Provincial Urbanity: Intellectuals and Public Life in Patna, 1880-1930

By

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Abstract

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Scholarly and popular discussions of cities tend to concentrate on the largest exemplars—Bombay and Calcutta, in the case of South Asia—and to neglect the smaller cities and towns where most urban people live. This dissertation examines the history of Patna, a small city in the north Indian region of Bihar, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Patna had been a bustling center of trade, culture, and administration for much of the early modern period but, like many cities in the Gangetic plains, it was marginalized by the political and economic changes of the nineteenth century. To many observers, it seemed to have become part of the provincial hinterland or, to use the term that developed under colonial rule, the “mofussil.”

Even a diminished and demeaned Patna, however, remained a major center. Despite the city’s apparent decline, it sustained its connections with other mofussil towns and with the rest of the world, and maintained ways of being urban and urbane that distinguished it from larger cities as well as from more rural places. Patna was still Bihar’s economic and political hub and a central node in the dynamic public culture that linked Patnaites with readers and writers in nearby towns and distant cities. Questions of the “backwardness” of Patna and Bihar entered national politics when activists based in the city began to call for Bihar to be separated from Bengal and established as a new province with Patna as its capital. When they succeeded in 1912, the city itself was reshaped along with its forms of community and authority. The same transformations that seemed to reverse Patna’s decline also weakened its links with the networks that had defined its public culture.

This dissertation documents Patna’s distinctiveness and vitality by combining several approaches. First, it is a cultural history of provinciality and urbanity that shows how these concepts were formed through social practice. Secondly, it is an urban history that examines the city’s politics and social geography together with its relationships with its region. And thirdly, it is a social history of intellectuals that locates their literary and scholarly activities within their urban community. Ultimately, it argues, Patna’s urbanity was inextricably linked with its provinciality.
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Note on Spelling and Transliteration

In transliterating words from Indian languages, I have tried to maintain a balance between precision and readability. I have marked transliterated words with diacritics and italics on their first occurrence in the main text of each chapter, and afterward written them without either diacritics or italics. They are given with diacritics in the glossary. I have avoided silent letters and kept diacritics to a minimum. The few Bengali transliterations vary by context; they reflect pronunciation in some cases and spelling in others. My general approach to Hindi and Urdu words has been to use only those sounds that can be written in both Nagari (Hindi) and Nastaliq (Urdu) scripts, and to omit silent letters. Therefore, I have ignored the Urdu ain (אے) and hamza (ہ) and (usually) word-final h, and I have not distinguished between the Hindi ś (श) and s (स), or n (न) and n (़); between the izāfat (possessive) suffixes -e or -ye; or among the multiple Urdu letters that are pronounced as h, s, t, or z. Except when drawing an explicit contrast, I have not distinguished the fricatives kh (ख़/) and gh (ग़/) from the aspirated stops kh (ख/) and gh (घ/). However, I have included long vowels like ā, the nasalized ŋ (sometimes written without nasalization to reflect the original orthography), and retroflex letters like d and r, on the grounds that these are the most indispensable for speakers of Hindi and Urdu. Without them, a phrase like “garam dal,” referring to the “hot” or extremist faction of the Congress party, is easily confused with “garam dāl,” or hot lentils.

I have made some exceptions to these rules. I have foregone diacritics when giving the names of people and institutions, but kept them in the citations and bibliography. Titles of periodicals only include diacritics in the bibliography. When quoting translations and English-language texts, I have kept the original orthography, and have used the most common transliterations for names of people and places (e.g., Calcutta, Ganges, Singh) while trying to avoid confusing inconsistencies and archaisms. I have also recognized that words like “Punch” were usually meant to be read as English words, so I have used their English spellings in transliteration and enclosed them in quotation marks in translation.

All translations are mine, except those quoted from English-language sources. I have aimed for idiomatic rather than literal translations, for instance translating ham as “I” rather than “we” when that has seemed more appropriate. I have made exceptions, though, when a play on words depends on a literal reading.

Minor, obvious errors in punctuation and spelling have sometimes been corrected.
Note on Maps

Since no detailed maps of Patna in this period are available, I collated information from a number of sources to create the maps in this dissertation using QGIS software. Apart from my own observations of existing structures, these sources included the following:

- a map drawn for Francis Buchanan and reprinted in the Bihar and Orissa Research Society’s edition of his journals;
- a map of Patna District prepared in 1842 by the Revenue Surveyor, Lt. W. Maxwell, held at the National Archives of India;
- several maps from the Bihar State Archives (including maps of Patna District, of the Patna Sudder Subdivision, of the water supply for Bankipur and the New Capital, and of ferry routes);
- a planning map of the New Capital held at the Patna Municipality offices in the Maurya Lok complex;
- the map drawn by Dakhinaranjan Ghosh in 1919 and published in Manoranjan Ghosh’s *The Pataliputra*;
- the maps included in the Patna Improvement Trust’s 1962 Master Plan;
- the map included in N. Kumar’s 1971 Gazetteer, *Image of Patna*;
- a 1977 map of Patna and Patna District available from the Bihar Survey Office in Gulzarbagh;
- and various other archival and published records, as well as public-domain digital maps.

The maps are only for purposes of illustration and are not to scale. Some locations are only approximate, owing to a lack of precise information.
Note on Numbers and Currency

Some numerical and monetary units may be unfamiliar. A lakh (lakh) is 100,000, and a crore (crore) is 10,000,000. During this period, one rupee (abbreviated Re. or, if plural, Rs.) was worth approximately a tenth of a British pound, and was divided into sixteen annas (as.); an anna was divided into four paise; and one paisa (the singular form) was divided into three pice. Monetary amounts were often written with rupees, annas, and paise separated by slashes; for instance, Rs. 1/8/- is equivalent to one rupee and eight annas (one and a half rupees).

A coolie (porter) in Patna district earned Rs. -/2/1 daily in the early 1890s, rising to Rs. -/4/- in the mid-1900s, while a superior carpenter (earning about 50% more than a common carpenter) saw his wages go from 5 as. to 10 as. daily over the same period. Meanwhile, a college student in the 1910s would live on about Rs. 20 monthly, a clerk Rs. 40, and a European engineer about Rs. 250; at the highest end of the scale, some lawyers and administrators could earn several thousand rupees each month.
Abbreviations

APAC  The Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections of the British Library; formerly called the Oriental and India Office Collections.
B&O  Bihar and Orissa.
BL  The British Library.
BSA  The Bihar State Archives.
KBOPL  The Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library.
LSG  Local Self-Government.
NAI  The National Archives of India.
P.A.C.  The Patna Administration Committee, which oversaw the New Capital, west of Bankipur.
P.C.M.  The Patna City Municipality, which governed both Patna City and Bankipur.
P.W.D.  Public Works Department.
U.P.  The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (previously the North-West Provinces and, after independence, Uttar Pradesh).
Introduction

_I opened my eyes in the era when the lamp of Azimabad’s power and culture was sputtering its last. I watched as this candle went out. For a little while, smoke continued to rise from this snuffed-out candle; but the cold winds of a changing atmosphere scattered that too._

—Badruddin Ahmad 1

When we think of cities, we usually think of big places, full of lively crowds and chaotic energy—places like Bombay, Tokyo, London, or Mexico City. We also commonly imagine that cities keep getting bigger and more important, so that places like Bangalore or Los Angeles, which have expanded dramatically within a few decades, seem typical. And growth and political power often seem like good things, at least until fears of overcrowding and disorder set in. But what about the places that don’t fit this mold? We know, of course, that not all places are like Shanghai or New York: that’s what makes them Shanghai and New York. There are ghost towns, cities in decline, and a wide variety of places that seem neither rural enough to be villages nor big enough or dynamic enough to really count as cities.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, like today, most urban Indians lived not in great cities like Bombay and Calcutta but in a galaxy of towns and small cities.2 This dissertation is about one of these places, the city of Patna in the region of Bihar. Over the course of the nineteenth century, places like Patna were increasingly seen as part of the provincial hinterland, or, to use the Indian English term, the “mofussil.” Despite this marginalization, places like Patna sustained their vigor and their connections with each other and with the rest of the world, and maintained ways of being urban and urbane that distinguished them from larger cities.

For many years now, Patna and Bihar have been widely seen in India as emblems of “backwardness,” redolent of feudalism, poverty, and crime. Yet for centuries in the early modern period, Patna had flourished as one of India’s largest cities, bustling with trade and intellectual ferment.3 The capital of a rich province and home to “many traders and comfort-loving men,” Patna struck seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travelers as “a very sweet city and honoured place... a place of perpetual spring, [among] the best of the cities of Hind.”4 But by the end of the

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1 In Sayyid Muhammad Ali Sabā, ed., _Yārān-e Maikada_ (The Tavern Friends) (Patna: Kāshāna, 1957), 24. Ahmad was born in 1901. Azimabad is another name for Patna.

2 Among those living in cities of more than 50,000 residents in 1901, for instance, only 28% lived in cities of more than 200,000. Meanwhile, smaller towns, of between 5,000 and 50,000 people, were home to more than twice as many people as lived in cities bigger than 50,000. H.H. Risley and E.A. Gait, _Census of India, 1901: India (Tables)_ (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1903), 16–30.

3 Kumkum Chatterjee, _Merchants, Politics, and Society in Early Modern India: Bihar, 1733-1820_ (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), chap. 1; Anand Yang, _Bazaar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Bihar_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), chap. 2. When Francis Buchanan visited Patna in 1811-12, he estimated the population of the city and its suburbs at 312,000. Even if this number was somewhat inflated, as is likely, it still suggests that Patna was among India’s largest cities. Francis Buchanan, “Journal of Francis Buchanan (Patna and Gaya Districts),” ed. Victor H. Jackson, _The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society_ 8, no. 3–4 (1922): 343.

nineteenth century, Patna, like many other cities, had lost much of its considerable prosperity and authority to the colonial port cities. It seemed to many to have melted into the mofussil, becoming just one among any number of backwater towns thanks to the growth of the railways and the consolidation of colonial rule.

Nonetheless, even a diminished and demeaned Patna remained a major center, central to the region’s markets and to a dynamic public sphere that linked Patnaites with readers and writers in nearby towns and distant cities. Questions of whether Patna and Bihar were backward, and in what ways, entered national politics when activists based in the city began to call for Bihar’s separation from Bengal and the formation of a new province with Patna as its capital. When they succeeded in 1912, the city itself was reshaped along with its forms of community and authority. At the same time as Patna appeared to have reversed its decline, its intellectual society increasingly turned away from the traditions that had sustained the provincial public sphere.

Patna’s cultural and political energy throughout this period belies received notions of stagnant provinces and of a stark rural-urban dichotomy. The city’s long history and its place at the head of Bihar, a region tied in different ways to both Bengal and north India, undoubtedly made it a very particular kind of place, a provincial metropolis. But while it was not easy to confuse Patna with smaller settlements, whether market towns or regional pilgrimage centers, it had much in common with them. Like them, it was solidly embedded in an agrarian landscape—a person in turn-of-the-century Patna was never more than a half hour’s walk from the countryside—and its social and cultural life was thoroughly enmeshed with the surrounding area. For many, too, it was tied to these smaller places by belonging to the mofussil, a way of seeing space that denied the variety and complexity of everything that lay outside the metropolis.

Ordinary cities

Like their subjects, historians have tended to associate provinciality with parochialism and stagnation, neglecting the dynamic provincial public cultures that maintained their own routes and idioms while partaking of metropolitan concerns. By “public culture,” I refer both to aesthetic and political activity and to participants’ understandings of themselves as constituting a public.5 Although many more Indians in the early twentieth century lived in small cities than in places like Bombay or Calcutta, the exciting recent work on urban public cultures, politics, and social space has concentrated on the largest cities.6 Meanwhile, apart from a small but interesting


6 See, for instance, Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850-1950 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Swati Chattopadhyay, Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and the Colonial Uncanny (New York: Routledge, 2005);
body of work on the cultural history of qasbas (towns associated with the Muslim service gentry, including jurists, administrators, and other intellectuals), research on smaller cities has centered on the relationships between colonial rule and identitarian politics. Likewise, recent work on regionalism and language politics prompts questions of cities’ role in organizing territoriality and imagination, while work on the circulation of ideas and practices has raised issues of the materiality and social specificity of public life.

Bihar has often been seen as a quintessentially rural place, and recent developments, like the growth of the Bhojpuri film industry and the rise of regional chauvinism in Mumbai, have solidified a perception of Biharis as perennial migrants and of Bihar as a source, rarely a site, of urban life. Accordingly, the scholarship on Bihar has generally concerned markets and agrarian history, as well as the intertwined histories of identity, regionalism, and nationalism. Meanwhile, work on Patna has concentrated on trade and politics in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These literatures accentuate the need to consider more carefully the interconnections between urban history and space, on the one hand, and regional and national histories, on the other.

A convention exists, in both scholarly and popular writing, of finding the country in the city. For instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that when Calcutta jute workers migrated from their villages in Bihar and the United Provinces, they imported, unchanged, a “precapitalist, inequalitarian culture marked by strong primordial loyalties.” Peter Robb, likewise, while critiquing overdrawn dichotomies between town and country, has suggested that Patna’s

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institutions (among which he includes only those with links to the colonial state), were “merely a gloss on continuing functions which town and country had in common.”\(^{11}\) The polarization of town and country has certainly been exaggerated, but the way out of such a false dichotomy is not to assert that a place like Patna is not a real city. Instead of Chakrabarty’s reification of rural and urban mentalities, or Robb’s dismissal of Patna’s many uniquely urban institutions, especially those connected with its Mughal heritage, it might be more productive to recognize that apparently rural elements are in fact native to cities. Rather than being anomalous importations or relics, rural practices help constitute the urban. For example, as Rajnarayan Chandavarkar has argued for colonial Bombay, and Aditya Nigam for contemporary Delhi, working-class urbanites produce their neighborhoods partly by reformulating rural linkages and rearticulating rural idioms of space, time, and behavior.\(^{12}\) Urban theory has tended to focus on a narrow range of processes in small pockets of a few large, mostly Western, metropolises. As several geographers have argued, “ordinary cities”—small, poor, and overlooked places like Patna—are different from New York and Paris, and from each other, in ways that can revitalize our understandings of cities and of relationships transcending familiar categories of community, region, and nation.\(^{13}\)

Provinciality and urbanity are slippery concepts, and precise definitions are not only impossible but counterproductive in a history of attitudes and practices. The term “urbanity” is particularly elastic, referring equally to the property of being urban and to that of being urbane. Among other things, recent work on the cultural sophistication of qasbas makes it clear that no facile equivalence can be set up between these two qualities.\(^{14}\) Nonetheless, despite the prevalence of anti-urban attitudes in India—epitomized by Gandhi’s insistence that “India does not live in its towns but in its villages”—concepts of the urban and the urbane are as thoroughly intertwined there as they are elsewhere.\(^{15}\) After all, one of the charges most commonly leveled against cities is that urban polish is tantamount to cruelty and fraud—that the same cosmopolitan worldliness that produces sophistication also breeds callousness and materialism. This attitude is famously expressed in a Hindi poem written in 1954 by Sachchidananda Vatsyayan “Agyeya”:


\(^{14}\) See in particular Hasan, From Pluralism to Separatism; Rahman, “Islam, Modernity, and Educated Muslims.”

Snake! You never became civilized—
You never learned to live in the city, either.
Can I ask you something—(will you answer?)
How did you learn to bite, then—where did you get your venom?16

A place like Patna was imagined and produced as an alloy of two apparent opposites, the provincial and the urban-urbane. Whether this meant that it shared the worst or the best of the two was up for discussion.

The context

Provinciality and urbanity took varied forms and left disparate traces. Accordingly, this dissertation is structured thematically rather than strictly chronologically, and uses a variety of sources, primarily in Urdu, Hindi, and English, to address the different kinds of questions taken up in each chapter. In the sections dealing with political and social history I rely on official records, on discussions in newspapers, and on the memoirs and private papers of the participants, in an effort to reconstruct the meanings that political events held for participants and bystanders. The sections that revolve around the public sphere also draw heavily on newspapers and other publications, but here the focus is on mapping the social geographies of public culture and on placing the texts and their authors within their aesthetic and intellectual worlds. Throughout the project, I am concerned with the ways in which politics and public culture helped mold the relationships among Patna, Bihar, and the rest of the world.

Before introducing each of the chapters, it may be helpful to situate Patna within its historic and geographic context. Patna lines the southern bank of the Ganges river, a few miles east of its junctions with the Son and the Ghaghra (see Map 1). The Gandak, coming south from Nepal, joins the Ganges just to the east of the city. Patna thus rests near the intersection of the three major regions of Bihar: its own region of Magadha extends to the south and east; while Bhojpur, which together with Magadha constitutes south Bihar, lies to the west; and Mithila, or north Bihar, stretches eastward on the north side of the Ganges.17


17 On the construction of north and south Bihar as distinct agrarian territories, see Prakash, Bonded Histories, chap. 1; on Bihar’s geography more generally, see Enayat Ahmad, Bihar: A Physical, Economic and Regional Geography (Ranchi: Ranchi University, 1965).
As archaeologists confirmed in the 1890s, the modern city of Patna was built on the site of ancient Pataliputra, the capital of the vast Mauryan Empire under Ashoka. After being largely abandoned by the seventh century, Patna was revived by Sher Shah Suri in the early sixteenth century, replacing the earlier capital, Bihar Sharif, forty miles to the southeast. Patna became an important entrepôt, and at times a provincial capital, under the Mughals, eventually being renamed Azimabad by a grandson of Aurangzeb. The tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, was born in Patna in 1666 and his birthplace became a place of pilgrimage; in addition to several well-known religious sites in the city itself, there were two major Sufi shrines nearby, in Phulwari Sharif and Maner, and an immense annual fair at the Hindu pilgrimage site of Sonpur, north of the Ganges. Like Lucknow and other cities in the Gangetic plains, Patna experienced an influx of aristocrats and merchants fleeing Delhi’s instability in the eighteenth century. These elite immigrants, and the artisans and service people who followed them, reinforced Patna’s Delhi-oriented aristocratic culture and invigorated its Persian and Urdu literary traditions.

European traders (British as well as Dutch, French, and Danish) also arrived in the eighteenth century and set up operations in Patna to export cloth, saltpeter, and opium. After the

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18 Sher Shah did not actually found the city, but seems to have been responsible for its renewal. Frederick Lehmann, “The Eighteenth Century Transition in India: Responses of Some Bihar Intellectuals” (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin, 1967), 22n.

19 Chatterjee, Merchants, Politics, and Society, 17–19 et passim.
British conquest of Bihar and Bengal in the 1750s and '60s, Bihar’s economy was increasingly oriented toward the production of opium and indigo for export. Even as its political importance waned, Patna’s convenient geography helped it remain an important center of trade, and rising merchants and landholders shunted aside its old Mughal aristocrats while adopting their prestigious cultural forms. By the early nineteenth century, there was a substantial permanent British presence in Bankipur, west of the historic core of Patna, and a military cantonment called Danapur (or Dinapore) some miles farther west. With time, both the city and the region were transformed fundamentally by colonial rule as Bihar became part of Calcutta’s agricultural hinterland.

Plan of the dissertation

Patna might have been distinguished by all of these specific contexts and histories, but by the end of the nineteenth century many found it easy to lump it together with countless other villages, towns, and cities. The distancing vocabulary of the mofussil—the up-country, the interior, the provinces—helped observers, especially Europeans, to overlook particularity and see only similarity. In the first chapter, I describe the history of the mofussil, both as an idea and also as a real place that was produced through that idea. Although the term itself comes from Persian (and in turn from Arabic), the idea that it came to express—that of a sprawling hinterland—was specifically colonial. The idea of the mofussil was adopted in Indian languages as cities like Calcutta and Bombay looked increasingly distinct from the places of the mofussil, which seemed in contrast to grow more alike. At the same time, a current of defiance also flowed through the mofussil, a sense that what was remote was also authentic and unsullied.

In chapter two, I consider the ways in which Patna’s place in the world was shifting in the nineteenth century, together with the transformations in the social landscape of the city itself. A British observer in the 1830s had noted the “enormous wealth,” “extensive trade,” and “expert workmen” of Patna, a “city of wealth and importance.” But only fifty years later, the dominant view, among Europeans at least, was that, “whatever may have been the ancient greatness of Patna, it is certain that no remains of it are now visible. Nothing can well be meaner, or less interesting, than the general appearance of the town.” Like other cities, Patna became impoverished and deindustrialized as trade and power shifted toward Calcutta and the other colonial port cities. Even within its immediate region, Patna began to face economic competition from smaller towns like Gaya and Bihar Sharif, which capitalized on railway connections to challenge Patna’s river trade.

As the geography around it was rearranged, the city itself was transformed along with it. Its cultural and political center of gravity began to shift from the old city, called Patna City, toward Bankipur, the colonial suburb to the west. The two halves of the city were intimately connected with each other, but often pulled in opposite directions despite the efforts of some Patnaites to bind them more closely together. Despite difficulties, though, Patna was still the largest and most important city in Bihar (and the second-largest in the vast Bengal Presidency), and continued to attract migrants from the region and beyond. Meanwhile, it sent people

23 Bihar has figured prominently in the vigorous debate over the extent of deindustrialization and deurbanization. See pp. 42–43.
outward, especially to Calcutta. The elite young Biharis who travelled to the colonial metropolis for their educations learned new disciplines, and new ways of seeing themselves and their region, in sporting clubs and student organizations. Many of these youths would be among Bihar’s most prominent men in the early twentieth century.

The third chapter continues this analysis of Patna’s links with nearby and far-off locales by charting the reciprocal relationship between Patna and its ecosystem of public spheres. Even as Patna seemed to fall from its earlier heights, elements of its public culture remained vital. I argue that some of this vitality came from readers’ and writers’ reinvention of existing idioms and their strengthening of existing linkages among smaller towns and cities. In some lights, Patna seemed a dusty mofussil town; from other angles, it was a center of sophistication drawing interlocutors from across the subcontinent. Public discourse was bound to geographies of circulation and power: people from great cities and small towns met in Patna, both in person and through the books and periodicals that issued from there. As people formed bonds through and with language, they reshaped not only themselves and their communities of thought and feeling, but also the places where they lived, above all Patna itself. Urdu literary culture, in particular, expressed a self-confident urbanity that saw no need to defer to big cities.24 I focus on the Al-Punch newspaper, which exemplifies the ways in which an informal style and a collaborative ethos, shaped by this literary culture, could blur the boundaries of the provincial and the urban by linking Patna with neighboring towns and distant cities.

A province of the Mughal empire starting in 1575, Bihar had become part of Bengal under Murshid Quli Khan in 1733, remaining a distinct territory under a nāib nāzim or deputy governor.25 After the British conquest of Bengal, both administrators and Biharis themselves continued to regard Bihar as a distinct region. From the colonial government’s perspective, though, it had no official status as a unit but instead formed part of the vast Bengal Presidency, together with Bengal proper (now West Bengal and Bangladesh), the Chota Nagpur plateau (now Jharkhand) south of Bihar, and the coastal region of Orissa (now Odisha) to its southeast.26 Both the Bengal Presidency and British India as a whole were ruled from Calcutta, in western Bengal, about 300 miles southeast of Patna. Culturally and socially, however, Bihar was as closely tied to the regions to its west as it was to those in the east. The north Indian languages of Urdu and Hindi were spoken in its cities and qasbas alongside local languages like Bhojpuri, Magahi, and Maithili, while in Patna and elsewhere in western Bihar, Bengali speakers were widely regarded as interlopers. White-collar Biharis complained that Bihar had become “the El Dorado of the Bengalees,” whose presence in Bihar was painted as even more exploitative than that of the British because of their proximity and local knowledge.27

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24 Some regarded Patna as the eastern frontier of the Urdu-speaking region; see, for instance, Gail Minault, “Master Ramchandra of the Delhi College: Teacher, Journalist, and Cultural Intermediary,” Annual of Urdu Studies 18 (2003): 102. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi points out, though, that from the point of view of Delhi intellectuals of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the language spoken in places like Patna was inferior to the Urdu of Delhi, even if their residents, “in their own estimation, are competent Urdu speakers and regard their own city as the urdā [camp or court].” Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part 1: Naming and Placing a Literary Culture,” in Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 807.


26 Between 1826 and 1874, the Bengal Presidency also included Assam.

An opportunity arose for Bihari critics of Bengali influence in 1905, when the Bengal Presidency was partitioned, with Bihar, Chota Nagpur, and Orissa remaining with western Bengal while eastern Bengal was joined to Assam. Pointing to the pitched nationalist agitation launched by large numbers of Bengalis, Bihari elites argued that rather than Bengal itself being divided, Bihar should instead be separated from Bengal. In 1911, their arguments succeeded, and the following year Patna became the capital of the new province of Bihar and Orissa. The fourth chapter traces the campaign for separation from its roots in the nineteenth century to the moment of its success. It focuses in particular on activists’ efforts to portray themselves as the enlightened vanguard of a backward, yet loyal, province, and to reconcile competing regional and national affiliations.

While their insistence on Bihar’s difference from Bengal seemed to undermine claims of national unity, the activists sought to stake out its place at the center of India’s past and present. Appeals to the ancient past, to the Buddha and the Mauryan Empire, were joined with a vision of Bihar as a hybrid region bridging north India and Bengal, with Patna at its core. This viewpoint was summed up by Sister Nivedita:

> the peculiar significance of Behar, in the comity of the Indian peoples, rises out of its position on the frontier-line between two opposing spiritual influences. To this day, it is the meeting-place of Hinduistic and Mussulmân civilisations. Sikh and Arya Somaji and Hindusthani Rajput pour down the waterway of the Ganges, to go no farther East than the twin-cities of Patna and Bankipore, and these stand face to face with the unified and Sanskritic civilisation of lower Bengal.\(^{28}\)

Thanks to this composite character, argued the advocates of separation, Bihar was distinguished from other regions as an exponent of “true nationality—catholic and territorial as opposed to sectarian and communal.”\(^{29}\) In their view, the religious conflict of other regions was replaced here by harmonious concord as, “amidst seething disunion and sectarian bitterness on all sides, Behar alone held forth the noble object-lesson of unity.”\(^{30}\) With these assertions of national cohesion, elites of all communities sought to convince both Indian and British audiences of Bihar’s political maturity and of their own right to speak for their region.

Chapter 5 returns to the urban scene, showing how Patna’s political ascent in 1912 remolded class, community, and authority. Patna enjoyed a resurgence following its elevation, but the same transformations that brought it to the fore of the region’s political life also intensified the marginalization of the old city. Old elites, like the bankers and landlords of the Guzri family, struggled to adapt, while English-educated lawyers enjoyed increased influence. Ironically, given the separation activists’ strenuous efforts to rid Bihar of middle-class Bengalis, many of the new white-collar jobs were taken by precisely those Bengalis. Meanwhile, Patnaites moved in new orbits and new rhythms that in turn remade the city and its institutions. Outlying areas chafed under Patna’s new dominance, while within Patna itself, migrants created new spaces of learning, power, exchange, and pleasure. As the city’s political culture became more

\(^{28}\) Margaret Noble [Sister Nivedita], “Behar,” *The Modern Review* 12, no. 4 (October 1912): 338–40. This article was published posthumously.


\(^{30}\) “Behar and Indian Nationality,” *The Beharee*, February 17, 1911.
firmly colonial, and as its horizontal links with other towns and cities became ever more vertical and hierarchical, Patna City’s post-Mughal public culture was supplanted by new idioms and networks tied to Bankipur and the freshly built New Capital. Even as Patna grew into a larger, richer, and more politically central city, with a High Court and other trappings of colonial modernity, its public life became less connected to the networks that had defined its distinctive public culture. Its links with the outside world were no weaker than they had been earlier, but now they were increasingly mediated by national categories and affinities, whether stemming from anticolonial nationalism or from Hindu reformism.

The final chapter examines how the circulation of knowledge and people shaped the meaning of erudition in Patna and established the city’s place in India’s intellectual geography. Expanding on the earlier discussion of Patna’s public cultures, I focus on the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna’s most famous and remarkable institution both then and now. Charged by his father to expand the family library and open it to the public, the Patna lawyer Khuda Bakhsh threw himself into the task by gathering together thousands of Arabic and Persian manuscripts from as far away as Spain. When he opened his collection in 1891, with support from the government and local elites, it quickly became a symbol of Muslim strength and refinement. The library was recognized as one of India’s preeminent repositories and an unparalleled resource for Islamic scholarship, while Khuda Bakhsh’s philanthropic efforts made him an icon of middle-class merit. He and his successors made canny alliances with colonial officials and both Indian and European scholars, thrusting the library into public debates over learning and reform and putting it at the center of the growing world of scholarly research. At times, however, the library’s national and international reputation was at odds with its provincial location.

An understanding of Patna’s political and social world must include a consideration of its public culture. The ways in which Patna’s intellectuals read, wrote, and spoke—as much as the substance of what they said—both reflected and shaped their city’s changing contours. Ultimately, I argue, provinciality and urbanity cannot be reduced to a simple opposition, a location on a number line. Nor was there ever unanimity on the value of urbanity. Whether Patna was at the head of its region, or only one backwater among many, depended as much on the beholder as on the beheld.
1 Provincially in Colonial India

We are all backwoodsmen and barbarians together—we others dwelling beyond the Ditch, in the outer darkness of the Mofussil.
—Rudyard Kipling

The word “mofussil” might give an impression of Islamicate origins, but despite initial appearances it designates a fundamentally colonial category. In this short chapter, I describe the origins of this term and show how its connotations changed over the course of the nineteenth century, as it came to seem more and more sensible to conceive of India as divided into a few large cities and the great expanse of land between those cities. Above all, at least in northern and eastern India, the mofussil was defined by contrast with the imperial capital of Calcutta. At the same time, though, the mofussil was always a relationship: the term indicated one place’s subordination to another, which in turn might be inferior to a third. The contrast between center (sadr or chief) and mofussil did not only imply the inferiority of the latter, but also its basic homogeneity: any place in the mofussil was, in some sense, the same as any other. The meanings that the word acquired in Bengali and Urdu were quite different from those it held in English, and also distinct from each other. I argue that these differences stemmed in part from the divergent relationships that these languages and their speakers held with the city of Calcutta.

A genealogy of the mofussil

The word “mofussil” is an Anglicization of the Persian mufassal, which means “detailed” and derives in turn from an Arabic root indicating separation or division. The Persian term seems to have entered administrative language by the eighteenth century, in the sense of “subordinate,” for instance to distinguish landholders’ gross revenue collections (mufassal jama) from what they owed the government (sadr jama), and to differentiate the revenue official at the level of the pargana or subdistrict (mufassal qānūngo) from his superior at the sarkār or district level (sadr qānūngo). With the British conquest of Bengal, this sense of administrative hierarchy was extended to the courts, so that those at Calcutta (and, for a time, at Murshidabad) were sadr and those elsewhere were mufassal, and likewise for institutions in district headquarters and their hinterlands. The city was not only the site of central institutions, but also the boundary between different forms of sovereignty: Crown courts (later the Supreme Court) governed all residents of Calcutta, but only British subjects outside the city, while Company courts claimed jurisdiction over Indians outside Calcutta.

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Alongside the racial and religious difference encoded in colonial law, then, spatial difference was also present from early on. By the 1770s, Calcutta was the unambiguous center of authority in Bengal, no longer ceding even nominal criminal jurisdiction to the Nawab at Murshidabad. So, for instance, the chief civil court at Calcutta was the Sadr Diwani Adalat (“Sudder Dewanny Adawlut”), overseeing the Mufassal Diwani Adalats in the districts. It is in this period that the word “mofussil” takes on a spatial meaning, describing the parts of Bengal outside of Calcutta by the 1770s and, by the 1820s, referring more generally to the “upcountry” or “interior” areas, those outside the Presidency capitals, especially in British territory and in northern India.

Despite its etymology, then, “the mofussil” is a thoroughly colonial idea. Within the layered forms of sovereignty that predated colonial rule, an understanding of space as either capital or provinces would make little sense. It was not the case that clear centers of authority were absent, or that, for instance, the elites of Delhi did not view their city as the center of culture. Indeed, the Urdu language takes its name from the urdā-e muallā, the exalted camp or royal court, in other words Delhi. But the court could move, and Agra, in particular, shared Delhi’s roles as both the imperial capital and the normative center of the language. Moreover, layered and discontinuous territorial boundaries, resting on ongoing negotiations among polities and social groups, engendered an understanding of space that allowed for more than one center. Centers might also be of different kinds, organized around political power in some cases and spiritual or mercantile power in others. Sovereignty continued to be layered and uneven under the British, even after the assumption of Crown rule in 1858. But Calcutta’s origins as a

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5 With Cornwallis’s reforms of 1793, sadr courts were also established in Patna, Murshidabad, and Dhaka, and later in Allahabad. “On the Registration of Deeds in Bengal by Kâzîs (From Report on the Administration of the Registration Department in Bengal for 1872-73),” The Indian Antiquary 3, no. 7 (July 1874): 201; Hussain, Jurisprudence of Emergency, 9, 79, 145–47.

6 For instance, it appears in this sense in a 1777 petition from “Cossineaut Bamboo” to the Bengal Board of Revenue. India Courier Extraordinary: Appendix to Mr. Hastings’s Parliamentary Trial, vol. 6, 1787, 158. See also the Oxford English Dictionary, third edition, s.v. “mofussil”; Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, Hobson-Jobson; a Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive, ed. William Crooke (London: J. Murray, 1903), s.v. “mofussil.” On the identification of the mofussil with British territory, see BL APAC, IOR L/P&J/857, C.J. Lyall to J. Keeble, March 23, 1908. Lyall, the Secretary of the Judicial and Public Department of the India Office, provided a definition in response to Keeble’s confusion about the term, which he had encountered in the course of historical research.


juridically and socially separate enclave, within which these negotiations could be ignored, made the Presidency-mofussil binary meaningful.

Despite Calcutta’s unique status, and its increasing dominance within Bengal and north India, this was a generative binary, one that reproduced itself on smaller scales. As Hobson-Jobson put it, “if, in Calcutta, one talks of the Mofussil, he means anywhere in Bengal out of Calcutta; if one at Benares talks of going into the Mofussil, he means going anywhere in the Benares division or district (as the case might be)... out of the city and station of Benares. And so over India.”11 The defining thing about the mofussil, from an Anglo-Indian standpoint, was its subordination, and more than that, its sense of isolation.

It is telling that the Maratha Ditch often appears as the line dividing Calcutta from the mofussil. Kipling says, “we are all backwoodsmen and barbarians together—we others dwelling beyond the Ditch, in the outer darkness of the Mofussil.... We have left India behind us at Howrah Station, and now we enter foreign parts. No, not wholly foreign. Say rather too familiar.”12 The Ditch, a defense against Maratha raiders dug primarily at the instance of Calcutta’s Indian merchants in the 1740s, served into the nineteenth century as the “boundary of the liberties of Calcutta, and of the English law.”13 Long after it had been paved over and its location forgotten, it remained as a nickname for Calcutta, and residents of the city were called “Ditchers” at least into the 1920s.14 The metonym disparagingly evoked the city’s legendary filth, whose smell Kipling compared to “the essence of corruption that has rotted for the second time,” but it also reinforced a sense of Calcutta as a precarious island in a hostile landscape by keeping alive the memory of “plundering hordes of Maratha horse.”15

This image of Calcutta as bulwark contained another potential reading, one that would prove long-lived, in which the mofussil was superior in authenticity to the metropolis. This duality, which of course shares something with the romantic idea of the harmonious and unchanging “village community,” is illustrated in an 1839 article in the Asiatic Journal, titled “The Mofussil and the Ditch.”16 Europeans in Calcutta, the article explains, long wondered why anyone would go upcountry: “going into the Mofussil was considered to be going into

11 Yule and Burnell, Hobson-Jobson, s.v. “mofussil.”
banishment by those who stayed behind, and Calcutta, in the estimation of its inhabitants, formed the whole of India, the remainder being totally unworthy of a thought.”17 But, the author points out, the feeling is mutual:

the Mofussillites and the Ditchers have agreed to hate each other with great cordiality. This dislike originated, in the first instance, in the arrogance and assumptions of the Ditchers, who despised the Mofussillites as barbarous and uncouth, living entirely out of the pale of civilized society; while, as the Mofussil widened, and its Anglo-Indian population increased, they, priding themselves upon their better acquaintance with the country, laughed at the Ditchers for their ignorance.18

The article wraps up in a vein that looks surprising in retrospect: rather than try to defend the mofussil from Ditchers’ disdain, it asks mofussilites to give Calcutta another chance. After staying in Calcutta, “the Mofussilite will continue to rail against the Ditch, and return rejoicing to the provinces, where he fancies he enjoys greater freedom of action and a better climate.” It is a furlough in England that will change his mind. When he returns to India, he will find that, despite its atrocious weather, Calcutta “is a very superior place of abode.” Its libraries, its “free press,” and, tellingly, the growing transportation infrastructure that enables easy escape to the hills, up the Ganges, and out to sea, are cited to prove that “it must always be preferred to any Mofussil station inferior to Meerut.”19

This may have been the last time anyone, Indian or British, said Meerut was better than Calcutta. Apart from everything else, the rebellion that began there in 1857 amplified the prejudices and anxieties of mofussil Europeans, and afterward distance from the colonial capitals seemed to mean not merely boredom but danger. Colonists told each other more vociferously than ever that martial virtue was essential to the isolated official: “it is well for a Mofussil civilian that he should have cultivated tastes and extended views; but it is well likewise that... in villages and bazaars of the most evil reputation he should feel secure with a favourite hogspear in his hand, and a double-barrelled Purdey slung across his shoulders.”20 Even after the rebellion had been quelled, wrote one traveller, “it was only reasonable to imagine, that in the secret depths of many fanatical breasts the embers of disaffection still smouldered, ready to blaze up in isolated acts of vengeance as a victim came quietly in the way.” Accordingly, his friends in Calcutta warned him of danger and provided him with a gun and ample ammunition: “well, we were now fairly in the depths of the Mofussil. The hour of peril, if such existed, had arrived.”21

This anxiety was further crystallized in the 1880s during the racist backlash to the introduction of the Ilbert Bill, which proposed to allow Indian judges jurisdiction over Europeans in the mofussil. In particular, as Mrinalini Sinha has argued, racial anxieties took a starkly gendered tone, as they had in 1857. She cites one Englishwoman who urged, “Englishmen, try to picture to yourselves a mofussil court, hundreds of miles away from Calcutta—in that court a Native Magistrate is presiding with the supercilious assurance that a native assumes when he has an Englishman in his power. Before that man stands an English girl in all her maidenly dignity....

18 Ibid., 36.
19 Ibid., 46.
20 Trevelyan, *Competition Wallah*, 11.
Picture to yourself that girl’s agony of shame!” A pervasive fear of mob violence, which, “if it became general, would deprive Europeans living in lonely mofussil stations of all security of life and property.” The implication was, the greater the threat from treacherous, lecherous Indians. And, as far as the state went, the mofussil was more or less a cipher. As John Morley, the India Secretary, once remarked to Viceroy Minto, “what you say of the difficulty you have in really knowing the inner state of things in the mofussil... goes to the root of our difficulties, doesn’t it? It is nobody’s fault.”

Of course, fear, machismo, and confusion were not the only British responses to the post-rebellion provincial landscape. Probably the more pervasive attitude was one of boredom, expressed in the profusion of Anglo-Indian writings chronicling the dreariness and backwardness, and sometimes the idle pleasures, of mofussil European life (see Fig. 1): “heat, and poor diet, and limited drives... do not prove the most serious of the Mofussilite’s enemies. It is the dull monotony of their daily life that makes people utterly wretched at times.” Such complaints are easy to come by. In her account of Anglo-Indian life, for instance, Florence Marryat writes that although Bangalore “is a large cantonment, and very cheerful and gay; far more so than Madras, which is one of the dullest places on earth,” nonetheless, “no better proof could be given of the monotony and uselessness of existence passed in an Indian station, than the fact that, on the first occasion of my seeing Bangalore, I lived there for twelve months, and yet have nothing to relate respecting it, except a few idle stories.”

Fig. 1. R. Caton Woodville, “Dolce Far Niente [Sweet Idleness]: Life in an Indian Bungalow.”

23 The Statesman, quoted in The Beharee, August 20, 1907.
24 A compilation of objections to the bill repeatedly emphasizes the threat to mofussil Europeans, especially planters, from Indians’ false accusations, exacerbated by the lack of “anything approaching intellectual and moral sympathy between them,” a state of affairs blamed entirely on Indian prejudices. The Ilbert Bill: A Collection of Letters, Speeches, Memorials, Articles, &c., Stating the Objections to the Bill (London: W.H. Allen, n.d. [1883]), 61, 81 et passim.
26 “Monotony in the Mofussil,” The Madras Mail, June 25, 1869.
Intellectual atrophy was another fear of some Europeans in the mofussil: “in very truth individuality is a nuisance up-country; mental culture is de trop; broad views of the world beyond one’s petty world are knocked out of the head; and one exists—not lives.” Agastya, the indolent narrator of the postcolonial novel English, August—the title taken from the nickname his Anglophilia has earned him—spends his days as a civil servant in a mofussil town by reading Marcus Aurelius; similarly, his professional if not genetic forebears were urged to read St. Augustine to stave off lethargy and the “deadly and, we must add, demoralizing effects of Mofussil exile.”

Although a few critical writers, like Orwell and Forster, would later acknowledge the role of racism in producing a stultifying sense of isolation among Britons in small towns, it was the norm in the nineteenth century for colonial writers to state baldly that “the social qualifications of natives are, in relation to Europeans ‘nil,’” and that it was “impossible at present that there can be any intimate friendship between natives of India and Europeans.” This exclusiveness, dramatically magnified after 1857, effectively precluded much European sympathy for the mofussil or attention to its internal variation. Instead, imperial memoirists bitterly described their postings to “penal settlements” populated by a few thousand “miserable inhabitants” and a handful of Europeans, “mostly disappointed officials, or their still more discontented wives.”

The few exceptions generally made paens to pure village life and to the independence of the “man on the spot,” embodied in the excitement of the hunt, where “the whiff of powder smoke from your trusty gun salutes your nostrils like grateful incense... in the dear old happy hunting-grounds of a good mofussil district in India.”

29 “Clubs vs. Messes,” The Madras Mail, March 16, 1869.
31 An Ex-Civilian [G. Graham], Life in the Mofussil: Or, The Civilian in Lower Bengal (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), vol. 1 pages 61, 147. While Forster makes the same point in A Passage to India, for “An Ex-Civilian” the cause for this incompatibility lies in habits and ideas of purity, rather than in the structural racism endemic to empire. The literary critic Todd Kuchta has argued that the nostalgia and monotony of suburban colonial settlements not only helped entrench white racism but also, in the works of Forster, Orwell, and Waugh, signaled the “impotent outrage” of imperialists contemplating their own imminent failure. Todd Kuchta, “Suburbia, Ressentiment, and the End of Empire in A Passage to India,” Novel: A Forum on Fiction 36, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 307–29.
33 James Inglis, Tent Life in Tigerland: With Which Is Incorporated Sport and Work on the Nepaul Frontier, Being Twelve Years’ Sporting Reminiscences of a Pioneer Planter in an Indian Frontier District (Sydney and Brisbane: A. Hutchison & Son, 1888), 3. The masculine pleasures of hunting and racing were central to the cultivation of solidarity among the English in the north Indian mofussil, as well as to the formation of bonds between Englishmen and a small number of Indian notables. As one piece of doggerel went, “Who thinks Sonepore / An awful bore— / ... / Of sticking pig — / Recks not a fig — / He’s not the man for Chupra!” The races at Sonpur, across the Ganges from Patna (and overseen by the Collector of Chapra), occasioned the most important annual gathering of Anglo-Indians in north India; see Harry Abbott, Sonepore Reminiscences: Years 1840-1896 (Calcutta: The Star Press, 1896), 174–75 et passim; Yang, Limited Raj, chap. 1; Anand Yang, Bazaar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Bihar (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), chap. 3.
The Anglo-Indians who wrote fiction and comic verse for each other, though, often took a different approach. Rather than complaining of the miseries of mofussil life, these authors sought to evoke what they saw as the charming absurdities of upcountry life in “our station” (see Fig. 2). The premise of the resulting genre, which catalogued “our magistrate,” “our padre,” “our moonshee,” “our race-course,” “our theatricals,” and so on, was that since mofussil stations were all the same, their inhabitants could understand each other’s foibles. To emphasize this interchangeability, these authors gave their fictional towns names like Lonelypur, Dustypore, Mofussilpore, Mofussilabad, or simply the Backwater. Each book would begin with a comic

These pastimes were equally important to the colonial articulation of unbridgeable difference between Europeans (and sometimes “martial” Indians) and “effeminate” Bengalis. The latter’s supposed lack of athleticism was taken as an indicator of cowardice and a lack of sympathy for forms of violence, like accidental hunting deaths and planters’ forcible punishments of their employees, that Europeans considered excusable. Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 40–42; see also chapter 4 in this dissertation.

35 Ibid.
Fig. 3. H. Johnson, “An Awkward Visitor at an Up-Country Station in India.”

disclaimer, locating Kabob in a remote corner of the province of Bobarchy (a corrupted form of bāwarchī, or cook), or declaring, “it is not the slightest use for the reader to begin by asking me where Budgepore is, for I have no intention of satisfying a vain and idle curiosity. If it is not in the map that is not my fault, for my profession is not that of a map-maker.... It is enough for the reader’s purpose, and for mine, that he be told that Budgepore is in India.” And, of course, this approach could combine with others to suggest the mofussil’s potential incompatibility with colonial modernity, as in Fig. 3.

Indeed, as far as their European sections went, these towns were much the same. Architecture and town plans were largely standardized, distilled into repeating forms—the bungalow and the compound, the cantonment and the civil lines—that could be laid down wherever needed. But the colonial tendency to equate the oceanic mofussil with this archipelago of carefully duplicated islands erased the manifold diversity of the huge area that the term included. This is not simply to denounce colonial prejudice and narrow-mindedness, but rather to point out that the Presidency-mofussil binary rested on the assumptions of Anglo-Indian society. To colonials, the mofussil was simply “the up-country as opposed to the city[,] the vast area of townships on which European civilization has not yet had time to imprint its veneer of shops and tramways, gas lamps, and conventional streets, and... where the kerosene oil tin is still practically the only visible and tangible sign that the Western civilization is abroad, save that little group of thatched bungalows far away from the

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Calcutta Central Press, 1893); Atkinson, Curry and Rice; Boxwallah, An Eastern Backwater (London: Andrew Melrose, 1916). A modern parallel might be found in the imaginary Fursatganj (something like “Idletown”), the lethargic town of “empty, boring afternoons” from which one of the protagonists of the popular Hindi film Bunty aur Babli (2005) makes his escape. (Incidentally, there is a real village called Fursatganj, near Rae Bareli.)


The Graphic, June 18, 1892.

Anthony King, Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power, and Environment (London: Routledge, 1976), chap. 4; Jan Pieper, “The Mofussil Environment: Elements of Colonial Architecture and Settlement in Up-Country India,” in Städte in Südasiien: Geschichte, Gesellschaft, Gestalt, ed. Hermann Kulke, Hans Christoph Rieger, and Lothar Lutze (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982), 77–92. This standardization undoubtedly contributed to the feeling of ennui. As Florence Marryat writes, “the interior as well as the exterior of every bungalow in India is the same, which used to sicken me of trying to decorate any of them, for what is the use of trying to make ‘house-hold gods’ out of articles fac-similes [sic] of which you may see next door, if you choose to enter it.” Marryat, Gup, 178.
native city’s hubbub—dubbed a station—where the English rulers live.” 40 Sweeping away everything apart from these stations, by denying the native city’s status as a genuine city, made the mofussil legible. Another way to say this is that while every English definition of the mofussil included the entire “up-country,” it often entailed the same slippage from great landmass to tiny station. For it to make sense when George Trevelyan says that “there is a strong family likeness between all houses in the Mofussil,” the reader must understand that these are specifically European houses. 41

Jeffrey Auerbach has pointed out that “imperial boredom” was born in part from disappointment with reality’s inadequacy next to thrilling fiction. 42 Similarly, the apparent difficulty that some imperial observers had in distinguishing village from city seems to come partly from the same divergence of fact and imagination. Trevelyan, for instance, disdainfully expressed his irritation at both Patna and its surroundings in terms of their failure to live up to the hopes that Orientalist literature had nourished:

Where are the graceful maidens with pitchers balanced on their stately heads? Where are the lovely daughters of Hindustan, from whom Southey drew his conception of the charming heroine of the Curse of Kehama? ... There is very little difference between the appearance of the town and country populations, and an utter absence of the picturesque costumes which, in the markets of Cairo and Alexandria, almost realize our ideas of the Bagdad of Haroun Alraschid. 43

The British were certainly aware that cities predated their arrival in India, and of course they often took great interest in villages. But they paid little attention either to the variety of settlements between hamlet and metropolis or to the relationships of movement, exchange, and sentiment that linked these places with each other and with the big cities. Substantial cities like Benares, Agra, Patna, and Lucknow; big towns like Murshidabad, Munger, and Gorakhpur; and hundreds of pilgrimage towns, qasbas, and ganjes (market towns), not to mention the innumerable villages that were imagined as eternal, autonomous “republics,” became nearly invisible except in extraordinary circumstances. 44

40 An English Barrister Practising in India, “With a Stuff Gown in the Mofussil,” The Green Bag 12, no. 4 (April 1900): 200. I am not discussing in detail the views of Indians writing in English. Broadly speaking, however, the connotations of the mofussil in their writings tended to resemble those of Europeans. While the elements of fear and isolation are largely missing, the bias toward large cities often remains. For instance, in a letter to Dadabhai Naoroji, Behramji Malabari complained of the poor response their campaigns had received in Bombay Presidency: “the fact is Poona Parsis as others in the mofussil not only do not appreciate the work but say it is a sin for Parsis to risk their all on Hindus & Mahomedans.” National Archives of India, Dadabhai Naoroji Papers, M-32 (147). Thanks to Dinyar Patel for this reference.

41 Trevelyan, Competition Wallah, 40.


43 Trevelyan, Competition Wallah, 38–40. The references are to Robert Southey’s exoticist epic poem, The Curse of Kehama (1810), and to the ninth-century Caliph who appears frequently in One Thousand and One Nights, which circulated widely among nineteenth-century Britons.

44 David Ludden has pointed out that both scholars and administrators have overlooked the mofussil’s political dynamism and spatial complexity; I would suggest that these are related facts. David Ludden, An Agrarian History of South Asia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 147–48, 176–77.
Producing the mofussil

As the idea of the mofussil developed wider currency, it helped structure a host of practices and discourses surrounding urbanity and provinciality. The conceptions of urbanity and provinciality embedded within the idea of the mofussil both derived from and underwrote a range of social practices. Like the nation as a whole, the mofussil was produced as a simultaneously homogeneous and uneven space, one that represented the elements within the nation that needed to be reformed but also those that constituted its true self.45

While there were different mofussils—the mofussil that was Bengal outside of Calcutta, the mofussil that was all of British India outside the Presidency capitals, the mofussil that was all of India outside the cities, the mofussil that was each district outside its headquarters—they shared a common relational structure, that of recursive peripherality. This is not to propose a central-place model in which, for instance, a village fed a qasba like Desna, which fed a town like Bihar Sharif, which fed a city like Patna, which fed a metropolis like Calcutta. But in a certain powerful conception—embodied in words like “mofussil” and “up-country” but also by various kinds of institutions and practices—almost every place could be seen as mofussil from somewhere else. This fractal self-similarity is what I mean when I say that the mofussil is both uneven and homogeneous—uneven, because its essence is subordination, and homogeneous, because it denies local particularity. In Kipling’s words, “you know our ineradicable tendency to damn everything in the mofussil. Calcutta professes astonishment that Allahabad has a good dancing floor; Allahabad wonders if it is true that Lahore really has an ice-factory; and Lahore pretends to believe that everybody in Peshawar sleeps armed.”46

Indians’ adoption and redefinition of the category of the mofussil was heavily inflected by its imperial history, and especially the administrative and legal framework that had given birth to it. Many complained, in particular, of the caprice and expense of the mofussil courts and the avarice of the lawyers (vakils and mukhtârs) and the amla or court personnel who operated there.47 Mofussil anxieties prompted Europeans to demand more authoritarian rule, but for Indians, especially those with business before the courts, exploitation by state functionaries was all the more threatening in the mofussil, far from any oversight.48 But the meanings that the mofussil acquired were not limited to these judicial contexts. In part because of the different positions of Bengal and of north India relative to Calcutta, “mufassal” had different overtones in Bengali and Urdu, and in both languages its connotations differed substantially from what they were in English.

45 This argument draws on Goswami, Producing India, especially pp. 59-65, 127-131.
48 The phrase comes from Singha, A Despotism of Law.
In Bengali, as in English, the mofussil became a widely used term for a broad region, understood as rural. Here, though, the mofussil was particularly Bengali, and a site of nostalgia rather than fear. The nineteenth-century Bengali _bhadralok_, or middle classes, maintained both economic and emotional links with their ancestral lands, even as their ties with Calcutta grew closer. They continued into the twentieth century to refer to their city homes as their _bāshā_ (lodging), and reserved the words _bāṛi_ (home) and _desh_ (homeland) for their village or small-town homes.\(^{49}\) By the mid-nineteenth century, the collective homeland formed by gathering together all of these deshes was being called the mofussil; it appears in this sense in the 1857 novel *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl*—importantly, in a legal context—in the observation that “there is no chance of getting business promptly attended to in the Mofussil.”\(^{50}\)

At the same time as they deplored the misery and impoverishment of the mofussil, the bhadralok also extolled it as the site of an authenticity unavailable in Calcutta. As Atig Ghosh has argued, the upper-caste Hindu bhadralok, anxious about their own perceived rootlessness, largely redefined the mofussil as synonymous with Bengal itself—Calcutta, in this view, was in Bengal but not of it.\(^{51}\) On the other hand, as Bengali Muslims became more active in politics and the public sphere in the 1920s and ’30s, they articulated a more explicitly political sense of mofussil identity, in which rural backwardness and Muslim backwardness, particularly in East Bengal, stemmed from the same causes.\(^{52}\) But for both groups, and whether it was mentioned in a tone of lament or longing, the Bengali mofussil was defined by its villages, real or imagined. This rural emphasis in apparent in an early twentieth-century dictionary, which alongside the original Persian meaning of “separate” also supplies the local administrative meaning of “the

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\(^{50}\) “_Mophoshshole kormmer nikāsh nāy_,” i.e., “there is no end to work in the mofussil.” The word “mofussil” appears several other times in the novel, often in the context of law courts. Additionally, the English preface (though not the Bengali one) promises to illustrate “the state of things in the Moffussil.” Tek Chand Thackoor (Peary Chand Mitra), *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* (The Spoiled Child) (Calcutta: P.S. D’Rozario & Co., 1857), 90; the translation is from Tek Chand Thackoor (Peary Chand Mitra), _The Spoilt Child: A Tale of Hindu Domestic Life_, trans. G.D. Oswell (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1893), 109. The redefinition of “mofussil” in Bengali does not seem to have occurred much earlier: in Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay’s 1824 *Kalikātā Kamalalay*, “mofussil” (_mofoshshol_) is defined as “secret” or “concealed.” Atig Ghosh, “Construcción Colonial del Mofussil: La Economía Política y la Cultura en la Bengala del Siglo XIX” (Colonial Construction of the Mofussil: Political Economy and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Bengal) (Ph.D., El Colegio de México, 2009), 52. On the representation of the mofussil in Bengali writings in the nineteenth century, especially in _nakshas_ or sketches, see ibid., chap. 1.


subdivisions of a district or sub-district” and, more broadly, indicates an association with the countryside (“that which is outside a city; village”).

The story in north India is a bit different from that in Bengal. In Urdu, “mufassal” doesn’t seem to have referred to a particular type of place until the late nineteenth century. Even then, it was only used on a local scale, to distinguish, for example, the headquarters of a district from its hinterland. An early appearance comes, with distinct overtones of wildness, in an 1870 ghazal by Wasti: “I’ve wandered through cities and gone into the wilderness, / I’m the Majnun who’s learned his work in both sadr and mufassal.” Although the word was being used in this local sense, and even, occasionally, to mean the “upcountry,” it was still new enough in the early twentieth century that Urdu (and Hindi) dictionaries didn’t even list “mufassal” in any relevant sense, although they did define the plural form, mufassilāt, as “villages; qasbas; suburbs; surrounding villages.”

What is singular and monolithic in English becomes plural and varied in Urdu (as in another common term for the “countryside,” dehāt, lit. “villages”). More importantly, the local frame of reference, which is secondary in English, is even more dominant in Urdu than in Bengali. For the bhadralok, the consolidated bifurcation of space into Calcutta and mofussil offers a compelling way of thinking, but in north India, the mofussil is multiple; any city can be sadr and its hinterland mufassal. So newspapers in both Urdu and Hindi list prices for readers in the shahr, or city, and higher rates for the mufassil. When “mufassal” takes a broader scope corresponding to the English “upcountry,” it is invariably in connection with official activities, like the Prince of Wales’s tour or the selection of High Court judges. Later, this sense of the


54 “Urāt khā kheshroīn meñ kabht jā jā ke jañgal meñ / Woh Majnūn hān ki stkhā hāi kām sadr-o-mufassal meñ.” Urdu Lughat (Tārtikht Uṣul par) (Urdu Dictionary [On Historical Principles]) (Karachi: Urdu Lughat Board, 2002), s.v. “mufassal”; Fazl-e Rastūl Wāṣṭī, Dīwān-e Wāṣṭī (Poems of Wasti) (Lucknow: Matba Munshi Nawal Kishor, 1874), 147–48. The reference is to the mad lover who wanders through the wilderness pining for his beloved. The jungal or wilderness, which here appears as parallel to the mufassal, is an old concept that increasingly under colonialism was “no longer associated with power, but with marginality, ignorance and subordination.” Ajay Skaria, Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 256.


56 For examples in each language, see Al-Punch, September 14, 1900, and Bihar Bandhu, May 20, 1901.

57 See “Shehzāda-e Wall-ahd Bahādur kī Āmād” (The Arrival of the Crown Prince), Al-Punch, September 14, 1905: “Governor sāhib mufassal ke daure ke bare safa kā intīzām kar chuke the” (“the Governor had already arranged a grand tour of the mofussil”). The following year, as well, Al-Punch uses the term in the context of a debate over whether the mofussil should be involved in the selection of High Court judges, or only the capital (“dār ul-saltanat Kalkatta”). “Judge-e High Court” (High Court Judges), Al-Punch, September 20, 1906.
word became fairly common in Hindi and Urdu; so in the 1920s, we have Premchand referring to the mufassal in contrast to Delhi, which of course was by then the capital of British India.58

The category of the mofussil expanded beyond imperial circles and legal contexts, and became more salient and more coherent, at the same time as smaller cities and towns started to decline and the areas outside the large colonial cities began to be flattened out. The growth of the primary export-oriented railroad network, the consolidation of colonial political authority at the expense of Indian aristocrats, and the decline of Indian manufacturing and banking, all contributed to economic and demographic stagnation in many inland towns and cities.59 This political-economic decline came at the same time as the criteria for significance in the eyes of the state were narrowed. Where the Mughals and their successors had patronized many small religious and intellectual centers, under colonial rule cities were increasingly understood through their population figures and administrative roles.60 Nonetheless, public culture and intellectual production, as well as religious activity, remained alive in these places. In fact, many smaller cities and towns—not only Lucknow and Benares, but also Gorakhpur, Mathura, Patna, and qasbas like Desna, Kakori, and Dariyabad—were extremely vigorous in these regards, often more so than the colonial port cities.

Though most small cities were static or shrinking in population until the 1920s, a few administrative and marketing towns continued to thrive quietly, laying the foundation for precipitous growth after that.61 In the 1930s, small and medium cities contributed heavily to the 40% rise in India’s urban population while the population of the country as a whole grew by 15%.62 Chart 1 illustrates this dynamic: while the three Presidency capitals, as well as Hyderabad, were growing furiously, a wide swath of smaller places, from towns like Gaya and Bihar Sharif to substantial cities like Lucknow and Benares, had constant, or even shrinking, populations throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the 1930s and ’40s, every city on the chart was growing, due largely to rural population pressure; before then, though, colonial politics was a crucial factor in the growth of many cities, whether they were made into industrial centers in response to the First World War, as in the case of Kanpur, or into capitals, as in Dhaka, Lucknow, Delhi, and Patna.63

However, Al-Punch much more frequently uses it to refer to the rural hinterland of a particular city—often Patna, but sometimes Darbhanga and others. See, for instance, Al-Punch, March 14, 1902, and November 28, 1903. (The word also appears simply in the sense of “detailed.”)

Premchand, “Chakmā” (The Trick), in Mānsarovar (Allahabad: Hans Prakāshan, 1950 [1922]), vol. 6 pages 220–21. Even today, however, many educated speakers of Hindi and Urdu associate the word with specifically legal and official contexts.

See, for instance, C.A. Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), chap. 7, 9; Goswami, Producing India, chap. 3.


This sketch of the idea of the mofussil has traced some of the historical and conceptual relationships underlying this dissertation. Invocations of provinciality might be inflected with rhetoric of ethnicity, caste, class, and religious community, as much as by spatial terms. The interactions of these categories were often mediated by questions of language, which became an important domain of conflict throughout India in the late nineteenth century, as partisans sought social authority and political power through purificatory campaigns. Proponents of Hindi sought to replace Urdu as the language of law and status, while suppressing regional languages, like Magahi and Bhojpuri, that they saw as uncouth. As urban, elite Urdu was provincialized, it took on an archaic aura that linked it with these regional languages, with their rural associations. C.M. Naim has pointed out that these disparate languages, sidelined by Hindi’s ascendancy, are often eulogized as “sweet.” This is a quality that “lies in what in other contexts is called decadent and ‘feudalistic’.... To be called ‘sweet,’ a language must be perceived as something remote, a part of the nostalgia, even carrying a whiff of decay.”

Such an indeterminacy or ambivalence, a sense of teetering between the refined and the sickly, could apply equally to the mofussil. Although it might appear backward when seen from

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64 Population figures, obtained from the 1901-1941 censuses, include cantonments, as well as Howrah, in the case of Calcutta, and the New Capital and Bankipur, in the case of Patna.


Calcutta or Bombay, for many who lived there, the mofussil retained—and continues to maintain—its internal complexity and its capacity for creativity. In recent years, a variety of critics have sought to challenge the marginalization of the mofussil in metropolitan spaces, in part by asserting the dignity and autonomy of the “unreformed.” Nita Kumar, Lawrence Cohen, and other anthropologists have explored the pain and pride of “backwardness.”67 As Kumar has said, “the nation’s metropolitan identity might valorize itself with a distancing from the provincial, and thus pose as modernity and Indianness, but this pose... either rings hollow in the provinces or is actively resisted and counterposed by another discourse, for which the real India, the spirit of the nation, its power and beauty, resides in the provinces.”68 Meanwhile, in the realms of journalism, literature, and popular culture, writings by authors including Amitava Kumar and Ian Jack have joined films like Peepli Live (2010), Ishqiya (2010), and Shuddh Desi Romance (2013) in bewailing the deprivation and celebrating the earthy resilience—what development discourse calls jugāṛ (jury-rigged improvisation)—of the people of the mofussil.69 While my argument in the following chapters shares certain affinities with these works, my intent is less to assert that Patna represented the “real India” than to illustrate some of the ways in which its provinciality was in fact tied together with its urbanity.


68 Kumar, “Provincialism in Modern India,” 398n3.

2 Patna in the Nineteenth Century

If one of the pleasures of travel be to find a pre-conceived notion entirely contradicted by the reality, that pleasure I enjoyed to the full at Patna.... I expected to pass through a succession of lofty streets, of temples rich with fretwork, of bazaars blazing with the gorgeous fabrics of the Eastern loom.... [But the Patna] bazaar is a narrow street of one-storied hovels.... The fronts are generally of wood, carved in tawdry patterns, dirty beyond anything that cold western imaginations can conceive. Into the filth and darkness of the inner room behind the shop no European, save a police-officer, or a sanitary commissioner, would dare to penetrate.

—George Trevelyan¹

They call it Patna, that land like a sign of heaven,
On the right side of the Ganges, like a refuge of life.
About nine miles long, on the shore of the flowing water.
Peopled with gatherings as beautiful as idols’ tresses.
It’s intoxicated with its style, like a playful, elegant beauty;
The sun’s rays form a crest in the mirror of the Ganges river.

—Safi Lakhnavi²

A resident of Patna at its height, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, would have been startled to see what it had become by the beginning of the twentieth century. Once “the chefest marte towne of all Bengala,” and among the largest cities in India, it had dwindled to a straggling town, merely one of several middling, semiagrarian cities lining the Ganges.³ This chapter explores the consequences of Patna’s decline, as they appeared to a range of people in the city and outside it. After establishing its bearings in the city, the chapter discusses the political contestations that reshaped its social landscape in the years around the turn of the century. It then locates Patna in the wider world, exploring its relationships with its immediate surroundings and with other cities. Calcutta’s rise to dominance had decisively changed the region’s urban order: the constellation that had included Patna, Murshidabad, Allahabad, Lucknow, and other cities seemed to fade as the sun of Calcutta grew brighter. But, as the epigraphs above suggest, opinions of what this meant for Patna varied radically; to some, at least, Patna was far from a spent force.

Patna’s spatial and social landscapes were organized around two poles. In the east lay the historic Patna, built in the sixteenth century and renamed Azimabad in the early 1700s. Since the

late eighteenth century, when the British moved west to a new settlement called Bankipur, the old city had also been called Patna City, to distinguish it from the larger urban area. By the late nineteenth century, power and privilege were beginning to be reconfigured and redistributed within Patna. The aristocrats and bankers of Azimabad, some descended from the Mughal nobility and others arrived during the tumult of the eighteenth century, faced increasing competition. New men, professionals trained and socialized in the colonial educational system and equipped with new skills, were starting to move into Bankipur, rather than into the old neighborhoods of Patna City.

Even as the administration and its new allies and employees grew more distant from the elites of the old city, though, they were unable to forget that Bankipur and Patna City were two parts of a whole. Following a common pattern, the old city was dirtier and in worse repair than the colonial suburb. But disease did not always respect the boundaries of class and geography; plague and cholera were chronic problems in both Bankipur and Patna City, one striking in the winter and the other in the summer. While administrators recognized the shared interests of the two areas, their responses to disease and dirt in the two areas differed, depending on financial as well as social concerns. Patna’s political and economic unevenness, exemplified by the state of its sanitation, caught the attention of many observers. One concrete response was the building of a tramway to connect the two parts of the city. The tramway’s short and troubled life illustrates the difficulties facing Patna, and especially Patna City, as Bankipur developed from a suburban appendage into an integral part of the city.

The rearrangement of wealth and influence within Patna was tied to larger processes at work throughout the subcontinent that limited Indian leaders’ authority, especially in cities, and reoriented economic activity away from inland river markets and toward the colonial port cities. Though it had shrunk in population, wealth, and prestige in the preceding decades, Patna was still a crucial hub within the district and the wider region. Its courts and its wholesale markets—as well as its salons and poetry gatherings, discussed in the next chapter—attracted people from around south Bihar, and sometimes from farther away.

For many, Patna was either a destination or a resting point on a circuit that ended at home. For others, though, it was a way-station on a path out of Bihar. Its schools and colleges prepared many elite young men for careers at Calcutta University and then, often, at the Calcutta High Court. While in Calcutta, they met in new settings like the mess house and the students’ club. In addition to comforting homesick visitors in a strange city, these social spaces helped cultivate a class of professional Biharis, linking migrants from different districts and generations. Many of the young men who met and learned new disciplines, ranging from football to public speaking, went on to become the Bihari political leaders of the following decades.

A tour around Patna

Though Europeans had once lived in Patna itself, by the nineteenth century the city was made up of two distinct, racially defined zones. Increasingly, the few resident Europeans lived exclusively in the civil station, or colonial suburb, of Bankipur, and avoided the old part of the city, which they marked off with the name Patna City. The change took place gradually over late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, so that, while there were still some Europeans in Patna

City in the 1820s, almost none were left by the 1880s. But as Europeans avoided the Indian city more and more, the city itself continued to expand toward its colonial satellite. Though the boundaries between the Indian and European cities proved elastic, the older parts of the city, in the east, were increasingly marginalized. As Bihar declined economically in the late nineteenth century, Patna fell with it; but Patna City was affected far more than Bankipur. The new city’s eclipse of the old was not merely a geographic change; a social transformation accompanied this spatial reorganization, as lawyers and other white-collar elites in Bankipur rose to prominence over the merchants, bankers, and landowners of the old, Mughal city.

The most detailed records of Patna before the late nineteenth century come from the journals of Francis Buchanan (later Hamilton), a botanist who undertook a systematic and wide-ranging survey of a number of districts of Bengal Presidency in the early nineteenth century. When he visited Patna District in 1811-12, Patna was already a very long and narrow city, strung along the riverbank and warded off by the marshland to the south. Buchanan made its length at nine miles, from Bankipur in the west to Bagh Jafar Khan in the east, and the city remained within these limits until the New Capital was built to the west in the 1900s.


6 By “the city,” and by “Patna,” I generally mean Patna taken as a whole, but occasionally, when the context makes it clear, “the city” may refer to Patna City. Ordinarily, though, I use “Patna City,” or sometimes “Azimabad” or “the old city,” when contrasting it with Bankipur. Needless to say, many place names were spelled inconsistently. I have tried to be regular in my own usage, but quotations may use spellings like “Backergunge” or “Baqarganj” for Bakarganj (which was originally named after a Sir Robert Barker, but the r was dropped in the nineteenth century). Spellings like “Bankipore,” “Behar,” and “Beharee” appeared frequently. Most of the places mentioned here appear on the accompanying maps. On civil stations, see Anthony King, Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power, and Environment (London: Routledge, 1976), 82–84; Veena Talwar Oldenburg, The Making of Colonial Lucknow 1856-1877 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), 55–58.

Map 1. Overview of Patna.
The boundaries between city and country, though, were never quite clear. Buchanan wrote that, “among the natives,” the city was “usually said to reach along the bank of the Ganges from Sherpur to Baikunthapur,” adding about twenty miles to its length. A dozen years later, when the clergyman Reginald Heber rode from Bankipur to Danapur, the military cantonment seven miles to the west, he noted that “the whole way lies between scattered bungalows, bazars, and other buildings.” Even as suburbs extended westward to “practically form one continuous narrow city hemmed in between the Ganges and the railway,” many parts of Patna between Bankipur and Patna City remained rural, especially south of the main road paralleling the riverfront, “the area of ground which is actually occupied by buildings being comparatively narrow.”

In *A Passage to India*, set in a fictionalized Patna, E.M. Forster writes that Chandrapore, that is, Bankipur, “shares nothing with the city except the overarching sky.” The distinction between city and civil station, though often seen in such stark terms, was not so clear in reality. As Rebecca Brown has argued, a fixed dichotomy between fort and “black town,” familiar throughout the literature on colonial cities, is not quite appropriate in Patna. In the Presidency capitals of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, Europeans segregated themselves from the Indian cities that developed outside colonial forts. In Patna, though, Brown points out that the fort predated the colonial presence, having been built by Sher Shah Suri in the early sixteenth century. While British settlement remained outside Patna City—first in nearby Gulzarbagh and then in Bankipur—the European cemetery, with its memorial commemorating the killing of British officers in 1763 by the troops of the Bengal nawab, Mir Qasim (under the command of Walter Reinhardt, alias “Sombre” or “Samru”), was inside the city walls. Meanwhile, the premier burial site for Muslim aristocrats of Patna City, the *dargāh* (shrine) of Shah Arzan, was closer to Bankipur than to Patna City.

Even in the Presidency capitals, racialized segregation was more complex than might be suggested by a dichotomy between a black town and a white town (whether the white town took the form of a fort, a cantonment, or civil lines); all the more so in older cities like Patna, Delhi.

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8 Buchanan, “Journal of Francis Buchanan (Patna and Gaya Districts),” 343. “Baikunthapur” refers to Baikathpur (whose name may well have changed in the last two hundred years), rather than to Baikunthpur, which is located elsewhere.

9 Heber, *Journey through the Upper Provinces of India*, vol. 1 p. 218.


and Lucknow. The Europeans in Patna themselves lived around Bankipur Lawn or Maidan, also called the Race Course (renamed Gandhi Maidan in 1948), especially between the Gol Ghar (lit. Round House) granary to its northwest and the former Company Bagh, or garden, to its northeast. Official buildings were concentrated near this area as well. According to the 1907 district gazetteer, “the whole appearance of the place is somewhat picturesque on account of the fine Maidān, the large houses, and the well laid out gardens surrounding it and lining the river bank.” But in a provincial city like Patna, where there were only a few hundred Europeans, the colonists never had a hope of isolating themselves entirely in their civil station. In addition to the servants they depended on, and the elite Indians who built homes there, even very poor Indians regularly came to Bankipur from nearby villages in order to shop and seek medical attention.

This small part of Bankipur, then, perhaps a quarter of its area, was the place that most resembled a classic upcountry civil station. Four and a half miles east lay Patna’s opposite pole, the walled city built by Sher Shah Suri in the early sixteenth century, which came into its own, and acquired the name Azimabad, in 1703-1707 under the governorship of Aurangzeb’s grandson, Azim ush-Shan. Here, inside the former city walls, were the wards of Khwaja Kalan and Chauk Kalan, which formally made up Azimabad or Patna City. The old walls were mostly gone by the late nineteenth century, but their influence on the city’s form lingered in the street plan. Aside from parts of the moats, which filled with water for much of the year, the most visible remnants of the city walls were the landmarks of Purab Darwaza and Pashchim Darwaza, or the Eastern and Western Gates, through which the main city road passed (for an 1824 depiction of Pashchim Darwaza by the Opium Agent and amateur artist Charles D’Oyly, see Fig. 1).
Over the course of the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, Patna City’s boundaries became more and more vague. Patnaites regularly included places like Gulzarbagh and Sadiqpur, west of the walled city, and Malsalami, the former customs area to its east, within their conceptions of Patna City. Several of Patna’s most important markets were outside the city walls, including Marufganj, the city’s largest wholesale market. Markets oriented to the river trade with north Bihar, the North-West Provinces, and Bengal lined the river all the way from Marufganj, outside the eastern wall in Malsalami ward, to Colonelganj, well beyond the western wall in Alamganj ward.

Inland, parallel to this string of riverine marketplaces, stretched their counterparts catering to the cart trade from the districts of Patna, Gaya, and Shahabad; these covered a similar extent, from Mansurganj, just inside the eastern wall, to Maharajganj, Sadiqpur, and Alabakhshpur, west

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20 British Library Online Gallery, Shelfmark WD2060.
22 Marufganj was especially important in the businesses of grain and, particularly, oilseeds, Patna’s most-traded commodity. Buchanan, “Journal of Francis Buchanan (Patna and Gaya Districts),” 345; Yang, Bazaar India, 98–100.
This commercial zone bled into smaller markets to its west, extending all the way to Bakargarh in Bankipur. Some Europeans called this intermediate area the “suburbs,” a term which, as Brown points out, by its very indeterminacy helped define the poles of city and civil station. Others referred to it as the middle zone, or threw up their hands and called the entire conurbation up to the Lawn Patna City, or simply Patna. It is useful to keep in mind the narrowness of this middle zone: until after the turn of the century, much of the area below Sher Shah Suri Road (as it is now called, although it had not been given this name at the time) was patchily populated, speckled with villages in some places and elsewhere with fairly substantial settlements.

If Azimabad increasingly extended toward Bankipur, the reverse was true as well. As the Bihar Bandhu newspaper said in 1901, “thirty years ago, Bankipur was like a village; aside from government offices, there was hardly any population. At night, one was frightened to the soul to go to the railway station. In every direction, it was nothing but gardens, and there weren’t as many solidly built houses as one can see nowadays.” This growth was accompanied by an erosion of Bankipur’s racial, and class-based, exclusiveness. Certainly, the area around the Lawn was still largely populated by Europeans and elite Indians, but the name “Bankipur” had come to refer to a larger and more diverse area to the east as well. Formally, Bankipur was bounded by a line running roughly north-south, just to the east of Bakargarh and Muharrampur, next to the Lawn. In common usage, though, at least among Indians, Bankipur ran substantially farther east, through the Pirbahore ward muhallas (neighborhoods) of Muradpur and Chauhatta, and even up to Mahendru, in Sultanganj ward.

Few Europeans lived in these neighborhoods, and residents were not especially well-off. Nor were political affiliations their distinguishing feature; the eastern part of the riverfront, as much as the western, had been dominated by the Raj and its allies since the early nineteenth century. Rather, it was the new colonial institutions situated there, especially educational ones like Patna College, the Bihar School of Engineering, and Temple Medical School (the site of the Bankipur Charitable Dispensary, destination of ailing villagers) that made them part of Bankipur. The opium factory at Gulzarbagh, and the City Court in Alamganj, though equally colonial, were remnants of an earlier phase of colonialism, when the British had been less intent on segregating themselves. Though Alamganj was full of vakils (lawyers), many of them led social lives resembling those of the old clerical elites of Patna City more than the English-speaking students


\[24\] Brown never refers to Bankipur as either a “civil station” or “civil lines,” instead arguing that Bankipur aspired, but failed, to be “a space outside of the colonial.” Brown, “Cemeteries and Suburbs,” 162–63.


\[26\] Bihar Bandhu, July 20, 1901.

\[27\] For some administrative purposes but not others, Bankipur was considered a separate entity from Patna City, but generally, and especially in municipal matters, the two were taken together. The particular contexts in which the two were administratively separated changed over time. Patna City and a few outlying villages generally comprised the Patna City Subdivision, under a City Magistrate, while Bankipur (and, later, the New Capital) usually fell under the Phulwari thana of the Sadar subdivision. See censuses and gazetteers for details.

\[28\] See various issues of Al-Punch, for instance, as well as Maheshwar Public Library, Annual Report, 1929-30 (Patna: Ramesh Printing Works, 1930).

\[29\] Yang, Bazaar India, 107–8.
and clerks in Chauhatta and Muradpur.\textsuperscript{30} Clearly, then, no neat lines could be drawn separating Patna City from the middle zone from Bankipur; nonetheless, these regions—particularly those on either end of the city—remained important to Patna’s social organization, as well as to Patnaites’ understandings of their own experiences.

**A “disagreeable and disgusting” city**

Distinct though these areas were from Patna City, in some ways they stood together with it, and apart from the “picturesque” elite neighborhoods to the west. Bad sanitation, in particular, united eastern Bankipur with Patna City. Between 1912 and 1914, while Bankipur as a whole had the fewest plague deaths of any of Patna’s wards (though Sultanganj was close behind), Bakarganj, which the Sanitary Commissioner called “the most insanitary and overcrowded in the city,” had higher mortality than all but two of the 146 muhallas in the city (with 125 deaths, behind Alamganj’s 268 and Khwaja Kalan’s 245).\textsuperscript{31} More anecdotally, Gokulananda Prasada Varma describes his lodgings as a student in the 1890s, presumably near Chauhatta, as “one of the thatched houses in a half-clean half-dirty street of the dirtiest Mahalla [sic] of Bankipore.”\textsuperscript{32}

Patna City had long been considered insanitary, at least by Europeans; Buchanan, for instance, called it “disagreeable and disgusting,” although his Iranian contemporary Ahmed Behbahani called it a “paradise.”\textsuperscript{33} As Anand Yang has pointed out, colonial fears of urban congestion and miasma were mixed with anxieties about Patna’s supposed history of what William Tayler, the excitable Patna Commissioner of the 1850s, called “disaffection and intrigue.” Such fears found their proof in Mir Qasim’s 1763 “Patna Massacre,” the 1857 rebellion, and the “Wahhabi conspiracy” of the 1860s and ‘70s, all of which appeared to the British to be linked with Patna’s visibly Muslim identity, epitomized by its Mughal architecture and prominent population of *sharīf* Muslims, that is, those claiming respectable or noble foreign ancestry.\textsuperscript{34}

Such feelings were, of course, common among colonists in other cities as well. William Glover has pointed out the consistent repetition of clichés of urban squalor, disorder, and congestion throughout colonial descriptions of Indian cities. As one writer said, “when one has

\textsuperscript{30} Hasan, *Yādgār-e Rozgār*, 979–1038.

\textsuperscript{31} Sanitary Commissioner to Municipal Secretary, August 31, 1914. Both Alamganj and Khwaja Kalan refer to the muhallas of these names, and not to their namesake wards, which were much larger. Since muhallas varied in population and other respects, and plague deaths were reported inconsistently, these numbers should be interpreted with some caution. They are, however, suggestive. The vast majority of muhallas suffered fewer than 50 plague deaths in this period and, in many cases, fewer than 10. No deaths at all were recorded outside of Bankipur and Pirbahore in 1913, an off year in the biennial plague cycle. BSA, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, November 1914, 1-9 A.

\textsuperscript{32} Varma does not specify whether he received his B.A. from Patna College or Bihar National College, but the former is more likely. In any case, both campuses were close to each other, and students usually lived nearby. Gokulananda Prasada Varma, *My Experiences and Observations* (Bankipore: Khadga Vilas Press, 1901), 13.


seen one Indian city, one has seen the lot.” In Patna’s case, by the late nineteenth century, these conventions congealed together with tropes of Patna’s decline from ancient greatness into the idea that the city’s filth was endemic and eternal. Officials complained about “the insanitary conditions produced by many centuries of neglect,” and lamented that “the soil of the ancient city is saturated with the filth of ages.” Despite incessantly repeating such complaints, the colonial administration rarely bestirred itself to address the problem, especially in Patna City. As the civil servant and Orientalist Henry Beveridge said in 1883, “the narrow lanes, and the quarter beyond the eastern gate, are full of filth, and stink abominably. Possibly these things are less noticed than formerly, as now no Europeans live in the city.”

Beyond this long history of European disgust at conditions in Patna, the concern for sanitation was made much more acute by the persistent presence of disease. In particular, cholera—which was considered endemic to Patna, appearing annually from March through September—caused a record 8,000 deaths in 1905. Even more acute was the plague outbreak that began in 1900 and returned each year, between December and June, for more than two decades.

In one especially serious episode, in 1901, thousands of people died or fled the city. As the Bihar Bandhu said, “this disease is continually growing, so much that nobody can be sure that someone they meet will still be alive come evening... Before, people had begun to leave their houses one by one, but now all the stores are closed and people have begun to run away, so the city has emptied out.... Nobody even brings up the idea of stepping foot inside the city.” The 1901 census, taken in March during the height of the epidemic, was recognized as compromised by widespread flight and by the disorganization that the plague had caused. A second enumeration made three months later, when the epidemic had subsided, found nearly 19,000 more residents in the city. Exact numbers are impossible to ascertain, given the inconsistency with which plague deaths were reported, but mortality was high; the government counted a minimum of 17,384 plague deaths in the city between 1901 and 1910.

Understandably, the epidemic made a deep impression on Patnaites. Newspapers printed updates on mortality, advertised medicines, and provided survival advice. Private citizens, too, addressed the frightened public. A mukhtār (lawyer) named Ram Krishna Lal, for instance,

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35 William Glover, Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2008), 48–52.
36 O’Malley, Gazetteer of the Patna District, 86; BSA, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, March 1896, 50-53 A.
37 Beveridge, “City of Patna,” 216.
38 On cholera as an endemic disease in Patna, see Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, 9:211–12; O’Malley, Gazetteer of the Patna District, 82.
40 “Ham” (Us), Bihar Bandhu, March 20, 1901.
41 As the census report said, “no one who could go elsewhere remained in the stricken city.” More than a hundred thousand people, though, were left behind to struggle through the epidemic. E.A. Gait, Census of India, 1901: The Lower Provinces of Bengal and Their Feudatories (The Report), vol. 6, bk. 1 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902), 31–32, 83; O’Malley, Gazetteer of the Patna District, 31, 34.
published a number of pamphlets, in English, Hindi, and Urdu, on the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of plague. Evidently possessed of a scientific mind, he presented his theories in the form of logical proofs, often summarized in couplets (“Live like a bird when plague prevails; / A skilled Doctor, to cure it, fails.”). One pamphlet, *The Pathogeny of Plague*, was, according to its preface, an “imitation of EUCLID’S GEOMETRY and a true revealer of the mysteries of Plague.” Admitting that he was “a non-professional man,” Lal asserted the superiority of his approach over medical convention and promised “a Syllabus of a New Scheme of Science for eradicating PLAGUE without the least trouble or expense.” Patna’s publishing institutions afforded both professionals and passionate amateurs the opportunity for profit or service, or both. Whether or not they all felt the “ecstasy of joy” that Lal reported on the publication of his pamphlets, those who wrote essays and advertised doctors’ services or pills like Ananta Churun (“to defy plague,” sold from Muzaffarpur) and Dr. Batliwala’s Ague Mixture (“for malaria influenza and mild forms of plague,” sold from Bombay) reached audiences in Patna and Bihar through the Patna papers, which generally kept publishing even when they had to relocate outside the city temporarily.

Plague thrives in densely populated areas, and so it affected Patna much more than the smaller towns and villages of Bihar. Patnaites were almost eight times as likely as the population of Bihar and Orissa at large, and 16% more likely even than townspeople in the most affected parts of Bihar, to die from plague between 1901 and 1910. The government’s response, though, was rarely commensurate with this fact. Out of Rs. 35,000 in plague grants distributed in Patna Division in 1908, for instance, Patna Municipality only received Rs. 1,000, an amount in line with its proportion of the population but not with the disease’s urban bias.

Part of the problem was that, while Patna was the largest city in the Bengal Presidency after Calcutta, it was administered like a much smaller town. Like almost all provincial towns in British India, the local administration was too strapped financially to afford adequate sanitary or other facilities and was thus “run... on what one may call third class lines.”

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44 545,450 people in the province died from plague in this period, or 1.49% of a 1901 population of 36,557,257. In Patna, there were 17,384 plague deaths, 11.3% of the 1901 population of 153,739. In the 26 towns and cities of Patna, Gaya, Shahabad, Saran, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, and Bhagalpur districts, 77,526 people died of plague in this period, 9.77% of the 1901 urban population of 793,136. Where available, I have used the corrected figures taken in July 1901. L.S.S. O’Malley, *Census of India, 1911: Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Sikkim (Report)*, vol. 5, bk. 1 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1913), 34, 72; L.S.S. O’Malley, *Census of India, 1911: Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Sikkim (Bihar and Orissa Tables)*, vol. 5, bk. 3 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1913), 264.

45 E.V. Levinge, Patna Commissioner, to Municipal Secretary, April 30, 1908, BSA, Bengal, Municipal Department, Medical Branch, May 1908, 207-208 B.

46 H.T.S. Forrest to E.L.L. Hammond, November 16, 1913. BSA, B&O, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, June 1915, 1-4 B. For a popular contemporary handbook meant to guide impoverished
government periodically gave the city some aid for sanitation, but this support generally came in the form of loans, which the municipality had difficulty repaying.\textsuperscript{47} Thanks to this ongoing financial strain, even projects that were taken on, like the 1894 drainage scheme, were often poorly kept up. Although the provincial government did sometimes relieve the city’s debt, as when it granted the municipality Rs. 10,000 in 1904, such relief was often short-lived.\textsuperscript{48} In the early twentieth century, especially, the municipality was regularly in debt thanks to a combination of plague and famine expenditures and the loss of its revenues from Gangetic ferries and the failed tramway (about which see below).\textsuperscript{49}

Facing these difficulties, the administration oscillated between congratulating itself on a job well done and blaming problems on the Municipal Commissioners, appointed and elected from among prominent townsfolk. In 1899, the Patna Commissioner applauded “the splendid sanitary work that is now being carried on in Patna by the Chairman, Mr. H. LeMesurier.... It is entirely due to his energy, perseverance and powers of organisation that Patna may now be quoted as an example to all the other municipalities in Bengal not only in the matter of drainage but in all other work connected with conservancy.”\textsuperscript{50} Three years before, though, frustrated with Patna’s low taxes (7½ percent on holdings), the Commissioner advised the Municipal Secretary that “the fact is that there is a party amongst the Municipal Commissioners whose cry is ‘down with taxation at all costs.’”\textsuperscript{51} Likewise, in 1914, when the Government of Bihar and Orissa sought the United Provinces’ advice on making sanitary improvements to Patna, the U.P. government warned that recent experiences in Lucknow had shown “the undesirability of using the Municipal Boards as the bodies of trustees. Future schemes will be carried out by forming special bodies of trustees.”\textsuperscript{52}

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municipalities, including Patna, in making the most of their meager funds, see G.W. Disney, \textit{Sanitation of Mofussil Bazaars} (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1902), as well as the 1914 edition of the same book. Like his contemporary Patrick Geddes, Disney emphasized modest interventions over radical projects aimed at reconfiguring entire neighborhoods and cities. For some of Geddes’s recommendations for Indian cities, written between 1915 and 1919, see Patrick Geddes, \textit{Patrick Geddes in India}, ed. Jacqueline Tyrwhitt (London: Percy Lund Humphries & Co., 1947).
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\textsuperscript{47} In a 1912 address to Lieutenant-Governor Andrew Fraser, the Patna Municipality and District Board said, “Patna is the chief town of Bihar and it is in an insanitary condition. The reason is not far to seek. The Municipality of Patna cannot afford to undertake any good work of public utility, and meets its demands with great difficulty[.] Unless Your Honour’s Government comes to its rescue, Patna is doomed to fall into a state of bankruptcy.... In spite of the heavy burden of a loan of about 4 lakhs, the Municipality had effected such improvements as had gained a high reputation for its executives and had considerably raised its prestige. But we are pained to say that owing to a fall in our ferry income and the necessity of granting grain allowance to our poor employés consequent upon a rise in the price of food-grains, we are unable to take up sanitary works, and find it difficult to meet our sanitary requirements.” In a marginal comment, Fraser remarked, “in my new scheme all grain compensation is done away with. This will of course press hardly on some.” BL APAC, IOR P/7863, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, October 1912, 56-58 A.
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\textsuperscript{48} BSA, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, November 1904, 26-28 A.
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\textsuperscript{49} BL APAC, IOR P/7863, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, October 1912, 24-29 A.
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\textsuperscript{50} Resolution Reviewing the Reports on the Working of the Municipalities in Bengal for 1898-99.
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\textsuperscript{51} Resolution Reviewing the Reports on the Working of the Municipalities in Bengal during the Year 1894-95. Forbes to Risley, February 26, 1896. BSA, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, March 1896, 50-53 A.
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\textsuperscript{52} Undersecretary to Government of United Provinces to Municipal Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, March 7, 1914. BSA, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, November 1914, 1-9 A.
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Patna’s provinciality, and its distance from the cantonment at Danapur, saved it from some of the more aggressive sanitary measures borne by other cities in India. Lucknow, for instance, with its substantial military presence, was subjected to more vigorous clearance measures in accordance with the view that it was “impossible to separate the question of health, as it relates to troops, from the sanitary condition of the native population.” A metropolis like Bombay, meanwhile, was transformed utterly by ambitious, but largely unsuccessful, attempts to improve the city’s crowded and plague-stricken core. In Patna, by contrast, interventions were half-hearted and driven by the commonplace administrative rationality according to which, “if it cannot reasonably predicted that such a work will be profitable..., it should not be undertaken.” Thus, the Sanitary Commissioner emphasized the importance of clearing and rebuilding the insanitary poor neighborhoods of Bankipur, believed to be one of the key points of origin for plague each year:

Sites for bazars in the neighbourhood of the Civil Station are in great demand and the value of these areas ought to be much enhanced if they were well laid out. On the other hand it is difficult to make any practical proposals to deal with the bastis [settlements, here slums] in the Malsalami ward at the eastern end of the city which is the other area in which plague is said to break out each season, because they are in a very poor semi-agricultural quarter which could never, from any point of view, repay the cost of improvement.

This logic meant that when it came to disease prevention, poor areas like Malsalami were largely left to their own devices, apart from the provision of fired, and therefore rat-resistant, bricks. Conversely, areas like Bakarganj, which both threatened the civil station by their proximity and also promised remuneration, saw interventions of the sorts that took place in other cities—occasionlly effective in improving health, but also invasive and unevenly applied. As another administrator said, “in the past a lot of basti removal has been done in Bankipore, but there our action has ended. We have made no attempt to house the persons evicted, who have simply made overcrowding worse in some other basti.” Overall, however, as long as Patna remained a backwater within colonial geography, the scale of these demolitions does not seem to have approached that of cities with a larger European presence.

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56 E.C. Hare, Sanitary Commissioner, to Municipal Secretary, August 31, 1914. BSA, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, November 1914, 1-9 A.
58 E.A. Gait, November 25, 1914. BSA, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, November 1914, 1-9 A.
Indian journalists made vigorous attempts to goad the administration into improving Patna’s condition. Their critiques often echoed the favorite themes of administrators, emphasizing the intractability and endemicity of the disease, and drawing attention to Patna City’s crowded conditions. As the Kayastha Messenger of Gaya said in 1907, “Patna has ever been notorious as the hot-bed of epidemics. This densely populated town interspersed with dirty narrow lanes has been the favourite haunt of plague and cholera and it has taxed the brains of the Municipal authorities how to effect an improvement in the sanitary condition of the town.”

Indian journalists also resembled administrators in attacking the Municipal Commissioners for their apathy, pointing out that “if you are a Municipal Commissioner, then improving the entire city and not just paying attention to the cleanliness of the streets and alleys immediately around your mansion... is becoming of you.”

Beyond these similarities, though, the two groups of commentators often diverged. Unlike Europeans, Indian critics extended the blame beyond the Indian Municipal Commissioners to include European administrators, too. The Behar Herald complained, “no one can of course be blamed for these periodical visitations, but people have a notion that if the local municipality would take better care of their roads, ditches, and drains, such visitations [of cholera] might to a certain extent be averted. As it is, our roads are full of dirt, the ditches full of foul water and putrid matter, and rain water accumulating for want of drains by the ditches on the sides of road.”

Indian papers regularly decried the unequal distribution of the municipality’s attention to sanitation. Al-Punch wrote, “why, sir! Is this a municipality or a lawless town [andher nagri]? ... Or is the ‘money bag’ only filled by those who live in main streets? No, no! Sir, the ‘tax’ is collected from everyone in the city.” The complaint was reasonable: property values declined on side streets, where sanitation was poorer, but stayed constant on the main roads. Beyond this concern for taxation and property values, Indian journalists, particularly those writing in Urdu and Hindi papers, pointed out the unequal burden borne by the poor. Without either the infrastructure or the funds needed to see to their needs according to sanitary regulations, they were at the mercy of the police. The Bihar Bandhu wrote, “nowadays, police oppression is growing somewhat. If you look in the morning, hordes of men and women are heading to the police station in the company of constables. We hear that it has been forbidden to go to the floodplain to defecate.... Such an arrangement is undoubtedly excellent for sanitation, but harassing people isn’t appropriate in any situation.” Lamenting the government’s tendency to

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59 Quoted in “Sanitary Condition of Patna,” The Beharee, August 2, 1907.
60 “Shobhā” (Grace), Bihar Bandhu, September 15, 1901.
61 The Behar Herald, July 15, 1879.
62 The reference is to the superior status of municipalities over towns lacking any institutions of self-governance. Al-Punch, March 29, 1906.
63 Plague Survey of Patna City, by H.M. Brown, Deputy Sanitary Commissioner. BSA, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, November 1914, 1-9 A. In Lucknow, likewise, the contractor for the old city’s sanitation “believed that the ‘narrow lanes and by-lanes should be the responsibility of the inhabitants,’ which meant that ‘two-thirds of the city had not been cleaned at all.’” Oldenburg, Colonial Lucknow, 104–5.
64 Bihar Bandhu, October 25, 1883. What is at stake here seems to be the lack of alternative facilities, as well as the impropriety of bothering people in a sensitive moment. On another occasion, Al-Punch invited official attention to the contamination of shared spaces: “our Danapur correspondent says that the police have arrested the Sultanpur resident Ismail and his 15 accomplices on the charge of gambling. And he says that excrement is being thrown from carriages at the east end of the park at 10 o’clock every night, upon which the carriages drive
disclaim responsibility for the material welfare of its poorest subjects, *Al-Punch* pointed to the links between hunger and disease:

> From the king to the peasants, all are silently watching the mass death, and however dreadful they may say it is, they defer action. Several of the country’s sympathizers blurt out that cleanliness is necessary, but nobody says why. The peasants are dying of hunger... if they can’t be sure of caring for their children, then why bring up cleanliness? Out of their labor, they should build a well-ventilated house, ‘disinfect’ it every week, and burn frankincense and sulfur. They should do all this, but nobody says how. When the stoic [fāqa-mast, i.e., cheerful despite starvation] peasant can’t do any of this, then should he die?65

Beyond criticizing this combination of administrative callousness and apathy, journalists pointed to the link between colonial authoritarianism and the resentment stirred up by forced inspections, reburials, and other unpopular measures. The *Behar Times* reprinted a long item from the Allahabad *Pioneer* in which the Anglo-Indian paper expressed surprise that “the Mysore darbar authorities [i.e., the government of the princely state] have achieved in a quiet way what has been found nearly impossible in other plague-affected places in India.” Taking a dig at the prejudices of the author of the *Pioneer* piece, presumably a European, the *Behar Times* argued that it was no surprise that the measures taken in Mysore had succeeded, for though they were no less invasive than those in British India (here simply called India), the Mysore government granted its subjects more respect and liberty:

> If our contemporary had given some serious thought to the matter, he would have no doubt come to the conclusion that coercion in this connection... was a vast mistake. How can we expect measures affecting the social and religious conditions of the people to be taken by them submissively, when the rulers keep the people at arms’ length and treat their complaints and suggestions as sedition.... This ought to be a valuable object lesson to the authorities in India.66

Administrators and their journalistic critics agreed that sanitation and disease were linked, and particularly urban, problems; they also shared a critique of the elite Indians on the Municipal Board for their complicity in Patna’s unhealthy condition. Indian writers diverged from their rulers, though, both by criticizing the inequalities of official policy and by including administrators as well as the Indians on the Municipal Board in their apportionment of blame. Where the administration and the Municipal Commissioners had failed, some looked to other Indian elites for succor. The Bihar correspondent of the Calcutta *Hindoob Patriot* attacked the inadequacy of the government’s anti-plague measures, while expressing gratitude to the Maharaja of Darbhanga, by far the largest landholder in Bihar, for his gift of Rs. 100,000 for drainage in Patna, without which “Patna might be whistling in vain for the carrying out of a scheme, characterised by [the Lieutenant-Governor] himself as important.” Inspired by the contrast between the Maharaja’s beneficence and “the fact how Government at times is hard up for funds, and how, necessarily, some important and urgent reform of scheme [sic] is shelved,”

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65 “Safāī” (Cleanliness), *Al-Punch*, March 14, 1903.
66 “Plague Measures in Mysore,” *The Behar Times*, October 14, 1898.
the *Patriot’s* correspondent asked, “cannot Patna, the first town in Behar, boasting of so many well-to-do people, Nawabs, bankers, nobility and gentry, afford to get water-works of its own?”

This complaint points toward the ongoing participation of wealthy Patnaites—as well as zamīndārs (landholders) with interests in Patna, like the Maharaja—in the city’s life, as philanthropists, businessmen, intermediaries, and politicians. Neither were these roles static, though, nor did the same men fill them throughout the period.

**Neighborhoods and elite leadership**

As C.A. Bayly and Douglas Haynes have argued, existing patterns of urban leadership contributed to the idioms and structures of colonial urban politics and to the formation of nationalist elites in cities like Allahabad and Surat. In Patna as well, landlords and merchants, representing families of varying antiquity, played important roles on the political scene of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Increasingly, these notables with local roots were supplanted by professional men, many of them lawyers, who though they came from privileged backgrounds were often more or less outsiders to Patna and its late-Mughal aristocracy.

Like the Mughals, the colonial government attempted to rule its cities through local intermediaries. Each of Patna City’s muhallas was placed under a muhallaḍār, typically the patriarch of the local merchant family, who was responsible for Levyng the *chaudkādārī* (night watchman) tax and serving as an intermediary between the state and the people of his muhalla. Many of these muhallas, like Chaudhari Tola and Guzri Bazar, were named after the nobles and traders who had founded them; others, like Kashmiri Kothi and Lodi Katra, were named after the ethnic or caste groups who had been settled there under Azim ush-Shan. In many cases, descendants of the founding inhabitants still lived in these muhallas.

The authority that Patna City notables exerted in their localities—incomplete and contested though it undoubtedly was—complemented and buttressed their pursuit of influence and prestige in broader arenas. Locally, they distinguished themselves by operating as mediators, philanthropists, and authority figures. Each aristocrat would hold a darbār, or court, in his dālān, or courtyard. According to Waris Ismail, a member of the Guzri family born in 1909, in his youth “the darbars of the old aristocrats and wealthy men [umrā and rausā, plurals of amīr and raṣ] were held precisely on the Mughal pattern.” Rich and poor were present in these gatherings, and refreshments would be offered to all. Descriptions of these darbars emphasize the etiquette with which they were held. As Waris Ismail recalls, “if a person’s dalan ran from west to east, he

69 Syed Hasan Askari, “The City of Patna—Etymology of Place-Names,” in *Patna Through the Ages: Glimpses of History, Society & Economy*, ed. Qeyamuddin Ahmad (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1988), 62–65; Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics, and Society*, 22; Yang, *Bazaar India*, 97–98. As in other matters, sources on urban governance in early modern Patna are thin. Conditions were undoubtedly markedly different from those in Delhi; nonetheless, a comparison with Delhi’s havelis may be warranted. In these compounds, closer to a muhalla than to a mansion, the resident noble exercised a high degree of control. Over the course of the eighteenth century, though, these havelis were gradually broken down into discrete units. Their resident tradespeople moved from clientage to commerce, while aristocrats were reduced to possession of a few courtyards. Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 17–35.
70 KBOPL, Mss. Acc. 2884 (Warīs Ismāil, “Azīmābād 1920 se Qabl tak Kyā Thā” [“What Azimabad was Before 1920”], in “Maqālāt-e Nawwāb Warīs Ismāil, Jild-e Awwal” [“Writings of Nawab Waris Ismail, Vol. 1”]).
sat facing Mecca and the elites sat to his right, while the common people sat to his left. If his
dalan ran north-south, he sat facing north. In my time, this tradition was nearly extinct, as the
English custom of visiting while sitting in chairs had begun.”71 By the 1930s, the elite darbars
were a thing of the past. Waris Ismail’s contemporary, the poet Jamil Mazhari (born 1904),
recalls the nostalgic account that Abul Kalam Azad (born 1888) presented to him in 1936:

“In my early youth, I saw a gathering at the house of every sharif and ālīs [wealthy
man] in Patna. In fact, in every muhalla, every ālī’s parlor [dtwān-khāna] was like a
‘club,’ in which the poor and rich of the entire muhalla would gather. According to
the season, tea and sharbat [a refreshing drink] were served. Scholarly and literary
debates took place. There was singing and poetry recitation. People listened to one
another’s sadness and pain and thought of ways to alleviate them. If one of the daily
attendees was absent, then the ālī would immediately send a servant to find out the
situation. If the employee brought the news that sāhib [the gentleman] is sick, or if
someone is sick in his house, the ālī would get up and go over with all his attendees
to help.”72

These memories clearly present an idealized image of the harmonious and inclusive darbar.
Nonetheless, they do indicate some of the ways in which the people of each muhalla congregated
under the patronage of local leaders. Though status and etiquette remained important—as Waris
Ismail says of the darbar of his great-great-grandfather, Wilayat Ali Khan, “much was made of
hierarchy”—the ālī’s leadership was partly determined by his ability to care for the ordinary
people of his muhalla. Thus, while the city’s umra and rausa were consulted on political
matters—especially those affecting Muslims, like the Sharif of Mecca’s declaration of
independence—they were also expected to respond to the demands of their humbler neighbors,
as when one gentleman mediated between the police and the people of his muhalla when a
cowherd’s house burned down.73

The family of the Guzri Nawabs is a useful exemplar of the Patna aristocracy, not only
because Waris Ismail’s manuscript memoirs contain so much information about it, but because it
was a large and prominent family for many decades, active in many of the domains where the
aristocracy operated. The family was founded by a Mir Abdullah Rizvi, a banker with roots in
Khurasan who came from Awadh to Patna in the 1780s, rising in status and wealth through
service to both the British and the Mughal Governor of Azimabad.74 Since Mir Abdullah’s father
had only arrived from Iran in the eighteenth century, the colonial state did not consider his
descendants to be among the “old landed proprietors,” and so, although they possessed
substantial rural holdings around Patna—more than any other zamindar in the city—the colonial

71 KBOPL, Mss. Acc. 2698 (WARIS ISMAIL, “AZIMĀBĀD Kī QADĪM TAHZĪB AUR AHL-e PAṬNA Kī ZINDAGĪ” [“The Ancient
Culture of Azimabad and the Life of the People of Patna”]).
72 Jamīl Mazhari, “Kal kā Azimābād” (The Azimabad of Yesterday), in Mansūrāt-e Jamīl Mazhari (Patna: Bihar
Urdu Academy, 1991), vol. 2 page 341.
73 BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 213 of 1914; Al-Punch, March 21, 1903.
74 Sayyid Muhammad Ismail, Brief Account of the Family and of the Life of Late Lamented Nawab Bahadur
Nawab Al Haj Syed Wellayet Ali Khan Saheb, C.I.E. by His Dutiful Great-Grand-Son Khan Bahadur S.M.
state did not rely particularly heavily on them in the countryside. Within the city, though, they acted as spokesmen for the aristocracy, largely by virtue of their superior wealth.\textsuperscript{75}

One of Mir Abdullah’s grandsons, Wilayat Ali Khan (1818-1899), became especially prominent, establishing himself as “the chief nobleman of Patna,” in the words of the anti-imperialist poet, diplomat, and traveller Wilfrid Scawen Blunt.\textsuperscript{76} In addition to his superior wealth, Wilayat Ali’s conspicuous loyalty to the British in the rebellion of 1857 helped him secure this status. Though he was educated in Arabic and Persian, Wilayat Ali never learned English. In his generation, though, this was only a moderate impediment to earning respect from the British; it could even prove an advantage, by demonstrating an aristocrat’s authenticity in an era much concerned with the figure of the \textit{bābū}, or Westernized middle-class man.\textsuperscript{77} As his great-grandson, Sayyid Muhammad Ismail, wrote, “his name will always be remembered by his countrymen [for his patronage of educational institutions] as well as for his staunch orthodoxy throughout a long life in an age of progress.”\textsuperscript{78}

Though his wealth and loyalism were prerequisites for close ties with the British, Wilayat Ali cemented his bona fides by modeling his domestic space on European norms, building “the first palatial building in Patna of European style with furnitures of European make.... Even his Zenana house was a model of cleanliness. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Europeans felt themselves at home in his company.”\textsuperscript{79} He earned further trust and admiration from the administration through his early and enthusiastic support for projects like Patna College, Temple Medical School, and the Muhammad Anglo-Arabic School, which was located near his house in Guzri Bazar.\textsuperscript{80}

Other members of the family, like Wilayat Ali’s uncle Lutf Ali Khan and Lutf Ali’s son Mehdi Hussain Khan, alias Badshah Nawab, also attained prominence in similar ways, for instance by patronizing institutions like the Bihar School of Engineering and the Training College for Female Teachers, which was named after Badshah Nawab. In Lutf Ali’s case, this patronage was in part a sort of penance for his suspected involvement in the 1857 rebellion.\textsuperscript{81}

While notables who supported such colonial institutions may have had other motives apart from demonstrating their loyalty, they also received more favorable attention from administrators than

\textsuperscript{75} Yang, \textit{Bazaar India}, 70–71. Various branches of the Guzri Nawab family owned a plurality or a majority of the land in many of the villages near Patna, as well as farther afield. See Patna Village Notes.


\textsuperscript{78} Ismail, \textit{Brief Account}, 10.

\textsuperscript{79} From an obituary in \textit{Reis and Rayyet}, quoted in ibid., 9–10.


\textsuperscript{81} KBOPL, Mss. Acc. 2884 (Waris Ismail, “Azmābād 1920 se Qabl tak Kyā Thā,” in “Maqālāt-e Nawwāb Wāris Ismāʿīl, Jild-e Awwal”); Yang, \textit{Bazaar India}, 72; William Tayler, \textit{The Patna Crisis: Or, Three Months at Patna, during the Insurrection of 1857} (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1858), 74–75. For clarification of the family’s complexly interwoven genealogy, see the “Genealogical Table of the Guzri Nawab Family of Patna Founded by Mir Abdullah,” compiled in 1912 by Syed Alimuddin Ahmed, the Manager of Estates for the Patna Court of Wards, in the collection of Waris Ismail’s granddaughter Farha Ismail.
did those who focused their philanthropy on religious beneficiaries like imambāras and madrasas.\textsuperscript{82}

It was not the case, though, that administrators disapproved of the patronage of institutions oriented toward communities defined by religion, caste or, in the case of Bengalis, region. Quite the reverse: colonial officials appreciated philanthropy directed toward charities and, especially, schools meant for specific high-status communities. These schools, like the Bhumihr Brahmin College in Muzaffarpur, and Patna’s Mohammedan Anglo-Arabic School and T.K. Ghosh Academy (the latter largely sponsored and attended by Bengalis, at least in its early years), began to appear in the late nineteenth century, starting with the Bankipore Girls’ School, founded by a Bengali woman in 1867.\textsuperscript{83}

Following colonial models of pedagogy but largely run by Indians and catering to particular communities, such schools were central to the expansion of Western education among elite Biharis in the late nineteenth century. Like zamindari advocacy groups, especially the Bihar Landholders’ Association, and caste groups like the Bhumihr Brahman Sabha, these schools appeared to British eyes as admirable self-improvement initiatives geared toward the reproduction of a conservative status quo. Even those schools that were aimed at broader constituencies emphasized their support for the divisions that comprised colonial common sense. The Badshah Nawab Rizvi Training College for Female Teachers, for instance, offered separate classes, teachers, and headmistresses for Muslim and Hindu students. As its supporter, the zamindar and lawyer Ram Gopal Singh Chowdhary, said in 1915, “this institution has been started mainly to educate ladies of high castes and good families. Every application for admission into this institution is very carefully inquired into and no one is admitted unless the Lady Principal is satisfied as to the high caste and respectability of the applicant.”\textsuperscript{84}

Whether or not a particular institution explicitly belonged to a specific community, patronage and official support often assumed the authority of community boundaries. Likewise, bodies like the Behar Landholders’ Association, led by the Maharaja of Darbhanga and supported by most of the large zamindars of Bihar, including the Guzri nawabs, met with official approval for their conservative and paternalistic agendas. As Peter Robb says, “the traditional arena was thought superior to the political, even when it was not very traditional, as with a caste sabha [organization]. So it was that zamindari bodies, equally as political in purpose as the Congress, in the early years, generally escaped the label, in British terminology, because of their half-conscious assimilation in the official mind with a social, a caste, a ‘natural’ category. They reinforced the order; ‘political’ movements disrupted it.”\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{82} For instance, compare Wilayat Ali with his more obscure contemporary, Imam Bandi Begum (d. 1894), who patronized religious institutions. Abbas, \textit{Short Account}.

\textsuperscript{83} On education in Patna District in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see James Hagen, “Indigenous Society, the Political Economy, and Colonial Education in Patna District” (Ph.D., University of Virginia, 1981), chap. 11.

\textsuperscript{84} Ram Gopal Singh Chowdhary, “B.N.R. Training College for Female Teachers,” \textit{The Express}, September 23, 1915. Reprinted in Ram Gopal Singh Chowdhary, \textit{Select Writings and Speeches of Babu Ramgopal Singh Chowdhary, B.A., B.L. (with a Short History of His Family)} (Bankipore: Bishun Prasad Sinha, 1920), 59–63. This account is confirmed by official records. See BSA, Bengal, Home Department, Education Branch, July 1907, 95-96 A.

While the admiration of colonial administrators was certainly not the only desirable form of prestige, it was nonetheless helpful to elites whose fortunes were intimately tied to their relationship with the state. Titles, honorary magistracies, and membership in District and Municipal Boards came to those who distinguished themselves in these ways, whatever their talents. An example is Wilayat Ali’s grandson Sayyid Khurshaid Nawab (Fig. 2), whose own son admitted that “my poor lamented father was not destined to become a greatman [sic], but such is the case with every glorious family in the world that it is liable to decay.” Nonetheless, he was rewarded for his ancestry and his contributions to causes like the Khuda Bakhsh Library, the Muhammadan Anglo-Arabic School, and the Bankipore Hospital with invitations to the 1903 and 1912 Imperial Darbars, a life post as an honorary magistrate, and, like his grandfather, uncle, and son, a post as a Municipal Commissioner.86 This last was a particularly valuable post. Though Commissioners’ influence over municipal policy and expenditures was limited, membership in the Municipal Board gave them prestige and opportunities for community leadership, or, in the critical view of a later generation of nationalists, opportunities to entrench themselves by distributing patronage to the people of their muhallas.88 Until the end of the nineteenth century or a little later, zamindars and bankers dominated the local boards rather than professional men. As C.A. Bayly says of Allahabad, “most of the town’s banking and property-owning elite secured sufficient representation and access to the administrative perquisites of the new Board to keep them from serious political alliance with the professional men. Moreover, their position as rais was enhanced by status as a municipal Commissioner, should they care to acquire it. The aspirant politician was encouraged to seek election and improve his own standing, but found that his scope was limited by both rais and official.”89

86 Khurshaid Nawab’s uncle, Tajamul Hussain Khan, alias Sultan Sahib, was elected to the Municipal Board, but the other members of the line were nominated. KBOPL, Mss. Acc. 2698 (Waris Ismail, “Ek Haqīrtaēn Fard kī Kahānī aur us kī Zabānī” [“An Extremely Despicable Person’s Story and Narrative”]; “Azimābād-Patna kā Māzī-o-Hāl” [“Azimabad-Patna’s Past and Present”]; Ismail, Brief Account, 7, 14–15.

87 KBOPL, Mss. Acc. 2696 (Photo album donated by Nawab Waris Ismail).


89 Bayly, Local Roots, 104.
By the turn of the century, the umra and rausa who had dominated Patna society were beginning to feel pressure from new white-collar elites. The influence of these professional men, many of whom were lawyers, could be felt in bodies like the Municipal Board, as well as in the very shape of the city. Capital and social cachet were shifting gradually toward Bankipur from Patna City, and with them moved political influence.

The political concerns of the professional elites of Bankipur, though, and the terms through which they expressed them, were quite different from those of the aristocrats. Where the Patna City aristocrats maintained strong ties to their muhallas, and reveled in their conservatism, the professionals spoke for a geographically diffuse Bihari public and articulated their goals in the idioms of liberalism. Ambitious, self-consciously modern men, like Sachchidananda Sinha and the brothers Ali and Hasan Imam, having come to Patna from smaller towns in Bihar for their schooling or to practice law, settled in Bankipur, near the colonial institutions they depended on. Others, like Khuda Bakhsh Khan, founder of his namesake library, had grown up there after their fathers had moved in search of legal employment.90

As Jyoti Hosagrahar has pointed out, the European suburb, Civil Lines in the case of her study of Delhi, was an increasingly important destination for both newcomers and old-city elites struggling to adapt to the restructuring of power after 1857.91 In Patna, many of the professional men, particularly lawyers, maintained ties with zamindari estates (and frequently held some land themselves), and thus shared interests with landed proprietors outside of Patna; but they largely separated themselves from the nobles of the old city. Many professionals, likewise, were Kayasthas, with long family histories of links to the Mughal state and expertise in Urdu and Persian, but increasingly they used English and Hindi in their professional and public lives. As I argue further in chapter 5, Bankipur’s eclipse of Patna City was tied closely to the ascendancy of English and Hindi over Urdu, and of a professional class, largely composed of Kayasthas and Brahmins, over the predominantly, but by no means entirely, Muslim aristocracy.

It must be kept in mind, however, that categories like “professional” and “aristocrat” are shorthand. They represent particular idioms and ways of living, rather than closed and exclusive groups. Certainly, they were not static categories. Many Hindus remained attached to Persianate customs—that is, the sophisticated culture and norms of the Mughal elites, both Hindu and Muslim—and Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s college at Aligarh was only the best-known of the institutions through which respectable Muslims, members of what David Lelyveld calls the culture of the kachahri or law court, tried to keep up with the demands of colonial employment despite their weakening grip on land, British suspicion in the wake of the 1857 rebellion, and the declining status of Urdu and Persian.92 Both individuals and groups remained resistant to easy categorization in the neat terms preferred by modern disciplines. By the same token, Bankipur and Patna City were never separate or homogeneous. Nonetheless, despite the irrefrangible messiness of reality, the political and cultural sway of Mughal Azimabad was undeniably waning, a process that would be hastened by Patna’s transformation into a provincial capital.

91 Hosagrahar, Indigenous Modernities, 37.
“That which halts is called a tramway”

As historians like Jyoti Hosagrahar and William Glover have shown, Patna was one of many Indian cities undergoing such a reconfiguration around colonial suburbs. 93 In Patna, though, this rearrangement took a particular form dictated by the city’s elongated geography. Bound by the Ganges on the north and swampland on the south, Patna had long been very narrow in one direction and sprawling in the other. Since at least Buchanan’s time, there had only been one artery, called simply “the main road” (now known as Ashok Rajpath), traversing the city’s length. 94 By the early twentieth century, it was fully paved and about twenty-four feet wide, but still remained Patna’s only “thoroughfare deserving the name of a street,” the primary link between the eastern and western parts of the city. Another road lay to the south, parallel to the railroad tracks, but given the clustering of settlement around the main street, this southern road was of more use to motorists and through traffic than to the ordinary residents of the city. 95 This limited communication between the eastern and western ends of the city exacerbated the polarization of Patna City and Bankipur all the more.

Sensing an opportunity in bringing the two poles nearer each other, an English businessman named Gilbert Finlayson had organized a tramway company in the 1880s. After a series of false starts and transfers of ownership, a joint-stock company called the Patna Tramway

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94 Buchanan, “Journal of Francis Buchanan (Patna and Gaya Districts),” 344–45.
Company got underway under the charge of a William Lloyd of Darjeeling. In the 1890s, the company began operating a narrow-gauge, horse-drawn tram along a five-mile route on the main road (Fig. 3). At first, the line ran between Chauk, the central business area in Patna City, and the Judge’s Court in Bankipur, a little east of the Maidan; soon, the east end of the line was extended southward to the Patna City railway station (see Map 2). Fares were set at one anna per mile for lower-class passengers and twice that rate for upper-class passengers, and the company paid the city Rs. 500 per mile annually, plus a portion of its profits.97

Map 2. Transportation infrastructure in Patna, c. 1900.

The tramway company attracted substantial interest from Patnaites, both as an infrastructural project and as an investment opportunity. Even people of fairly ordinary means, like an out-of-work police subinspector in Patna City, sold shares.98 One Patna City rais, Qazi Sayyid Riza Hussain, an ally of Khuda Bakhsh Khan and Sayyid Ahmad Khan in promoting English education among Muslims, appears to have invested in the company partly out of reformist, modernist motives.99 His biographer, Sayyid Abdul Ghani, points to the city’s length

97 BSA, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, July 1895, 125-38 A; *Annual General Administration Report of the Patna Division for 1892-93*. The tramway carried goods as well; see the 1895 file for details. Finlayson remained in business in Patna for a number of years; see *Thacker’s Indian Directory*, 1908 (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1908), 467.


and its separation into a “western portion, where every kind of government office, places of primary and higher education, and the homes and mansions of administrators and people in the legal profession are situated, [while] in the eastern portion live the umra, rausa, bankers, merchants, and people of every kind of profession.” In light of this sprawl, and his perception that Bihari capitalists were falling behind their competitors, Hussain felt that on account of the city’s particularities, it was in fierce need of a tramway, and establishing it would be beneficial to the ‘public.’ Additionally, Qazi sahib also thought that there was an extremely pressing need for powerful gentlemen and people in possession of capital to demonstrate how rupees can beget rupees according to the business techniques of the modern age. There was also the idea that people might learn to do business with shared capital, so that they might develop the courage to do business, and be able to set foot on the various paths of employment; moreover, through this ongoing arrangement, the sloth [jumūd, lit. frozzeness] that had been born among Biharis might be done away with and replaced with activity.100

Ghani, who wrote Hussain’s biography in the 1910s and who was close to Hussain during his life, casts the tramway as a double boon.101 First, it offered a way to unite the “public” of the two halves of the city, a public that in Ghani’s account makes no reference to the poor, but instead includes the administrators, lawyers, and students of Bankipur, and the aristocrats, capitalists, and professionals of Patna City. Secondly, according to Ghani, Hussain saw the tramway company as a didactic model for Biharis in need of capitalist inspiration and incitement.

The tramway was not, however, destined to succeed. Henry Beveridge had warned that “the main street has no footpath, and is so narrow that, if the threatened tramway is introduced, one does not see where pedestrians will find room or safety,” and indeed, there were several accidents each year, some fatal.102 Economically, though, the contest between tram and street ended up going quite the other way. At first, the trams attracted a substantial number of riders, earning a few thousand rupees’ profits on earnings of about Rs. 38,000 in the mid-1890s. As an administrator noted, the cars were “generally crammed full, and it would seem to the ordinary observer that if the rolling stock were more plentiful,” the line could run more frequently and earn more money.103 But receipts quickly began declining, and the company soon fell into trouble.104

To some extent, the tramway company’s problems were contingent on bad luck stemming from scarcity, mad horses, and events like the cancellation of the popular Somvari Mela, or

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101 Although Ghani’s biography of Hussain was not published until 1935, he began work on it in the 1910s. After he died in 1918, Sayyid Muhibbulhaq, a friend of both Ghani and Hussain, finished it on the request of Ghani’s son, Sayyid Muhiuddin. See the note of thanks by Sayyid Muhiuddin and Muhammad Ikramullah Khan’s foreword in Ghani, *Hayāt-e Rizā*.
102 Beveridge, “City of Patna,” 216.
104 Profits were Rs. 6,098 on an income of Rs. 38,531 in 1894 and Rs. 3,645 on Rs. 38,391 in 1895, but the tramway’s income fell to Rs. 34,586 in 1896 and Rs. 31,346 in 1897. BSA, *Annual General Administration Reports of the Patna Division for 1895-96, 1896-97, and 1897-98*.
Monday Fair. The larger issue, though, was that the tramway was too slow and unreliable, and simply too badly run. Out of safety considerations, the city forbade steam engines, except for goods traffic at night. The carriages were rickety and crowded, ran off the tracks, and often had to wait on sidings since there was only one line. Al-Punch was a sardonic critic of the tramway. Playing on a proverb, the paper observed more than once that “that which moves is called a vehicle; that which halts is called a tramway.” Correspondents complained of feeling abused and frustrated by the tramway’s unpredictability. One, signing himself “A Poor Traveler” (Gharīb Musāfir), vented his irritation in a comic account of the tram’s halting journey:

The vehicle left from Chauk, but kept stopping.... Crawling along, somehow it got to Gulzarbagh. From there on, a fishwife started shouting, “Get your fish!” Mr. “Inspector” sahib was on that “tram,” too. When he saw the fish, he became like a fish out of water and gave an order like Nadir Shah to stop the tram. So, sir, the tram was stopped, and the fishwife was called. There was a lot of discussion about the price, but no deal was struck. The tram had only moved ten steps when janāb [Mr.] Inspector sahib commanded, “Stop the tram.” Once again it was stopped. This time, business was concluded and the fish was bought.... And the tram departed, at an accursed pace. The horses were new and stout; the carriages were colorfully decorated; the employees were vigilant. So what is the meaning of the willy-nilly assassination of passengers’ needs? ... It’s the same bad management; the same lack of a schedule; the same impediments. And the same constant halting. Now neither is the “timetable” of any use, nor does sahib bahādur’s [honorable or brave sir’s] order carry weight. The “Manager” of the “Tramway Company” should take pity on the state of the poor travelers and respond to these complaints, and receive the “thanks” of the “public.”

The tramway appears here as a stage for a fruitless confrontation between authority and subaltern. The fishwife seizes on the tram as a site of commercial opportunity, and despite his tyrannical (Nādir Shāhī) rage at the invasion of middle-class space, the police inspector ultimately has no way to get rid of her but to buy her fish. Despite resenting the tramway’s flaws, the Al-Punch correspondent sympathizes with the fishmonger over the policeman. Though her presence is another symptom of the poor service offered by the tramway, the real problem is the tramway’s sloth and unpredictability.

105 Al-Punch, July 26, 1901.
106 BSA, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, July 1895, 125-38 A. I have not found any evidence that they were ever used.
107 The Behar Herald, January 31, 1903; BSA, Annual General Administration Report of the Patna Division for 1895-96; Patterson, “Patna Scenes,” 476.
108 “Chaltī kā Nām Gāṛī, Thehehtī kā Nām Tramway” (That Which Moves is Called a Vehicle; That Which Halts is Called a Tramway), Al-Punch, August 31, 1900; “Tramway ke Māne Machhua Bāzār” (The Tramway Means Machhua Bazar), Al-Punch, September 20, 1902. “Chaltī kā nām gāṛī” (“that which moves is called a vehicle”) is the conventional saying, which means that a thing only earns its name by fulfilling its function.
109 The reference is to the Persian conqueror who sacked Delhi in the eighteenth century. In the 1920s, his name was still invoked in Delhi as a metonymy for massacres. Percy Molesworth Sykes, A History of Persia, cited in Walter Hakala, “Diction and Dictionaries: Language, Literature, and Learning in Persianate South Asia” (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 2010), 550.
110 Al-Punch, September 20, 1902. For more complaints, see the issue of November 22, 1902.
Before long, these constant deficiencies led to the end of the tramway. Mismanaged and unprofitable, it proved unable to meet the competition from new and improved ekkās—one-horse carriages that sat four people, and more in a pinch (Fig. 4)—and in early 1903, the company folded.\footnote{BSA, Annual General Administration Reports of the Patna Division for 1895-96, 1896-97, and 1897-98.} Despite its unpopularity, the tramway was soon missed. The Behar Herald expressed its regret; even Al-Punch, for all its hostility, was sad to see the tramway go, complaining that “now the ekka- and cart-drivers will extort us fourfold.”\footnote{Al-Punch, January 31, 1903; The Behar Herald, January 31, 1903.} 

![Fig. 4. An ekka, 1890.\footnote{H. Patterson, “Work in the Patna District,” The Missionary Herald (November 1, 1890): 402.}]

Was the tramway a complete failure, then? Notwithstanding its constant sniping, Al-Punch suggested that it was not. Announcing the move of its offices from Bankipur to Patna City, the paper reflected on the changing relationship between the two half-cities: “in love, there is no such thing as near and far. And the ‘tramway’ has also abolished the imaginary distance between the two.”\footnote{Al-Punch, February 14, 1902.} Certainly, this was a sentimental claim more than a statement of fact. Nonetheless, the tram cars had been crowded, and though the ekka-drivers won the competition, the trams had briefly given them a run for their money. If the tramway was a failure, it was one caused by the constraints of the city’s geography as much as by mismanagement.
Meanwhile, other cities were building electric tramways; electric trams began running in Calcutta in 1902, and in Bombay, Delhi, Madras, and Kanpur by 1908. Only one year after the horse-tram company had collapsed, an electric tramway was proposed in Patna as well, running along the southern edge of the city, between Patna City and Bankipur stations, a route only incrementally less congested than the main road. This project never came to fruition, though, and it would be decades before Patna acquired a mass-transit system; today, movement between Bankipur and Patna City is still very slow, especially along the main road. Unlike cities like Lucknow, Bangalore, and the Presidency capitals, Patna never experienced a large-scale project of “urban renewal” that would have made room for fast transport in the core city. On the one hand, this meant that the populations and social formations of the old city were not suddenly, and forcibly, displaced as they were elsewhere; on the other hand, it meant that as Bankipur developed from a suburb into a central part of the city itself, Patna City was marginalized all the more.

**Patna’s political economy**

The peripheralization of Azimabad within the larger city of Patna was part of the provincialization of Patna and Bihar over the course of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the century, the city had been an important center of trade and banking, and, secondarily, of manufacturing; a hundred years before that, it had also been a major political center. By the end of the nineteenth century, though, a small fraction of its former importance, activity, and population remained. Nonetheless, it was still the second-largest city in Bengal, and the “metropolis” of Bihar, not to mention of its immediate neighborhood. By the 1890s, and increasingly in the next decade, Patna became a center for elite Biharis growing dissatisfied with their perceived subordination to Bengal. Connections with the imperial capital of Calcutta, especially among Bihari students and lawyers, were equally important to the articulation of this rising resentment, which would ultimately contribute to the separation of Bihar from Bengal.

The economic history of Patna over the nineteenth century resembles that of many other Indian cities. The commercial importance it had by virtue of its location near the junction of four major rivers (the Ganges, the Son, the Ghaghra, and the Gandak), as well as smaller tributaries like the Punpun, was of substantially less value after the extension of the East Indian Railway to

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116 The correspondent for the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* warned that “the road is a narrow one, there are no footpaths, and although the number of ekkas and pony carts may be considerably reduced, the number of bullock carts which are the real hinderance [sic] to traffic will not be reduced at all, and accidents both to foot passengers and vehicles are likely to be numerous.” *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, September 1, 1904; April 25, 1905.


119 Discussing the Patna of the nineteenth century, Ram Gopal Singh Chowdhary refers to it as such. Chowdhary, *Select Writings*, xii.
Patna in 1862 and the addition of a connection to Gaya in 1877.\footnote{Sinha, \textit{Communication and Colonialism}, 217; Hagen, “Indigenous Society,” 298–99.} Since the 1970s, there has been a vigorous debate on deindustrialization in India, especially in Bihar, which has focused partly on the question of the reliability of Francis Buchanan’s data.\footnote{See Amiya Kumar Bagchi, “Deindustrialization in Gangetic Bihar, 1809-1901,” in \textit{Essays in Honour of Prof. S.C. Sarkar}, ed. Barun De (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1976), and responses by Marika Vicziany and J. Krishnamurty. For a useful and foundational treatment of deindustrialization in north India, see C.A. Bayly, \textit{Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), chap. 9. Recently, Douglas Haynes has built on Tirthankar Roy’s work to argue that small-scale production in mofussil towns of Bombay Presidency cannot be assimilated to a teleology of industrial capitalism. While acknowledging the reality of deindustrialization, he points out that some forms of artisanal production remained vigorous through the first half of the twentieth century. Douglas Haynes, \textit{Small Town Capitalism in Western India: Artisans, Merchants and the Making of the Informal Economy, 1870-1960} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).} Despite the impossibility of a precise quantification of this decline, however, it is clear that Patna, like other riverine centers of artisanal production across India, experienced a substantial deindustrialization during the nineteenth century. This was largely due to the linked factors of colonial trade policy and the growth of a system of transportation oriented toward export of raw materials, especially, though not solely, through the railroads. By the 1860s and ’70s, Patna inhabitants were largely using imported cloth and goods produced in Kanpur and Bombay, and many weavers had left the city, and often left Bihar altogether, in search of either agricultural labor or factory jobs.\footnote{Yang, \textit{Bazaar India}, 74–82. An important rethinking of the role of the railroads in reconfiguring space, which points toward the ways in which both the infrastructure and business practices of the railroads encouraged export over internal trade, is found in Manu Goswami, \textit{Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), chap. 3.}

Along with the decline in manufacturing, Patna’s population was also shrinking. Buchanan’s population estimate of 312,000 people may be somewhat inflated, and in any case referred to a substantially larger area than the nine square miles included in census figures after 1872.\footnote{For a defense of the plausibility of this number, though, see Hagen, “Indigenous Society,” 63.} Nonetheless, leaving aside the disputed 1872 census figures, the population of Patna decreased at each enumeration until 1931 (see Chart 1). In this regard, Patna resembled other north Indian cities and towns of comparable size, which were shrinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries while the colonial metropolises ballooned.\footnote{See Chart 1 in chapter 1.}
Some manufacturing did remain in Patna City, principally weaving of carpets and coarse cloth, dyeing and embroidering, and the production of metal utensils; and, of course, the British factory at Gulzarbagh was one of the world’s preeminent centers of opium production until 1910. The various aspects of trade, however—banking, wholesale and retail marketing, storage, and carting—made up a much more substantial portion of the local economy. Patna District, most of whose trade was concentrated in Patna City, had higher imports and far higher exports than the other districts of the division in most commodities, particularly seeds and pulses. The district held a larger portion of the Gangetic trade than any other place in Bengal Presidency after Calcutta; at the turn of the century, it commanded 37% of the trade of Patna Division, which made up most of present Bihar.

In matters of trade, Patna was, in Peter Robb’s terms, preeminent without being dominant. In other words, though the city was clearly a major trade hub, it did not control the trade of its district or division. There was significant trade in numerous smaller towns in Patna District, especially Bihar Sharif, and elsewhere in Bihar, particularly Gaya, Revelganj and Muzaffarpur. Moreover, the centrality Patna did enjoy was weakening. As more and more towns on both sides of the Ganges were linked to the rail network, Patna lost importance as an entrepôt and bulking center. The 1907 District Gazetteer noted that “the trade of the city, though still large, has

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125 Figures were obtained from censuses and gazetteers.


127 Linseed, in particular, made up about 40% of Patna’s exports, followed by gram and pulses, wheat and other grains, mustard seeds, and tobacco. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, 9:25–28; BSA, Quinquennial Report of the Patna Division for the Period From 1900-01 to 1904-05; General Administration Report of the Patna Division for 1896-97.

128 At the time, Patna Division comprised Patna, Shahabad, Gaya, Saran, Champaran, Muzaffarpur, and Darbhanga districts. The district’s share of imports was 41% and of exports, 29%. This was a very slightly higher overall proportion than in the previous five-year period, but the position of imports and exports had changed—previously, the district had been responsible for 35% of imports and 40% of exports. BSA, Quinquennial Report of the Patna Division for the Period From 1900-01 to 1904-05.

declined of late years owing to the opening out of several new lines of railway in the districts north of the Ganges, and also owing to the policy of the railway companies, which charge a freight between intermediate stations out of proportion to the through freight to Calcutta…. The smaller merchants, who used to bring their goods and grain to Patna, now find it more advantageous to send them direct to Calcutta.”

As Nitin Sinha has pointed out, though, the railways did not simply replace other forms of transportation. According to the Patna Collector in 1893, “exports to Calcutta are at least as much by river as by rail, and the river-borne traffic seems to be increasing. Only last year a new line of steamers—the River Steam Navigation Company—was started, and seems to be flourishing.” The railroads did, however, rearrange relations between different towns and regions in Bihar. Though the Ganges had always formed a permeable border between north and south Bihar, Patna had previously been an important recipient and transshipment center for goods from northern Bihar. Now, the Bengal and North-Western Railway connected northern Bihar directly with Calcutta. Sending goods from north Bihar to Patna was comparatively difficult, because until the turn of the century, ferry links with Patna were poor. The main link was between the B.N.W.R. terminus at Pahleza, in Saran District, and the ghāṭ (dock) and railway station at Digha, west of Patna. Traffic thus bypassed Patna itself; additionally, the technical problems arising from the mobility of the ghats, which moved depending on the height of the river, were made more difficult by the competing claims of the various railway and ferry operators (see Map 2).

By 1904, the Bengal and North-Western Railway had established a steamer from Pahleza to Marufganj, but due in part to opposition from ferry contractors, there would be no bridge across the Ganges for many decades.

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130 O’Malley, Gazetteer of the Patna District, 143. A similar observation appears in BSA, Quinquennial Report of the Patna Division for the Period From 1900-01 to 1904-05. As John Hurd has shown, shipping rates systematically favored long-haul freight. John Hurd, “Railways,” in The Cambridge Economic History of India, ed. Dharma Kumar, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 756–58. This fact was noted by others at the time; for instance, in 1912, the Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa ascribed the 19% drop in Patna’s population and 15% decrease in its number of taxpayers in the previous fourteen years to “a further serious decline in the importance of Patna as a trading centre, a decline which began with the substitution of the railway for the river as the main route for traffic, and has been continued by subsequent extensions of railways north and south of the Ganges, by the ravages of plague, and the extinction of the opium industry.” Municipal Department, Resolution Reviewing the Reports on the Working of the Municipalities in Bihar and Orissa During the Year 1912-1913 (Patna: Bihar and Orissa Government Press, 1913); see also Yang, Bazaar India, 79–84.


132 These included the broad-gauge East Indian Railway, the meter-gauge Bengal and North-Western Railway, the Indian General Steam Navigation Company, and the ferry farmer, or contractor. The municipality itself was also concerned, justifiably as it turned out, about the loss of revenue from the ferry farmer if the B.N.W.R. established a steamer. BSA, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, August 1896, 23-33 A; Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, October 1901, 32-37 B.

133 BSA, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, November 1904, 26-28 A; BL APAC, IOR P/7863, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, October 1912, 24-29 A; Arvind N. Das, The Republic of Bihar (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992), 50-52.
The same developments that contributed to Patna’s decline as a trading center helped promote other towns in the region. Precisely because of its comparative centrality, Patna had more to lose from a more broadly distributed trading network. Nearby *qasbas* like Bihar Sharif took some of Patna’s business in both wholesale and retail trade. Even smaller towns, near neither river nor railway, maintained their economic health, thanks to the attention of traveling merchants and the increasing presence of periodic markets and fairs. The large traders and bankers of Patna were unable to fully confront this competition, still less the more imposing challenges presented by Calcutta and new circuits of imperial capital. By the early twentieth century, there were far fewer large traders in Patna than a century before. As the wholesale trade dwindled, the large banking houses that depended on it followed close behind. Where before they had attracted public deposits, now they were reduced to lending their own money and living off their investments in land. The Guzri nawabs, for instance, ended their banking business in 1915.

The boundaries between city and country remained ambiguous. As I have mentioned above, in addition to the rural merchants who attended the wholesale markets of Patna City, villagers from the immediate area regularly visited the city for shopping and medical treatment. Those living in a much wider area, up to a distance of about ten miles, also felt the city’s proximity. James Hagen has outlined several traits of this “belt” of about 260 villages, including a high prevalence of cash cropping; cash rather than produce rents; and, especially in the villages nearest Patna, many large landlords living in the city, who were generally traders and bankers (the Guzri nawabs above all), or else in law or government service. Also residing in this belt were a number of middling zamindars with ties to Patna City, including the Imam family of *qasba* Neora.

If the city made its presence felt in the countryside, the reverse was also true. After all, since the city was so narrow on its north-south axis, one could never be farther than half an hour’s walk from the country, and often much less. Areas like Muharrampur and Qazipur, southeast of Bankipur Maidan, and even Musallehpur, a mere thousand feet south of the main road, were noted for their excellent soil, which grew vegetables and sugarcane.

Farming was done not only in these semirural *muhallas*, but as an example from a somewhat later period shows, even in the densest parts of the city. In 1924, Bhairava Nath Rohatgi, a member of the Chanakya Society, Patna College’s economics club, presented the family budget of one Soman Dusadh. Soman Dusadh was “in the service of a gentleman of Patna City,” together with his son, and they and a daughter lived in the gentleman’s house. Alongside his work as a servant, however, he collected a particular kind of soil for sale, while his daughter gleaned potatoes from the fields and served tobacco to farmers during the harvest. The family also owned two nanny goats, along with a billy goat. Rohatgi noted that such a combination of agricultural labor with urban service work was typical of “the poor and low class of people in service who are on account of small income compelled to live from hand to mouth.”

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138 Patna Village Notes.
All cities are shaped by their hinterlands; the ongoing presence and proximity of agriculture, as well as Bihar’s marginalization within the colonial economy, had made Patna a particular kind of city, a provincial metropolis. It was a provincial place, a non-metropolis, its economic, political, and cultural authority circumscribed by the events of the previous two centuries. It was also, however, the metropolis of its region, the pinnacle of Bihar’s network of towns and cities. But in many ways, this superiority was difficult to discern. Although pilgrims came to visit several sites, chiefly the Harmandir Sahib gurudwara in Patna City, built at Guru Gobind Singh’s birthplace, and the Shah Arzan dargah in Sultanganj, Patna was not particularly well known for its religious institutions. Likewise, in governmental matters as in trade, Patna was preeminent rather than dominant. Most of its official institutions only extended their writ over Patna District, so that, although the largest zamindars in Bihar’s other districts, including the rajas of Bettiah, Tikari, Hathwa, Darbhanga, and Dumraon, maintained residences and properties in Patna, smaller litigants and petitioners from outside the district usually had little need to come to Patna.

Despite Patna’s merely marginal preeminence in all these respects, it could boast of several institutions that distinguished it from every other city in Bihar and helped lay the groundwork for its emergence as the capital of its own province. These were, above all, its English-medium schools and colleges—Patna College, Bihar National College, Temple Medical School, the Bihar School of Engineering, and several others, including subordinate institutions like the Patna Collegiate School.

Many of these schools had been founded and nurtured with support from the older elites of Patna City, but by the turn of the century, they were thoroughly tied to the fortunes of Bihar’s white-collar elite. Before moving on to Calcutta University, the future lawyer from Arrah or Chapra or Samastipur would come to Patna, often with an older brother or fellow villager. The elder boys would attend Patna College or Bihar National College, while the younger ones went to their affiliated schools or to T.K. Ghosh’s Academy or the Ram Mohun Roy Seminary. All of these schools were clustered in Chauhatta around the mother institution, Patna College, and around them grew an entire district of presses and newspaper offices. Though some Urdu-language institutions, like the Khuda Bakhsh Library, the Madrasa Shamsul Huda and the offices of Al-Punch (before 1906), were also located nearby, this area was, above all, the nucleus of Patna’s, and Bihar’s, English- and Hindi-speaking intelligentsia (see Map 3).

95. Rohatgi further observed that the landless, impoverished class to which the family belonged “is industrially valuable and is expected to supply the right type of labour for the industrial development of India.” On the intellectual agendas of the Chanakya Society and its members, see pp. 161–162 in this dissertation.


141 Patna was also the seat of the Patna Division, but most official institutions were organized on district rather than divisional lines. Some officials, like those in charge of sanitation, opium, and police, oversaw all of Bihar, in some cases including Chota Nagpur (now Jharkhand), but the extent of these official territories was irrelevant to most people. O’Malley, Gazetteer of the Patna District, 180 et passim.

**Map 3. Educational institutions in Patna.**

**Bihar in Calcutta**

Despite whatever importance it had in these various domains, the Patna of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a clear superior in the urban hierarchy. Political and economic power emanated from Calcutta, the capital of both India and the Bengal Presidency, and Biharis of all kinds looked to it for information, influence, and work. Although my focus is on the intellectual and political activities of Patna’s intelligentsia, it is important to note that most Biharis who came in contact with Calcutta were not lawyers and journalists, but laborers. Bihar had long been, and continues to be, one of the chief sources of migrant labor in the subcontinent. Not all of this labor was unskilled. Itinerant traders moved over very long distances, on multiple routes connecting rural and urban parts of Bihar with Nepal, U.P., Bengal, and places as far as Gujarat.\(^{143}\) The Bhojpur area, in western Bihar and eastern U.P., was a key recruiting ground for the military labor market from the medieval period onward. According to Dirk Kolff, this market was the chief mechanism through which the Bhumihar and Rajput groups took shape and established themselves as powerful landholders. The region’s excision from colonial military recruitment after 1857 contributed to its decline by limiting opportunities for social mobility and remunerative seasonal labor.\(^{144}\)

Most important by the late nineteenth century, though, was the migration of manual laborers, above all to Calcutta, where they found seasonal work in jute factories and as peons and watchmen. Other important destinations for circular migration included the tea plantations of Assam and the coal mines of Chota Nagpur; Bihar was also a major source of permanent migrants to sugar plantations in other British colonies. Most of the short-term migrants worked

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in factories, especially making jute, but others found work as peons or watchmen. Though most were single men, significant numbers of women migrated as well.\textsuperscript{145} The pain of migration permeated Bihari popular culture, expressed above all through the mode of \textit{viraha} (separation from one’s beloved), in which a woman laments her distance from her husband. In songs evoking viraha, especially \textit{bārahmāsas}, which recounted the twelve months of the year, the people of Bihar and U.P. reflected on the loneliness and jealousy of the one left behind; in the twentieth century, the \textit{bidesiyyā} (migrant) plays of Bhikhari Thakur would join these songs as extremely popular expressions of the angst of migration.\textsuperscript{146}

The migration of manual laborers was transformative, both at its sources, like Bihar, and its destinations, like Calcutta and Assam. Detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this study, however, partly because cities like Patna were less important sources of migrants than the countryside, and also because the intellectuals and politicians with whom I am concerned were themselves rarely interested in workers. Some lawyers, including Rajendra Prasad, would become interested in the plight of the rural poor during Gandhi’s Champaran \textit{satyagraha} (non-violent struggle), but at the turn of the century, they and their elders were far from such concerns, even more so when they regarded the urban rather than rural poor. While peasants occasionally figured in the debates around Bihar’s separation from Bengal, urban laborers did not. This fact itself bears some consideration, because many of those who demanded separation had themselves lived in Calcutta, in some cases for many years.

The provincial political class that successfully demanded separation, and went on to form the legal and political elite of the new province of Bihar and Orissa, was forged in Calcutta. For this group, Calcutta University and the Calcutta High Court were the city’s most important institutions, the one essentially functioning as training for the other. Bodhisattva Kar and Jayeeta Sharma have outlined the ways that Assamese mess halls helped students train themselves simultaneously to become respectable urbanites and also representatives of Assam and of particular districts.\textsuperscript{147} At once a home and a public space governed by formalized democratic procedures, as Kar says, the mess house was “an uneven middle-class cosmos of male morality where many ideals of nation building were deliberately tried out.”\textsuperscript{148}

Bihari students, too, had their own organizations and mess halls, which provided a venue for cultivating a sense of regional distinction. Often supported by older Bihari lawyers, these mess halls encouraged students to develop social ties with each other and with their elders. Though there were many lower-class migrants from U.P. in Calcutta, professionals from that province went to Lucknow and Allahabad for their education and for legal and administrative work; the alliances that Biharis might have crafted with other speakers of north Indian languages

\begin{footnotes}
\item[148] Kar, “‘Tongue Has No Bone,’” 51.
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were thus limited by their different orbits. Like Benedict Anderson’s “secular pilgrims”—or like Gandhi during his years in Africa—the political consciousnesses of these students and lawyers were shaped by the terms of their exile.\textsuperscript{149} Over just a few years, these students moved rapidly toward a forthright involvement in politics, at younger and younger ages. As they became more politically outspoken, they began to shift their focus from Calcutta back toward Bihar itself.

Ultimately, the most important of the Bihari student organizations would be the Bihari Students’ Conference, established in the early twentieth century by Rajendra Prasad. Several years earlier, though, in 1896, the famous High Court vakil Saligram Singh founded a kind of antecedent, the Behar Sporting Club. Singh was best known for founding the Bihar National College with his elder brother Bisheshwar Singh, but throughout the 1890s, the two brothers hosted and supported many Bihari political leaders, both young and old—Saligram in Calcutta and Bisheshwar in salons held at his Patna home.\textsuperscript{150} Part of what established Saligram as the “able leader” of the middle-class Biharis in Calcutta, in Sachchidananda Sinha’s words, was his patronage of institutions like the Sporting Club.

To its members’ dismay, the club, which the \textit{Behar Times} called “perhaps the only Beharee Club in Calcutta,” collapsed after only two years.\textsuperscript{151} They wrote to the paper to complain of the club’s mismanagement by its Secretary, one Hur Nundan Duivedi (Har Nandan Dwivedi), “who kept changing the rules all the time.”\textsuperscript{152} A back-and-forth ensued over the course of the next month, during which Dwivedi’s critics and supporters traded accusations. The dispute presents an illuminating glimpse of the links between students and lawyers in Calcutta, and of the regional ties that shaped institutions like the club.

In their initial complaint to the \textit{Times}, the club’s members wrote that Saligram Singh had founded the club “for the physical improvement of the Behari students receiving their education in Calcutta. The other Behari Vakils also were interested in the club, they used to come to the field and encourage the players with their presence and example.”\textsuperscript{153} The organization described by the members and by the \textit{Times}’s Calcutta correspondent, who took their side, was one where Bihari boys, mostly aged eight to fifteen, gathered during the school year to play football and cricket among themselves and against Bengali teams. Older students, attending Calcutta’s various colleges, ran the club under the supervision of High Court vakils, comfortable men living in the wealthy neighborhood of Bhowanipur.\textsuperscript{154}

One of the problems, said the \textit{Behar Times} correspondent, was that the Secretary was “not in a position to show much sympathy with this institution, being neither in his academical career, nor belongs to the elderly member of the Beharee community.”\textsuperscript{155} In the eyes of the aggrieved members, Dwivedi—who was neither young enough nor old enough to be a legitimate member of the club—had taken advantage of their youthful ignorance. They lamented their mistaken reliance on Dwivedi’s physiognomy as an index of his eligibility for leadership, saying that his “elegant features and grave appearance appeared to us as the index of the quick and gentler spirit


\textsuperscript{151} \textit{The Behar Times}, September 9, 1898.

\textsuperscript{152} Letter from “The Members of the B.S. Club” to \textit{The Behar Times}, September 2, 1898.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{154} \textit{The Behar Times}, September 2, September 9, and October 7, 1898.

\textsuperscript{155} \textit{All sic. The Behar Times}, September 9, 1898.
within.”156 By the members’ account, “hundreds of Beharies used to gather together with caps on
their heads” before Dwivedi had caused the club’s ruin.157 In response, Dwivedi’s supporter,
“One Connected” (almost certainly Dwivedi himself), tacitly admitting the club’s decline,
minimized its previous cohesion and success and denied that the club had ever reached even one
hundred members.158

In the end, the controversy was a fairly minor episode, but it illustrates a number of
dynamics within the elite Bihari community that would be amplified in the following years. The
participants spoke of the club’s members and supporters exclusively as Biharis, eliding the
presence of other, poorer Biharis in Calcutta. Such an identity received its logic through
interaction with the state. Were they poorer, they might associate with those sharing a village, a
neighborhood, a factory, or a language, but an official category like a sub-province—dividing
some language regions and annexing others—would make little sense. There was a sharp
generational discontinuity between the club’s members and its patrons, brought out by the charge
that Dwivedi was disqualified for office by being neither a student nor an elder. The relationship
authorized and encouraged by the club, then, was one of paternal support by adult
professionals—not ordinary lawyers, but practitioners before the High Court—for students,
destined to take their place as leaders of Bihari professional society, whether in the imperial
capital or in Bihar.

Speaking from Calcutta, the club members appealed to “the Behary [sic] gentlemen” and
“the Behary gentry” for sympathy and redress.159 It was self-evident, both to them and to the
paper’s correspondent, who hoped “to hunt out the whole thing and bring [it] before the public
notice,” that the Times was an appropriate venue for a dispute over the social life of middle-class
Biharis in Calcutta.160 “One Connected,” likewise, flattered the Times as a “valuable journal”
uniquely deserving of his attention, saying that he “would have treated the correspondent with
the contempt it [sic] deserves if it had appeared in any other paper.”161 By choosing an English-
language paper published from Patna as a platform and addressing an audience of “Behary
gentlemen,” the disputants indicated that, though all the participants were in Calcutta, the events
concerned the entire community of professional Biharis.

Members of this community in both Calcutta and Bihar, the correspondents suggested, had
a stake in the “physical improvement” of elite Bihari youth and in the cultivation of ties between
this generation and the next, especially at the center of imperial power. For middle-class Biharis,
conscious of being outsiders in Calcutta and proverbially “backward” in colonial education and
employment, sports like football and cricket appeared to provide ideal opportunities to develop
social bonds and physical skills. These imported games, promoted by British officials and
educators, were rapidly becoming popular among groups close to the colonial state.162 Wrestling
and kabaddi (a team game), historically popular among all classes, were now finding less favor

156 The Behar Times, October 7, 1898.
157 Letter from “The Members of the B.S. Club” to The Behar Times, September 2, 1898.
158 Presumably, the editors of the paper knew his identity, since they asked correspondents to give their names and
addresses. The Behar Times, September 23, and October 7, 1898.
159 Letter from “One Connected” to The Behar Times, September 2, 1898; letter from “The Members of the B.S.C.” to
The Behar Times, October 7, 1898.
160 The Behar Times, September 9, 1898.
161 The Behar Times, September 23, 1898.
162 Sayyid Ahmad Khan, for instance, prized cricket for its legalistic formality and for its combination of individual
and group achievement. Lelyveld, Aligarh’s First Generation, chap. 6.
among elites. Some wealthy men, including Saligram Singh, continued to wrestle, but they were increasingly a minority.\footnote{Ram Gopal Singh Chowdhary, “Indian Games,” The Express, September 7, 1915, reprinted in Chowdhary, Select Writings, 52–55. On declining elite patronage for wrestling \textit{akhāṛāśs} (gymnasia), and the transformation of the \textit{akharas} into predominantly lower-class spaces, see Nita Kumar, \textit{The Artisans of Banaras: Popular Culture and Identity, 1880–1986} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), chap. 5; Nandini Gooptu, \textit{The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chap. 6–7. For a contemporary ethnographic treatment of wrestling and wrestlers, see Joseph Alter, \textit{The Wrestler’s Body: Identity and Ideology in North India} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). A fictional depiction (set after Partition) of a courtesan and a wrestling master, two exemplars of marginalized disciplines, is presented in Musharraf Ali Farooqi, \textit{Between Clay and Dust} (New Delhi: Aleph, 2012).} The Bengali middle classes, in particular, brailing at stereotypes of weakness, took to football as a route to physical and social strength.\footnote{Partha Chatterjee, \textit{The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 291–302; Boria Majumdar, “The Vernacular in Sports History,” \textit{Economic and Political Weekly} 37, no. 29 (2002): 3069–75; Paul Dimeo, “Football and Politics in Bengal: Colonialism, Nationalism, Communalism,” \textit{Soccer & Society} 2, no. 2 (2001): 57–74.} These stereotypes undoubtedly came to the fore when the Biharis, typecast as strong and masculine, played “many other senior and famous Bengali Foot-Ball Clubs such as National and Dina and astounded them with the result.”\footnote{The Behar Times, September 2, 1898. These categories are discussed further in chapter 4.} When the Biharis in the Sporting Club worked to improve their physical condition, or tested themselves against Bengali competitors, they encountered themselves and each other as Biharis, distinct from their Bengali surroundings. By excelling at cricket, and especially at football, they proved their prowess against the standards of both the British and the Bengalis.\footnote{Although cricket was played in some schools in Patna itself since at least the 1870s, it does not seem to have become particularly popular there before the 1930s. See Hunter, \textit{A Statistical Account of Bengal}, 9:107; Sujit Mukherjee, \textit{Autobiography of an Unknown Cricketer} (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1996), 8; Sudhir Kumar Jha, \textit{A New Dawn: Patna Reincarnated} (Patna: Sudhir Kumar Jha, 2005), 184. Football, on the other hand, was popular among the students at all of Patna’s elite schools from the late nineteenth century. In 1897, the District Magistrate, Mr. Inglis, established an eponymous Shield, for which the local schools could compete; other tournaments followed. By the 1910s, football was recognized as “the favourite game in Bankipore,” in the words of the headmaster of the T.K. Ghosh Academy, although this status may only have applied among richer boys like his pupils. See N. Kumar, \textit{Image of Patna} (Patna: Government of Bihar, 1971), 115–16; BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 425 of 1918.} Students and reform

The Behar Sporting Club never recovered from its 1898 collapse, but within a few years, a more ambitious organization would arise in Calcutta. This was the Bihari Students’ Conference, founded and led by Rajendra Prasad. Later to become the first President of India, Prasad had been well known as a talented student since his youth, and was acknowledged as a leader and broker by the Bihari students in Calcutta.\footnote{Prasad recounts numerous academic feats in his \textit{Autobiography}, including topping the University entrance exam. See Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, 28–29 et passim.} Janakdhari Prasad, later a Congress activist, describes seeking out Rajendra Prasad on his arrival in Calcutta; though they had not met before, Rajendra embraced him warmly and greeted him in “the village language of Chapra.” Rajendra enrolled Janakdhari at Presidency College, the most prestigious of the Calcutta University colleges; found him a place in Eden Hindu Hostel, home of “the select, talented Bihari students”;
and invited him to the Bihari mess house in a nearby lane. This mess, also called the Bihari Chhatra Bhavan, or Bihari Students’ House, seems to have been augmented by a special kitchen inside the Hostel.\textsuperscript{168}

Since coming to Calcutta for his B.A., Rajendra Prasad had joined the Dawn Society, the social and scholarly club founded by Satish Chandra Mukherjee, which was to become an important center of Swadeshi thought and agitation (that is, activism promoting national self-reliance) among Bengali students in the following years.\textsuperscript{169} By the time Prasad joined the Calcutta University M.A. and B.L. classes, protests against the 1905 partition of Bengal had begun. Excited by the developments, he and his compatriots in the Bihari Club, a debating club he had founded in 1902, decided to form the first organization for Bihari students. Traveling to Patna to receive the blessings of senior Bihari politicians like Mahesh Narayan, Sachchidananda Sinha, and Sharfuddin, Prasad established the Bihari Students’ Conference in 1906.\textsuperscript{170}

The decision to call the Conference the Biharee rather than Bihar Students’ Conference—whether to define membership by residence or ethnicity—was a controversial one. Some members, especially those in Calcutta, including Rajendra Prasad, felt that Bengali students should also be allowed to join. In his memoirs, Prasad emphasizes his warm feelings for his Bengali friends and roommates, and Janakdhari Prasad similarly recounts his eagerness “to see Bengali life,” encapsulated for him by trams, electric lights, and political ferment.\textsuperscript{171} Meanwhile, those in Bihar itself tended to see Bengalis as competitors rather than compatriots.\textsuperscript{172} Although some affiliated organizations chose the noun rather than the adjective, such decisions were met with resentment from the ranks.\textsuperscript{173} The Biharis’ rancor, which will be discussed in chapter 5, was targeted more vociferously against “domiciled Bengalis,” those living in Bihar, than against those living in Bengal.

Despite being founded amid the fervor of the Swadeshi movement, the Conference was explicitly apolitical. Although some members wanted it to participate in political agitations, according to Rajendra Prasad, “the elders opposed participation in politics.” Writing from prison shortly before Independence, Prasad looked back on this decision as the correct one, on the grounds that it gave the Conference room to collect members in a region with “hardly any public life.” Its real purpose was to provide “the first platform where Biharis met to discuss questions of common interest,” through which students could receive “their first lessons in practical organisation and in the art of public speaking.”\textsuperscript{174} It also gave students a platform to demand better educational services from the colonial state. Under the influence of Prasad and others, the

\textsuperscript{168} Prasad, \textit{Kuchh Apnī, Kuchh Desh kt}, 10–11; Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, 57.


\textsuperscript{170} Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, 48.

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 57; Prasad, \textit{Kuchh Apnī, Kuchh Desh kt}, 9, 13–15.

\textsuperscript{172} Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, 49.

\textsuperscript{173} See, for example, the report on the Behar Students’ Association in Bhagalpur in the \textit{Behar Times}, August 2, 1907. Names were not everything, of course. In the letter printed immediately above this report, a Bihari student indignantly rebuts the claim, made by a Bengali in the Patna Beharee Club, that “Calcutta was the only fit place for the education of the Beharees.”

\textsuperscript{174} Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, 49–50.
Conference would later turn into the kind of activist organization that some of its younger members had wanted at the start, but its initial quietism had strategic value to a political group trying to distinguish itself from the nationalist Bengalis. Meanwhile, as Prasad observes, the Conference provided the “initiation into public life” for an entire generation of Bihari politicians.175

Like the Behar Sporting Club, the Conference and the Bihari Club were sites where a Bihari professional class was consolidated through intergenerational patronage and the cultivation of skills and affects appropriate to colonial urban modernity. The physical vigor and ability in British sports instilled by the Sporting Club were replaced, in the case of the Bihari Club and the Conference, by liberal disciplines of speechifying, debating, and reading.176 In all three institutions, students were under the paternal tutelage of lawyers like Langat Singh and Braj Kishore Prasad.177 Although their relationship was a hierarchical one, the lawyers did not always stay aloof from the students; according to Janakdhari Prasad, “all the Bihari lawyers and students in Calcutta gathered [at the Club’s annual festival]. About 100 to 150 people gathered and met with love.”178

Both the Bihari Club and the Biharee Students’ Conference were secular in the sense common to nationalist organizations of the period: that is, they affirmed the equality of all religions and communities while privileging high-caste Hindu textualism and the assumptions of liberal Hindu nationalism by insisting that religious communities remain separate.179 An illustration comes from the speech given by Radhika Prasad Singh, the President of the Reception Committee at the 1913 meeting of the Conference. He reminisced about the organization’s original purposes, saying that, aside from encouraging Bihari students to exercise and practice writing essays and speaking in public, the Conference also sought “to strengthen them in morality, [and] to make them study their own religion,” as well as “to encourage them to cultivate the vernacular in order to make Hindi the lingua franca of India.”180

For Singh, religion, national integration, and self-improvement were all intertwined. Speaking now on his own account, he went on to argue that tolerance could only come from careful study of one’s own religious texts: “when both the Hindus and the Muhammadans will have drunken deep at the Pierian spring of their own scriptural knowledge, then they will get at the kernel of truth which stands at the core: all the religions of the world are the same; only the language of the teachers differs. Then only our Province of Bihar, as also the whole of India, will have an Islamic body and a Vedantic heart and the whole problem will be solved of itself.”181

Singh’s vision of “Indian nationality, which consists in being spiritual first and anything else afterwards,” was standard rhetoric, for the Conference and generally for nationalists of what

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175 Ibid., 50. Among these were Anugrah Narayan Sinha, Braj Kishore Prasad, and Shrikrishna Sinha.
176 Prasād, Kuchh Apnt, Kuchh Desh kt, 11.
177 Bisheshwar Singh had died in 1899 and his brother in 1905. Sinha, Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries, 18.
178 Prasād, Kuchh Apnt, Kuchh Desh kt, 11.
179 This pattern has been discussed widely. For one classic statement, see Gyanendra Pandey, The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), chap. 6.
180 Since the surveillance file contains a transcript of Singh’s speech, rather than his original text, I have corrected errors in the transcription. I have also standardized the spelling of his name, which is given in the file as Radhica Prosad Singh. BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 80 of 1912.
Partha Chatterjee has called the “moment of departure.”" Singh and his colleagues were anxious to include Muslims as well as Hindus: the Conference gained Muslim members as it expanded, and so did many affiliated clubs—the Bihari Clubs, Behar Students’ Associations, and Beharee Students’ Clubs that appeared in cities like Patna, Bhagalpur, and Gaya, as well as smaller towns like Chapra and Sasaram. And certainly, Singh’s imagination of India, and of “Bihar where Yogi Raj Janak reigned... [and] where Makhdum Shah the great Muhammadan saint lived and flourished,” makes room for Muslims. Each community is understood, though, as a separate body defined by religious texts. Often, these are filtered through Christian terms, so that Singh ends his speech with a quote from Martin Luther, while Rajendra Prasad, speaking after Singh as President of the 1913 Conference, expresses gratitude for “the help of the Almighty Father.”

Especially at the start, the parent Club and the Conference were guided by the norms of Bihari upper-caste Hindus—the same Kayasthas, as well as Brahmans and Bhumihars, who formed the bulk of the professional class in Bihar. Eden Hindu Hostel, the central site of activity in Calcutta, was, as its name implied, exclusively for the use of Hindu students. Caste restrictions were often quite rigid at the hostel. In about 1911, for instance, Brahmans there objected to eating with the future scientist Meghnad Saha, a Bengali from a relatively low-status caste, and barred him from participating in a celebration of Saraswati Puja, a Hindu ritual.

But inherited norms were also being targeted by reform efforts, which were particularly spirited among the Club’s Kayastha members. While conservative Kayasthas held overseas travel to be defiling, reformers saw it as necessary if they were to match other communities’ success in government and the law. Sachchidananda Sinha’s defiant refusal to perform penance (prāyashchīt), after returning from England in 1892 as the first Bihari Kayastha to undertake “sea-voyage,” inspired other Kayasthas. When the second traveler, Ganesh Prasad, returned in 1904, Rajendra Prasad and his family ate together with him to demonstrate their belief that he had not lost caste. Ganesh Prasad’s main supporter, Braj Kishore Prasad, soon arranged for another Kayastha student, Ambika Charan, to go to Japan. Braj Kishore, who was also a patron

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182 Singh quoted, for instance, an earlier speech by a leader of the Conference, who had said that “the realisation of divinity in humanity is the mission of Indians in this world.” BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 80 of 1912. By the “moment of departure,” Chatterjee means the attitude represented by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, one of whose features was an acceptance and revaluation of the Orientalist division of the world into a rational West and a spiritual East. Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001 [1986]), chap. 3.


184 Janak is the father of Rama’s wife Sita in the Rāmāyana epic. Makhdum Shah Daulat is a seventeenth-century Sufi saint whose tomb lies in Maner, about 18 miles west of Bankipur.

185 BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 80 of 1912.


of the Bihari Club, then joined with Sachchidananda Sinha and others to try to send Rajendra Prasad to England to join the Indian Civil Service.\textsuperscript{189}

Club members encouraged this attack on the sea-voyage taboo by attending a feast to prove their disregard for conservative caste norms.\textsuperscript{190} At Ambika Charan’s return from Japan, there was a banquet at the Bihar Chhatra Bhavan, where, according to Janakdhari Prasad, “every Bihari student in Calcutta was gathered. Everyone sat together in one line and ate rice and lentils. In those days, this was considered quite significant, and there was a controversy in society because of it.”\textsuperscript{191} Interdining, at least with members of other high-status castes, was one matter, but certain caste taboos still applied for some. As Rajendra Prasad recalls, although he had participated in the dinner for his fellow-Kayastha Ganesh Prasad, “I must confess to my faith in caste restrictions then.... In Bihar we did not take food, particularly cereals, cooked by certain castes. I observed the restriction scrupulously even in the hostel. Though I stayed there for a long time, I did not take cooked rice or pulses in the Bengali mess even once.”\textsuperscript{192} Rajendra Prasad’s adherence to such caste restrictions would persist until he went to work with Gandhi in Champaran a decade later.\textsuperscript{193}

Gathered together far from home, in an environment built around an ideal of modernity, the students encouraged each other to reform themselves along nationalist lines. For instance, Janakdhari Prasad recounts how he and Rajendra Prasad were introduced to Hindi. Janakdhari was already well aware of Hindu nationalist ideas and institutions. When he was fourteen, his uncle had taken him to see Annie Besant, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Madan Mohan Malaviya speak in Benares; later, when he took the entrance exam for Patna College, he had been hosted by the Khadgavilas Press, the Hindi press in Bankipur that first published Bharatendu Harishchandra’s writings.\textsuperscript{194} Nonetheless, neither he nor Rajendra Prasad knew Hindi—though Rajendra, at least, knew a number of other languages—until they were taught and encouraged by a friend and fellow-member of the Bihari Club, Jagannath Prasad Chaturvedi. According to Janakdhari, the first letter that Rajendra ever wrote in Hindi was a postcard to Jagannath on the occasion of his father’s death, which consisted of the single word “swargavāś” (“gone to heaven”).\textsuperscript{195} Perhaps it is not too implausible to suggest that Rajendra saw a parallel between the deaths of his father and of his Persianate inheritance.

The progression from the Behar Sporting Club to the Bihari Club and the Bihari Students’ Conference exemplifies three trends of elite Bihari organizational life at the turn of the century. The first is a generational one. Where the Sporting Club had been created by adult lawyers for the benefit of children and youths, students had a much larger role in the Bihari Club and the

\textsuperscript{189} In the end, Rajendra gave in to family pressure and sent another friend instead. Ibid., 51–54; Prasad, \textit{Kuchh Apnā, Kuchh Desh kt}, 11.

\textsuperscript{190} Eating with members of other castes, or eating food cooked by them, violates the norms of many high castes, and the conservative position on sea voyage was that it resulted in the traveler’s loss of caste.

\textsuperscript{191} Prasad, \textit{Kuchh Apnā, Kuchh Desh kt}, 11–12.

\textsuperscript{192} Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, 58.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 98; Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Mahatma Gandhi and Bihār: Some Reminiscences} (Bombay: Hind Kitabs Limited, 1949), 25.


\textsuperscript{195} Rajendra Prasad knew Urdu, English, Persian, Bhojpuri, Bengali (which he had picked up in Calcutta), and some Sanskrit. Prasad, \textit{Kuchh Apnā, Kuchh Desh kt}, 12–13; Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, 57, 76–77.
Students’ Conference. The Conference always gave an honored place to lawyers, not least to Rajendra Prasad, who was still seen as its leader even after he began to teach at the Law College and practice before the High Court. The Bihari Club and the Conference also appealed to lawyers for money; nonetheless, they were fundamentally students’ organizations.\textsuperscript{196} Like the Sporting Club, the Conference included quite young students—members only had to be twelve years old, and schools were emphatically not distinguished from colleges.\textsuperscript{197} The students in the Conference, though, exhibited a self-confidence quite distinct from the Sporting Club’s appeal to “Behary gentlemen.” They addressed each other, wrote and voted on resolutions, and sometimes bucked the leadership of the adults who ostensibly guided them. This autonomy irritated some onlookers: one official, who felt that “we could get along very well without such Conferences,” wrote that the policy of admitting such young members on an equal footing was “childish,” an odd term for an effort to treat children like adults.\textsuperscript{198}

The second trend is of a movement from a posture of apoliticality to an avowed politicality. Of course, it is a rare organization that is truly apolitical, and the Sporting Club’s politics were expressed in several dimensions—from its restriction on lines of region, class, caste, gender, and age; to its selection of the games of football and cricket; to its motivating premise that Biharis needed “physical improvement.” Equally, the Bihari Club and the Students’ Conference claimed to be apolitical. But from the moment they were conceived, out of the Dawn Society and the fervor of the Swadeshi movement, they had to labor to deny what appeared obvious: that they were devoted, first, to influencing education policy in Bihar and, second, to fostering a white-collar Bihari political class capable of replacing both Bengali functionaries and the remnants of the Mughal aristocracy (though, in the latter case, not by challenging the zamindars, who supported the Conference). By the time of Bihar’s separation from Bengal in 1912, the Conference’s insistence on its apoliticality would become increasingly untenable, but in the context of a new province of Bihar and Orissa, this insistence was less necessary. Or, in other words, the Conference, and the generation that it represented, was moving from the constitutional reforms of the naram dal (the “soft faction,” or the moderate wing of the Congress party) to the overt confrontation of the garam dal (the “hot faction,” or the so-called extremists).

The third trend is a movement of the scene of action from Calcutta to Bihar itself. The Sporting Club had been an almost purely Calcuttan organization. To be sure, when it ran into trouble, its members had sought redress from the readership of a Patna paper; but this was consistent with its efforts to benefit Biharis sojourning in the metropolis, vulnerable as they were to atomization and alienation. Come summer, though, its members dispersed to their homes, and Bihar itself was left unchanged. The Bihari Club began in a similar fashion, as a club tying together Biharis far from home, comforting them and helping them create a common identity. But as it birthed the Students’ Conference—midwifed by Patna politicians—which in turn begat Bihari clubs across Bihar and into U.P., Calcutta became more and more peripheral to Bihari politics, and activity shifted to towns like Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur, and, above all, Patna. For elite, anglophone Biharis, Calcutta had largely served its function. It would remain important to them, of course, until the establishment of the twin temples of the middle class, the Patna High

\textsuperscript{196} Sinha, \textit{Mere Sansmaran}, 3.

\textsuperscript{197} This was not the case in, for instance, the Bihar Young Men’s Institute in Bankipur, a club for college students founded by Brahmo and Christian missionaries. The exceptions were for the Temple Medical School and the Bihar School of Engineering, whose students were similar in age and class to college students. B.C.M., “Patna,” \textit{Modern Review}, December 1912, 632.

\textsuperscript{198} BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 56 of 1913.
Court and Patna University. But on the pilgrimage from village to district town to Patna to Calcutta, they had encountered each other and themselves as Biharis, and recognized the Bengali bhadralok (middle classes) as their rivals for power in Bihar.

I have argued in this chapter that Patna became provincial as it turned from a node within a multipolar landscape into a satellite of an increasingly dominant Calcutta. At the same time, I have suggested that provinciality was not an amorphous cloud, billowing evenly throughout Patna’s society, but rather a quality that took shape in particular contexts. A backwater for some, the city was a metropolis for others. For capable young men, well educated in the colonial system, Patna was a magnet drawing them from villages and towns toward a life of comparative privilege; for some of these, its force catapulted them onward to Calcutta and its High Court or, for a very few, to London’s Inns of Court to become wealthy and influential barristers on their return to India. For others inside and outside the city, Patna was Azimabad, a living center of north India’s Persianate culture, known for its poets and courtesans. In this chapter, I have discussed the most privileged of these Urdu-speaking elites; in the next, I take up a broader swath of Patna’s society, exploring the literary and social worlds of the men, and sometimes women, who participated in Patna’s journals. Urdu learning and culture still had a home in Patna, after all. Through Patna’s newspapers and magazines, readers and writers across Bihar and northern India engaged with each other, in language both local and cosmopolitan, both provincial and urbane.
3 The Geographies of Public Culture

My dear Al-Punch! Maulana Al-Punch! Mahatma Al-Punch! Brother Al-Punch! Mister Al-Punch! Qazi Al-Punch! Punch into Punch upon Punch! Sarpanch street Punch city Punch!

Antic greetings like those in the epigraph above appeared often in Al-Punch, an Urdu newspaper published in Patna beginning in the 1880s. The stories of Al-Punch, and of the readers and writers who addressed it with such affection and exuberance, illustrate the vitality and distinctiveness of provincial public culture in the early twentieth century. Despite its economic and demographic decline, Patna was still able to muster the cultural and material resources to produce a sophisticated journal that engaged deeply with its city while simultaneously connecting it with faraway places. Together, Al-Punch’s disarming wit and collaborative spirit helped it cultivate a zealous community of readers and contributors, and enabled it to reach beyond that immediate community by joining together with other publications to form a broader public. In contrast to Al-Punch’s eclectic style and engagement with the world, both of which emerged from Urdu literary culture, Patna’s English papers were more staid as well as narrower in both their geographic and thematic range.

As its name suggests, Al-Punch was partly modeled on the London comic weekly Punch. When it was founded in 1885, though, the more prominent and direct template was the Urdu Awadh Punch, published in Lucknow since 1877. Dozens more papers in various Indian languages also took up the idea, either running Punch columns or giving themselves titles like Urdu Punch, Hindi Punch, and Kannauj Punch. The few studies focusing on the best-known Indian Punches have been primarily concerned with their relationship to the London Punch, and with fitting them into narratives of mimicry, nationalism, and resistance to colonial surveillance.

1 A sarpanch is the head of a panchāyat, a governing body theoretically composed of five (pānch) elders. The other terms are honorifics, evoking ironic deference.

2 These phrases, rhyming and rhythmic in the original, come from various issues of Al-Punch, including that of March 9, 1900. For the memoirist and historian Sayyid Badruddin Ahmad, these salutations encapsulate the charm of Al-Punch. Sayyid Badr ud-Dīn Ahmad, Haqīqat Bīh Kahānt Bīh: Azmābād ki Tāhzīb Dāstān (Both Truth and Story: The Cultural Tale of Azimabad) (Patna: Bihar Urdu Academy, 2003), 459.

3 I consulted the volumes of Al-Punch held in the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, which extend from February 23, 1900 (vol. 16, no. 8), to January 3, 1907 (vol. 23, no. 1). They were originally held by the Al-Islah Library in the qasba of Desna, whose collection was acquired by the Khuda Bakhsh Library. Desna is discussed briefly below, and the Al-Islah Library is discussed in chapter 6.


5 Ayesha Jalal says that there were over forty Indian Punch papers, and Mushirul Hasan puts the number at seventy. See Ayesha Jalal, Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850 (New York: Routledge, 2000), 56; Mushirul Hasan, Wit and Humour in Colonial North India (New Delhi: Niyogi, 2007), 12.

6 The most important works on South Asian Punch papers are Vasudha Dalmia, The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), chap. 5; Hans Harder and Barbara Mittler, eds., Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013); Hasan, Wit and Humour; Mushirul Hasan, Wit and Wisdom: Pickings from the Parsee Punch (New Delhi:
The broader literature on Urdu and Hindi public spheres in this period, meanwhile, has either focused on a few prominent papers or relied on the summaries compiled by the colonial state in the Native Newspaper Reports. In both cases, scholars have usually sought to make generalizations about Urdu newspapers as a group and to link them to national, or at least generally north Indian, political trends, an approach that has minimized their eccentricities and their local commitments. Al-Punch was certainly involved with the intellectual currents of its day, and it can tell us about how, for instance, the reformist ideas of Aligarh and Nadwat al-Ulama were taken up beyond their own precincts. In many ways, however, it diverges from the familiar discourses of reformism, communalism (religious bigotry), and nationalism. Partly because of the ways in which historians, like colonial officials, tend to privilege recognizable political discourses, the scholarship has not quite acknowledged the range of interests, including in literature and in quotidian culture, that we see in papers like Al-Punch as well as in better-known newspapers. Al-Punch also tells us something about the position of Urdu in the early twentieth century. Al-Punch was markedly less provincial, in more than one sense, than Hindi and English papers; its interests included the status of Muslims, of Bihar, and of Urdu, but weren’t limited to these. Its Hindi and English contemporaries, meanwhile, especially the most important Bihari English paper, the Behar Times, were much more focused on making particularistic demands on behalf of Hindi and of Biharis. Editorial attitudes differed, as well: English newspapers, especially, generally took an anodyne and authoritative, if sometimes obsequious, tone, in keeping with their self-conscious adoption of a public and political voice. Al-Punch, on the other hand, while still

Niyogi, 2012); Khanduri, “Vernacular Punches”; Partha Mitter, Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), chap. 4. Although most histories of Urdu journalism mention Awadh Punch, very little scholarly attention has been paid, in any language, to Al-Punch.

These reports, which went by a variety of names, consisted of weekly translations and summaries of articles in Indian newspapers that were distributed to officials and now constitute the best records of many publications. However, they are highly selective in their contents, devoting almost all of their attention to issues that the colonial state deemed politically important.

Needless to say, these works have been foundational; they include Christopher King, One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Ulrike Stark, An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007); Dalma, Nationalization of Hindu Traditions, chap. 5. One interesting exception to the tendency to emphasize national over local concerns is Markus Daechsel’s careful reading of combative discourses of community in the uneasily shared space of Lahore’s Urdu press. See Markus Daechsel, The Politics of Self-Expression: The Urdu Middle-Class Milieu in Mid-Twentieth Century India and Pakistan (New York: Routledge, 2006).

For instance, the interests of the Urdu press and of officialdom didn’t always coincide, so that literary debates could generate huge controversies without attracting official notice. See C. Ryan Perkins, “From the Mehfil to the Printed Word: Public Debate and Discourse in Late Colonial India,” Indian Economic & Social History Review 50, no. 1 (2013): 54. The work that does approach these issues has made Lucknow the paradigmatic site for examining the centrality of newspapers to Urdu literature in the late nineteenth century; see Jennifer Dubrow, “From Newspaper Sketch to ‘Novel’: The Writing and Reception of Fasana-e Azad in North India, 1878-1880” (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 2011); Francesca Orsini, Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), chap. 9; C. Ryan Perkins, “Partitioning History: The Creation of an İslâm Pablik in Late Colonial India, c. 1880-1920” (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 2011); Stark, Empire of Books.
making pronouncements on social and political issues, was allusive, dense, expressive, and ultimately more confident in its own authority and coherence.

Finally, and most importantly, *Al-Punch* exemplifies what we might call an ordinary intellectual public, positioned somewhat behind the first ranks of self-conscious national reform. It was one of many periodicals across India that, despite their devoted audiences, have not received the scholarly attention given to a few famous publications like *Harishchandra’s Magazine* and *Tahzib ul-Akhlaq*. Rather than representing a single dominant personality like Bharatendu Harishchandra or Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Al-Punch* encouraged intimacy and dialogue. This collaborative ethic, centered on the paper’s imaginary embodiment, Maulana Al-Punch, calls for a view of public discourse that focuses on participation and horizontal exchange rather than hierarchy and vertical diffusion. Equally important was *Al-Punch’s* deliberate use of wit (zarāfat), by turns elegant and cheeky, which both reinforced this participatory spirit and wrapped the paper’s serious critiques, or “useful things,” in a charming coating of what it called “haha heehee.” Far from representing a decayed provincial city, *Al-Punch* conveyed a vision of urban culture that was both cultivated and informal, and outward-looking while thoroughly enmeshed in its local community.

Like all of its Urdu contemporaries, *Al-Punch* had a fairly small circulation, fewer than 600 when the paper was founded in 1885, and decreasing to 250 by 1911. Though modest, these figures were typical for Urdu papers of the time. The largest Urdu newspaper of the nineteenth century, the *Awadh Akhbar*, peaked at 820 subscribers in 1877, and from 1890 onward its circulation hovered in the low 500s, while the largest Urdu paper in the Bengal presidency had a circulation of 400 in 1911. By contrast, Bengal’s largest Hindi paper had 6,000 subscribers, while Bengali-language papers had as many as 30,000 subscribers. Circulations were limited in part by technological constraints: although there had been a few experiments with letterpress printing in Urdu, lithography was preferred for both aesthetic and economic reasons. Consequently, Urdu print runs were more limited than in other languages where letterpress printing, which enabled faster composition and more impressions, was more accepted.

Audiences were not, however, as restricted as limited circulation numbers might seem to imply. Not only were individual copies shared and read aloud, but *Al-Punch* and its contemporaries deliberately positioned themselves within networks of sympathy and dialogue. This impulse to seek allies and audiences beyond any delimited circle had been present ever

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10 As Ulrike Stark says, “widening our focus to include the ‘second level’ actors... will lead to a more nuanced understanding of the social and intellectual networks that created the rich fabric of Indian civic life.” Ulrike Stark, “Associational Culture and Civic Engagement in Colonial Lucknow: The Jalsah-e Tahzib,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 48, no. 1 (January 2011): 31.


12 *Report on Native Papers in Bengal for the Week Ending the 6th January 1900*; *Report on Native Papers in Bengal for the Week Ending the 7th January 1905*; *Report on Native Papers in Bengal for the Week Ending the 1st January 1910*; *Report on Native Papers in Bengal for the Week Ending the 7th January 1911*.

13 Stark, *Empire of Books*, chap. 1. Incidentally, the first lithographic press in inland India was the one set up by the Patna opium agent, Charles D’Oyly, in 1826, only seven years after the publication of the first treatise on lithography. Ibid., 45–48.
since the paper’s origins in a dispute over who was entitled to speak Urdu and to speak for that
evocative place, the *watan* or homeland.

Reforming Biharis

*Al-Punch* emerged out of a conflict over linguistic standards that took place both in print
and in person and, for a short time, captivated large numbers of people in Bihar and outside it. In
1884, the Patna poet Sayyid Ali Muhammad “Shad” Azimabadi, then 38 years old, published a
book called *Nawā-e Watan* (The Voice of the Homeland). The book’s account of the
development of Urdu, the work of its masters, and the history of Patna’s Muslim elite, was aimed
at correcting what Shad considered the deplorable Urdu spoken in Bihar, and in Patna in
particular. Contrary to his intentions and expectations, the book’s publication prompted a torrent
of recriminations that led eventually to the foundation of *Al-Punch*, a paper whose distinctive
relationships with its readers and contributors stemmed from this conflict over provinciality and
literary authority. The young men who created *Al-Punch* made a paper for themselves and
people like them—brash and boisterous, and skeptical of the prerogatives claimed by the Delhi-
centric older generation. For them, Patna was not a provincial city but the metropolis of Bihar,
not the home of a few decayed old families but a lively center of innovation and activity.

Language was central to two kinds of contestations. All over India, language was being
tied to identity—particularly newly politicized religious identities—as activists and officials
sought to standardize and systematize the relationships between speech, script, and group
membership. Previously, common sense and propriety had dictated the use of different registers
depending on circumstances—perhaps Persian in court, elevated Urdu at a *mushā‘ira* or poetry
gathering, Khari Boli Hindi when conducting business, and Magahi at home. Now, such
heteroglossia was increasingly seen as deviant, and languages were redefined as all-purpose tools
inextricably tied to status, gender, religion, and region.

Equally, among people who recognized each other as speakers of Urdu—the literary types
who wrote poetry and attended mushairas—particular uses of language were subject to fierce
contention. Vicious battles were waged over recondite issues of usage: grammatical number and
gender, the use of particular adjectives, and so on. There had long been deep disagreements about
how Urdu was to be spoken and written, and by whom. Such controversies were nothing new;
similar disputes over the mastery of Persian had circulated for centuries. As Shamsur Rahman
Faruqi argues, though, the tenor of these disputes changed in the nineteenth century. In the case
of Persian, the argument of the naysayers (who were often rebuked, in turn, for their linguistic

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14 Urdu poets typically take the *nisbat* (demonym) Azimabadi, from the Mughal-era name of Patna; only a few
have called themselves Patnavi.

15 I have not been able to examine *Nawā-e Watan* itself, so in the following discussion, I am forced to rely
primarily on Shad’s own later account of the book and on the descriptions and excerpts found in Urdu secondary
sources, particularly Wahāb Ashrafi, *Shād Azimabādī aur un kī Nasm-Nigārt* (Shad Azimabadi and His Prose-
Writing) (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2001).

16 For a powerful description of this process in south India, see Lisa Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in

17 Before the spread of a Sanskritized Hindi written in the Nagari script beginning in the mid-nineteenth century,
Urdu was often called Hindi, as well as Rekhta, Hindustani, Hindi, and Bhakha.

340–47; Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “A Stranger In The City: The Poetics of Sabk-e Hindi,” *Annual of Urdu
innovations) was that Persian could only ever be spoken correctly by Iranians, preferably those who had never left Iran, and that any innovation that took place in India was illegitimate. Urdu, which began to gain prestige from the mid-eighteenth century, soon saw the elevation of Persian and Arabic norms, notwithstanding that Urdu was a distinct language that might have its own uses for borrowed elements.19

Furthermore, not all speakers of Urdu, even among those belonging to the elite classes, were seen as equally competent. The concept of the ahl-e zabān, or the people of the language, emerged to denote the rightful possessors of the language, whose usages would determine which elements of common speech were acceptable in literary discourse. The boundaries of this august society were both social and geographic: by the turn of the nineteenth century, linguistic gatekeepers looked sharply down on those outside Delhi and Lucknow who claimed to speak and write in the language.20 Between these two centers of patronage and sophistication, too, there was bitter rivalry, fed by the Delhites’ resentment at Lucknow’s political and cultural efflorescence while their beloved city decayed.21

But provinciality was not always seen as a lack. As Shantanu Phukan has argued, Persian and Urdu writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often prized bhākhā, roughly “regional dialect,” seeing it as a vessel for musicality, unstudied emotional directness, and a feminized sensitivity. Above all, this earthy authenticity was associated with the region called Purab, or “the East,” which stretched roughly from central U.P. to western Bihar.22

But as Hindi emerged as Urdu’s foil, Urdu-speaking intellectuals rejected the Sanskritric, the provincial, and the non-elite. Urdu speakers were exhorted to shape up lest they drag down their fellows. By the late nineteenth century, literary critics were engaged in a seemingly constant war against language they considered flawed, either because of its deviance from Arabic, Persian, or Turkish usage, or from the Delhi idiom. Few shied away from judging which places and social groups could produce competent speakers. Even Bihari writers like Bihari Lal “Fitrat,” in his 1883 Āīna-e Tirhut (The Mirror of Tirhut), complained that, with rare exceptions, “the elites [ashrāf] of this district speak Urdu, but their Urdu is not correct. They confuse masculine with

21 Carla Petievich argues that, while the “Delhi school” and “Lucknow school” of poetry are retrospective inventions of later critics, there was very real tension between Muslim elites brought up in Delhi and those from Lucknow. Carla Petievich, Assembly of Rivals: Delhi, Lucknow and the Urdu Ghazal (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992), especially chs. 4-5. The transplant Mushafi wrote, for instance: “You’ve robbed me of my own city / And led me into this wilderness: // What can there be between me and these Lakhnavis? / Dear God, what have you done to me?” (“Ya rab shahr apna yāh chhurāyā tā ne / Vīrāne meṁ mujh ko lā bīthāyā tā ne // Maiṁ aur kahān yeh Lakhnāa Ḵt khilqat / E vāe kyā kiyā khudāyā tā ne”). Ibid., 189 (Petievich’s translation).
feminine and feminine with masculine, and besides, they use many words in violation of the idiom of the ahl-e zabān.”

Writers from Delhi were even more dismissive of Bihar and other places outside of their orbit, to the extent of erasing almost any memory of these places’ fecund artistic histories. Three years before Fitrat was writing, when the Delhite Muhammad Husain “Azad” redefined Urdu literary history and criticism in his immensely successful and influential tázkira (biographical anthology) Āb-e Hayāt (The Water of Life), he almost entirely excised Hindus, women, and all the poets of Bengal and Bihar. As Shamsur Rahman Faruqi says, Azad “seems almost entirely unaware of literary production in Bengal and Bihar, although... one of his main sources [published in 1806] freely includes poets from Patna and Murshidabad, and gives the impression that these cities were then among the main centres of Urdu poetry.”

Writing in the wake of the devastation of Delhi and the final defeat of the Mughal empire, Azad and his contemporary, Altaf Husain “Hali,” set about performing, in Frances Pritchett’s words, “radical surgery on their own culture, to enable it to survive in a world defined by the victors.” Although Urdu had only recently gained the prestige long held by Persian, Azad and Hali agreed that the tragically vanished glory and power of sharīf (elite) Indian Muslims was embodied by the Urdu language, and most of all by Urdu poetry. In his mourning, Azad strove to revitalize the language by pointing to the brilliance of the old Delhi poets, while Hali—with his close association with Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the modernism of his school in Aligarh—held up English aesthetics as the new standard to be emulated. Both men, though, agreed that the language and its poetry needed to be made simpler, more “natural,” and more sober—all qualities whose lack they identified with the supposed decadence of Lucknow.

Shortly after Azad published Āb-e Hayāt and before Hali presented his Muqaddama-e Sher-o-Shārīrī (Introduction to Poetry and Poetics), Shad Azimabadi entered the fray with his book Nawā-e Watan, in which he addressed a similarly reformist message to his fellow Biharis. In his autobiography, Shād kī Kahānt, Shād kī Zabānt, Shad takes pains to emphasize that he was moved to write Nawā-e Watan out of the purest love for the Urdu language and for his homeland, or watan, of Patna and Bihar. Although Shad might have grown up to consider Patna

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26 Ibid., chap. 3–4, 9–10; Petievich, Assembly of Rivals, chap. 5–6.

his watan, he notes that, when he was growing up in the 1840s and '50s in the Patna City muhalla (neighborhood) of Purab Darwaza, there were still living elders in his family who had come from Delhi and Panipat, and his playmates were the children of the retainers and servants that they had brought with them, who were so numerous that “this muhalla was becoming a little muhalla of Delhi.”

Like many others among “the offspring of these honorable persons, who have migrated [from Delhi] to other cities and taken up residence there,” Shad displays a consciousness of the separateness and superiority of his language. In his telling, this sense of distinction filled him with an awareness of his responsibility to defend Urdu from its enemies. In the early 1880s, in Bihar as elsewhere, Urdu was under attack from colonial officials and Hindus (generally non-Kayasthas) who considered Urdu to be a Muslim imposition. Many Hindus spoke and wrote polished Urdu, and even more Muslims did not. Whichever register a person used in literary, scholarly, and political contexts, most spoke regional languages like Magahi and Bhojpuri, which were rarely written. But in Bihar as well as elsewhere in north India, Persianized Urdu in the Arabic script was increasingly understood as the proper language of Muslims, while Sanskritized Hindi in the Nagari script was assumed to be the “mother tongue” of Hindus. Thus, though they sometimes denied that Urdu was particular to Muslims, sharif Muslims saw attacks on Urdu as assaults on their own inherited rights.

Serving on the Bihar textbook committee in the early years of the Hindi-Urdu conflict, Shad was confronted by two prominent critics of Urdu. His colleagues, the lexicographer and Inspector of Schools, S.W. Fallon, and Munshi Sohan Lal, the headmaster of the Patna Normal School and a collaborator of Fallon’s and Garcin de Tassy’s, argued that Urdu was hardly spoken in Bihar except by the Muslim elites, and even then, Sohan Lal said, “so poorly and ineptly that one bursts out laughing uncontrollably.” Echoing other Hindi advocates, Sohan Lal—who himself spoke highly Persianized Urdu—further argued that the Urdu script was unsuitable for teaching and for official use because of the difficulties it posed in spelling and in determining word boundaries.

Spurred by these assaults, Shad responded by writing Nawâ-e Watan. His approach was not, however, to rebut most of Sohan Lal’s criticisms, but to accept them and encourage Urdu speakers to reform themselves. This impulse toward self-reform and boundary-drawing in the face of attacks from the outside mirrors the contemporary processes by which both Hindus and

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28 Shād Azimābādī, Shād kī Kahānt Shād kī zabānt, 12.
32 Shād Azimābādī, Shād kī Kahānt Shād kī zabānt, 81.
Muslims struggled to define community boundaries by seizing on some shared practices and rejecting others.33

Shad agreed that Urdu orthography needed to be scientized and its grammar standardized, and he said nothing in response to Sohan Lal’s charge that Urdu speakers’ emphasis on knowledge of Arabic and Farsi was elitist. To the contrary, he complained vociferously that linguistic standards (which encompassed not just literary creativity but, as in earlier debates, command over grammatical gender and number) had been eroded.34 “Linguistic refinement belongs to princes and high-born aristocrats,” Shad wrote, but since the rebellion of 1857, only a few of Patna’s elites—including his mentor, Shah Ulfat Husain “Faryad,” and Shad’s cousin, Wilayat Ali of the Guzri family—retained this elegance.35 The old cultivated patricians were being eclipsed by government clerks and rural parvenus, who were “beating the language to a pulp.”36 Soon, he warned, the watan will become Calcutta’s Burrabazar, where so many languages mingle with each other that it’s hard to recognize the real language.... Poverty has overtaken [Patna’s elites] such that their learning and talent have been ruined. A crowd of villagers has gathered, and they have swarmed into the markets and made the bazars hot with trade, and the standard of language has changed.37

What threatens Patna, in Shad’s view, is not provincialization, but in a way its reverse. The figure he reaches for is not the wilderness or the village, but Burrabazar, the commercial heart of the colonial metropolis. While the aristocrats of the Mughal age have lost their lands and their power, country cousins and nouveau riche upstarts are eager to take their place. With their untamed energy and disregard for social and linguistic boundaries, they threaten to replace the urbane with the merely urban.

**Battle formations**

In his autobiography, Shad acknowledges that *Nawā-e Watan* was hastily written and harsh in tone, but maintains that his motives were righteous: “I admit that in several place I challenged my countrymen [ham-watanoñ, i.e., fellow Biharis] quite harshly, but this was out of love, the same way one compassionately alerts a friend that he is in danger.”38 Ultimately, Shad seems to think that his primary mistake was to neglect to mention Munshi Sohan Lal and the textbook committee in the book’s preface. But, he says, this omission, and his hectoring tone, were consequences of his passion and excitement, which was so great that he sent each page to be printed (by his own press, the Matba-e Qaisari) as soon as he had written it. Immediately on finishing the last page, he had a few copies bound and sent out, including one that went to the office of the Urdu edition of the *Indian Chronicle* newspaper.39

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33 See, for example, Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), chap. 4.
37 Quoted or paraphrased in ibid., 184–85.
38 Shād Azīmābādī, *Shād kī Kahāṇī Shād kī Zabānt*, 82.
39 Ibid. The claim that Shad owned the Qaisari press comes from Ashrafī, *Shād Azīmābādī aur un kī Nasr-Nigār*, 182.
This was where Shad’s troubles began. In his telling, there was already a faction of poets who resented his success and sought every opportunity to undermine and disgrace him. Still, he was surprised when the Chronicle’s reviewer vituperated the book for what he saw—accurately, by Shad’s own description—as its scornful dismissal of Bihar’s elites and their mastery of the Urdu language. Contrary to Shad’s insistence on his benevolent motives, the reviewer alleged that the book was motivated by selfishness and a desire to mock the people of Bihar. After the first review was published, more contributors to the Chronicle chimed in with similar complaints: by singling out a handful of people for praise, Shad had maligned Patna’s elites, and he had even more grievously insulted those who lived in the countryside or had rural origins by characterizing them as yokels and bumpkins (gañwār and dihqānī) who were ruining Patna’s language.

Shad’s primary provocation to his critics, though, was his contempt for those without deep roots in the city and hereditary claims on urbane politesse. Using terms that invoked the distinction between those Muslims claiming high-status immigrant origins and those understood as descendants of low-caste converts, the original review in the December 8, 1884, issue of the Indian Chronicle admonished Shad that “the antonym of genteel [sharīf] is base [kamīna] or low-born [razī], not rustic [gañwār].” This rebuke captures the essence of the entire conflict. Like Shad, the reviewer accepted that personal virtue could be understood in terms of inherited status. Where he sharply departed from Shad, though, was when Shad sought to arrogate refinement and noble ancestry to urbanites alone. A sayyid from a village or qasba, or one with deep roots in Patna, was just as sharif as a sayyid whose family came from Delhi.

At the same time, the Chronicle reviewer and others among Shad’s critics were torn between an urge to deny any urban monopoly on sophistication—or at least to insist that it was not restricted to old families—and an impulse to undermine his hauteur by reasserting the conventional view that Delhi and Lucknow were unmatched as centers of literary virtuosity. While the Chronicle reviewer objected to the snobbish tone of Shad’s criticism of Patna’s customs and manners, he was still willing to insult Bihar if the barb stung Shad as well: although Nawā-e Watan had been modeled on Āb-e Hayāt, he said, the two books had the same relationship as the Urdu of Delhi and that of Purab. For the reviewer, it was obvious that Delhi’s language was the reference standard.

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41 Reprinted in Ashrafī, Shād Aẓīmābādī aur un kī Nasr-Nīgārī, 215–17. The initial review was so hostile that Shad says that he was driven by anger to burn all the remaining copies, except for thirty or forty that had already been bought by a bookseller. Shād Aẓīmābādī, Shād kī Kahānt Shād kī Zabānt, 83. This claim is disputed by scholars who point out that the 1885 edition asks readers to return the first, flawed, edition, and that a revised version was published in 1887. Ashrafī, Shād Aẓīmābādī aur un kī Nasr-Nīgārī, 181–82. Given the argument of Qāzī Abdul Wadud that Nawā-e Watan is the original source of an anecdote about the poet Bedil, widely repeated into the mid-twentieth century, it seems clear that the book did find readers. Qāzī Abd al-Wadūd, Kuchh Shād Aẓīmābādī ke Bāre meñ (A Bit About Shad Azimabadi) (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1995), 138–39. In any case, in the resulting conflagration the number of books in circulation was beside the point. In the initial review and in the many articles that followed it, the complaints of Shad’s opponents seem to have been consistent.
42 Shād Aẓīmābādī, Shād kī Kahānt Shād kī Zabānt, 83–84; letter from Shad quoted in Ashrafī, Shād Aẓīmābādī aur un kī Nasr-Nīgārī, 178–79.
43 Reprinted in Ashrafī, Shād Aẓīmābādī aur un kī Nasr-Nīgārī, 216.
Soon, according to Shad, the Chronicle’s attacks on him grew so virulent that the paper’s owners (who included the lawyers Bisheshwar Singh and Guru Prashad Sen) asked the editor to desist, fearing irreversible damage to Shad’s honor and personal safety. In an 1888 letter, Shad reveals that the Chronicle was funded by several of his well-wishers; when he came under attack, they withdrew their support and the paper quickly folded. At this point, Shad says, his opponents held him responsible and tried to set fire to his house. After their attempt failed and they were rebuked by the District Collector, they directed their passions into the establishment of a new press to publish a newspaper devoted to attacking Shad. In only one week, Shad says, they collected several thousand rupees, bought a press and lithographic stones, and inaugurated the Al-Punch newspaper. The new paper’s hostility to him was so great that it extended even to its title, which mocked his habit of including the Arabic article al- in his signature; the paper continued to ridicule this affectation by attaching the al- to common Hindi words, as in al-chauk (the town square), al-sarak (the street), and so forth.

The attacks on Shad that appeared in the Chronicle, Al-Punch, the Awadh Punch of Lucknow, and in books with titles like Ziyā-e Watan, Rīzā-e Watan, and Hayā-e Watan, were accompanied by great public excitement. A friend of Shad’s, a hakīm (doctor), rushed from a patient’s bedside one morning to urge Shad to flee the city because the crowd of people gathered at the patient’s house had ignored their sick kinsman and talked of nothing but their hostility for Shad. In Shad’s telling, notices were put in cities, qasbas, and villages, so that all the Muslims of Bihar, from masters to servants, were fascinated by the conflict. Four thousand copies of Al-Punch were sold in its first week, and readers complained every time any issue came out without a piece mocking Shad. Even his friends relished reading these satirical pieces aloud to each other, while his enemies subscribed in his name and threw copies into the courtyard of his house.

Shad says that he was reluctant to fan the flames by responding personally to the attacks, but he was gratified that some of his friends supported him quietly and that newspapers in other cities, the Nusrat ul-Akhbar (Delhi), the Mushir-e Qaisar (Lucknow), and the Aftab-e Am (Arrah), came to his aid and “wiped away the tears.” But in a painful reversal, Shad found that not everyone in Delhi and Lucknow would even grant his own refinement. The Lakhnavis, he says, rebuked his temerity in a couplet reading:

45 Shād Azīmābādī, Shād kī Kahānt Shād kī Zabānt, 85.
47 Shād Azīmābādī, Shād kī Kahānt Shād kī Zabānt, 85.
48 Ibid., 85–86.
50 Shād Azīmābādī, Shād kī Kahānt Shād kī Zabānt, 87.
51 Official figures put the circulation at 584 in 1885. It is entirely possible, though, that the first few issues sold many more copies. General Administration Report on the Patna Division for the Year 1884-85, quoted in Jha, “Fifteen Years of the Patna Al Punch on Mohammadan Education in Bihar,” 75.
52 Shād Azīmābādī, Shād kī Kahānt Shād kī Zabānt, 86–87, 94–95.
53 Shad also reports that at least three people associated with Al-Punch died in quick succession, but he swears that he was not desirous of revenge. Samdanī, “Shād kī Kuchh Khūd Navisht Sarguzasht,” 3–4.
Finally, after two years, Shad says, the people of Bihar tired of harassing him, though some still considered mocking some famous person or another to be the easiest way to earn fame. However, his failure to earn the respect of his contemporaries in Delhi, Lucknow, and Hyderabad, ranked throughout his life. He repeatedly attributed his lack of fame to having stayed in Patna, where people refused to acknowledge his talent, and to the unpublished state of his works. His only hope was that once both he and his opponents were dead, his work would be published and reflect his genius like a mirror. To Shad as to his opponents, print was the antidote to distance; part of what vexed him was that they had access to it while he, their apparent superior, did not.

**Trajectories**

Shad’s description of his travails in his autobiography, written almost forty years later, is melodramatic, clearly exaggerated in some respects, and generally consistent with the vanity and self-righteousness that pervades his autobiographical writings and correspondence. Its basic substance, though, is corroborated by both contemporaries and later writers. Although the memoirist Badruddin Ahmad argues that *Al-Punch* was founded in order to further the literary and social aim of “making the speedy efforts at the reform of society even speedier,” he acknowledges that most people believe personal enmity to have been primary.

One more dimension of the conflict is suggested by the scholar Sayyid Suleiman Nadwi, an admirer of Shad who calls him the only *ustād* (teacher or master) of Urdu in Purab and the only poet of his generation who retained the expressive genius of the old poetic masters. In 1930,

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54 “Dāwa zabān kā Lakhnaū wāloñ ke sāmne, / Izhār-e bā-ē mashk ghazāloñ ke sāmne.” The couplet plays on the similarity between *ghazal*, a form of poetry, and *ghazāl*, the gazelle or musk deer. Shād Azīmābādī, *Shād kī Kahānt Shād kī Zabānt*, 84. In the telling of Kalimuuddin Ahmad “Ajīz,” this couplet (which he phrases somewhat differently and in the reverse order) was aimed by either “Fasahat” Lakhnavi or “Shamshad” Lakhnavi at Patnaites in general, one of whom responded: “This town is still made a marketplace of Khutan [modern-day Hotan in Xinjiang, famous for its musk] by its luminaries. / The gazelles hide their eyes from the people of Azimabad.” (“Yeh bāstī ab bḥī bāzār-e Khutan hai bā-kamaloñ se, / Ghazāl ānkheñ churāte haiñ Azīmābādī wāloñ ke sāmne.”) Kalīm ud-Dīn Ahmad, “Būd-o-Bāsh-e Azīmābādī” (The Way of Life of Azimabad), *Khuda Bakhsh Library Journal* no. 109 (1997): 71.

55 In an 1888 letter, Shad says it took two years; in his autobiography, he repeats this number, but also says the enmity lasted for ten years or sixteen years. Samdānī, “Shād kī Kuchh Khūd Navisht Sarguzasht,” 3; Shād Azīmābādī, *Shād kī Kahānt Shād kī Zabānt*, 94, 96; Abd ul-Wādūd, *Kuchh Shād Azīmābādī ke Bāre meñ*, 71.

56 Apparently morbidly pessimistic, Shad was already predicting his own imminent death at age 42. In fact, he lived almost forty more years. Samdānī, “Shād kī Kuchh Khūd Navisht Sarguzasht,” 3; letter to Humāyūn Mīrzā, January 10, 1901, reprinted in Sayyid Muḥt ud-Dīn Qādir Zor, *Maktābāt-e Shād Azīmābādī* (Letters of Shad Azimabadi) (Hyderabad: Idārā-e Adabiyyāt-e Urdu, 1939); Shād Azīmābādī, *Shād kī Kahānt Shād kī Zabānt*, 98; see also Abd ul-Wādūd, *Kuchh Shād Azīmābādī ke Bāre meñ*, 23.


58 Ahmad also notes that the Urdu *Indian Chronicle* closed in 1886, only a year after *Al-Punch* began publication. Ahmad, *Haqiqat Bḥī Kahānt Bhr*, 457.

after Shad’s death, Nadwi wrote that most of Shad’s rural opponents had been close to Nadwi’s family and comprised a close-knit group who shared roots in the qasbas of Bihar and a particular educational background: “this was the first era of the province of Bihar, when the new education was replacing the old education. By the beauty of fortune, many of the talented people of the era were those young men who were influenced by the English language or by English ideas after studying Arabic.”

These included the founders of *Al-Punch*, Sayyid Rahimuddin (born 1858 in the qasba of Desna) and Abdul Ghani Warsi (born about 1858 in the qasba of Asthanwan, near Desna), but also several others who remained closely tied to the paper, like the barrister Sayyid Sharfuddin (born 1856 in the qasba of Neora) and Hafiz Fazl-e Haq “Azad” (born about 1854 in the village of Shaho Bigha), Shad’s most dedicated opponent. Twenty years later, long after the conflict had died down, when Shad subscribed to *Al-Punch* and some of the paper’s contributors spoke respectfully of him, Azad was still regularly deriding him, sometimes more than once per issue.

Several different tensions were woven together in the controversy over *Nawā-e Watan* and the formation of *Al-Punch*. One, gestured to by Nadwi, was a difference of philosophical outlook. Shad had received a traditional education in Urdu, Arabic, and Farsi from tutors, aside from a brief period attending an English-run school in Bankipur, which was aborted because of its distance from Patna City and out of fear for its effects on his religion. By contrast, the men listed by Nadwi were about ten years younger than Shad, and tended to have affiliations with either English education, as with Sharfuddin, or with Muslim educational reform, as in the case of Azad, who had ties with both the Lucknow seminary Nadwat al-Ulama and with Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh.

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*Tahrītroḥ, aur Muqaddamoḥi kā Majmūḥā* (Azamgarh: Mārif Press, 1939 [1923]), 398. Nadwi was born in 1884, the year that *Nawā-e Watan* was published, and grew up to become the most famous product of the qasba of Desna. His high opinion of Shad is widely shared, but Shad’s reputation seems to have grown substantially after his death. KBOPL, Mss. Acc. 2698, Wāris Ismāl, “Azimābād ke Chand Bākamāl” (Some Remarkable People of Azimabad); KBOPL, Mss. Acc. 2884, “Azimābād 1920 se Qabīl tak Kyā Thā?” (What was Azimabad before 1920?); Abd ul-Wadūd, *Kuchh Shad Azimābād ki Bāre meī* (Some Remarkable People of Azimabad), 9, 22; Jamīl Mazharti, “Kal kā Azimābād” (The Azimabad of Yesterday), in *Manṣūrāt-e Jamīl Mazharti* (Patna: Bihar Urdu Academy, 1991), vol. 2 pages 344–45; Ahmad, *Haqtqat Bht Kahi Ḍi Bht*, 461.

60 Nadwi, writing in *Mārif* in 1930, quoted in Ashraflī, *Shad Azimābādāt aer un kā Nasr-Nigarāt*, 183. Shad also identifies his opponents as those who had recently learned English; see his 1888 letter to Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad Samdani in Samdantī, “Shād kī Kuchh Khudh Navisht Sarguzasht,” 3.

61 Nadwī, writing in *Mārif* in 1930, quoted in Ashraflī, *Shād Azimābādāt aer un kā Nasr-Nigarāt*, 183; Matīn Imārdī, *Fazl-e Haq Āzād* (Fazl-e Haq Azad) (Patna: Bihar Urdu Academy, 2006), 4, 18–20. This Azad had no connection to Abul Kalam “Azad,” mentioned above; there is a limited stock of words from which poets tend to draw their pen-names (*takhallus*), and Āzād, which means “free,” has had many takers. The meanings given in a 1908 dictionary vary from “independent” to “impudent,” but also include connotations of ready wit and jocularity. Sayyid Ahmad Dehlavī, *Farhang-e Āṣafīyya* (The Asafi Dictionary) (Lahore: Matba Rīfā-e Ām, 1908), svv. “āzād,” “āzādt.”

62 For instance, see Fazl-e Haq Āzād, “Shād kī Kaj-Maj Zābānī ba Zābān-e Hasrat Mohāṇī” (Shad’s Distorted Language, According to “Hasrat” Mohani), and “Hazrat Shād kī Khult Khult Ghalatijānī” (Shad’s Obvious Mistakes), *Al-Punch*, November 23, 1905. An earlier issue had featured a rebuke to Azad for his hostility. “Āzād ne Shād ko Nā-Haq Miṭāyā” (Azad Unjustly Effaced Shad), *Al-Punch*, November 2, 1905. Azad also wrote poems against Shad in *Al-Punch* under assumed names. Imādī, *Fazl-e Haq Āzād*, 18.


64 Imādī, *Fazl-e Haq Āzād*, 5–9. Azad was introduced to Sir Sayyid’s ideas by his elder, the Patna aristocrat Qazi
Both sides met on the mutually acceptable turf of print culture, through which they hoped to carry out needed reforms. At the same time, they freely mobilized personal relationships, betraying no conception of print as a domain outside of social life. But, although the difference in age between Shad and his opponents was not great (and Shad had a number of younger disciples who defended him vigorously), they sought different things from literature and from public engagement. Shad had come of age in the period immediately after the rebellion of 1857 and devoted his life to cultivating the artistic and social traditions of the old Muslim elite, while pledging loyalty to the colonial state.\(^{65}\) In his view, only the Urdu language, supported by Persian, could carry these traditions forward; but this would only be possible if it were protected from the assaults of the uneducated and ill-bred. His younger critics, on the other hand, were beginning their efforts to preserve what they could of their intellectual and cultural inheritance while trying to adapt to the new political realities of the Raj. For them, Shad represented the hidebound worship of old hierarchies.

Individual traits must also be taken into account. Shad adopted a provocative and patronizing tone, and someone was bound to take offense; it was also to be expected that somewhere on the scene there would be a bellicose adversary like Azad to take up the cudgel against Shad.\(^{66}\) But the antipathy between Shad and his opponents took shape within the Urdu literary world’s tradition of fierce conflict, where a certain amount of preening and competition was expected of poets, and where opposing factions would seize on any perceived divergence from correct usage to proclaim their rivals’ incompetence.

These controversies gained heat from allegations of prejudice. For instance, when in 1905 Abdul Halim “Sharar” attacked Brij Narayan “Chakbast”’s new edition of a poem by Daya Shankar “Nasim,” many doubted that his complaints were really about the quality of the editing or the original poem, and suspected that they were motivated by the fact that both poet and editor were Hindus, Kashmiri Brahmins who had settled in Lucknow. On the other side, Chakbast and his defenders cast aspersions on Sharar’s own claims to authority, citing his ties to the small town of Kursi, outside Lucknow.\(^{67}\) In this and similar cases, like the controversies ignited by the iconoclastic poet “Yagana” Changezi, critique was construed as inseparable from prejudice and personal enmity.\(^{68}\)

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\(^{65}\) Shad’s pride in his loyalism is evident in his autobiography, and his insistence on emphasizing his services to the colonial state irritated his disciple and editor, “Muslim” Azimabadi; see Muslim Azīmābādī, “Shād kī Kahānī Shād kī Zabān,” 87.

\(^{66}\) On Azad’s pugnacious temperament, of which Shad was merely the most prominent target, see Imādī, Fāzl-e Haq Āzād, 18–21.

\(^{67}\) Perkins, “From the Mehfil to the Printed Word.” This controversy had much in common with the battle over Nawāt-e Watan, in substance as well as in the ways that it illustrated the interdependence of face-to-face relationships and printed media, as well as the potential of print to disrupt earlier norms of deference and hierarchy.

\(^{68}\) Mirza Wajid Husain “Yagana” (formerly “Yas”) Changezi came from Patna, where he was one of Shad’s disciples, but later moved to Lucknow, where he provoked a series of battles by challenging what he saw as the Lakhnavis’ pomposity and conventionality. He astonished his contemporaries by attacking Ghalib, the poetic idol of the Lakhnavis (though Ghalib himself was a Delhitei), but the most grievous crisis came when Yagana was accused of heresy and atheism. Najīb Jamāl, Yagāna: Tahqīq-o-Tanqīd Mutālā (Yagana: Critical and
Finally, this conflict—like the later tussle between Chakbast and Sharar—very intimately concerned the relationship between urbanity and provinciality. Shad seems entirely sincere in his dismay; clearly, he fully expected the people of the watan to thank him for rectifying their misconceptions and degraded practices. As he said candidly to his friend Samdani, “as a rule, until a person understands that he’s in error, he won’t improve. Accordingly, I corrected the errors of the people of Azimabad and its surroundings, and... also showed that the language spoken by the people of the previous era was far superior to that of the present.”69 To his detractors, Shad seemed to be saying (in his own, possibly ungenerous, rendering) that “the people of the countryside are brutes and beasts.”70

This dispute over historical decline and the location of civilization was not one to be quickly resolved. Frances Pritchett says of Azad and Hali that, unlike Ghalib and his contemporaries, each of them lacked “a confidence that impatiently assumed both his individual mastery, and the self-evident, unchallengeable excellence of the literary tradition within which he worked.”71 This was equally true for Shad. He might have been confident of his own mastery, but it was equally clear to him that his literary tradition was on the back foot. Refinement could be achieved—if not by all, then at least by certain elite men—but only by emulating the established masters of Delhi and Lucknow. It was no longer clear that anyone in Patna, apart from Shad himself, still had the creativity and grandeur of the old era; worse still was the distorted language of Bihar’s towns, qasbas, and villages. For his opponents at Al-Punch, urban refinement was not such a rarefied thing. Undoubtedly, society and literature had many flaws that needed to be corrected. But this work could be done with ebullience and spunk, and by a variety of people. Patna was as fine a center of learning and art as Delhi and Lucknow, and the educated, well-born people of Bihar’s villages and qasbas had as much right to Urdu as anyone else.

There might even be something in the countryside that the city could learn from. In a nostalgic poem, “Tārāna-e Dihqān” (The Villager’s Song), Azad contrasts the simplicity of village life with the destructive hurly-burly of urban modernity:

There were freedoms there, we had found such security;
There are such comforts there, as if bestowed by the breeze.
It’s as if the world has reached such a pinnacle of progress,
That life’s customs have been demolished by hardship.72

This is the fond memory of a person who has left his village behind.73 But it is the same Azad who writes glowingly of the city that he adopted:

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70 Ibid., 3.
71 Pritchett, Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics, 44.
73 On Āzād’s arrival in Patna and his reluctant return to Shāhī Bigha, which he accompanied with efforts to recreate Patna’s literary culture, see Imādī, Fazl-e Haq Āzād, 9–11.
How long has it been since Delhi was ground in the dust?
And nobody knows what happened to Lucknow.
But there was a Patna, thronged with God’s creatures—
Which neighborhood wasn’t abuzz with a new guest?

... There’s a long epic of Patna’s linguistic prowess;
Both urbanite and villager spoke in Rekhta [i.e., Urdu].

After the dust settled following the battle over Nawā-e Watan, Patna’s Urdu press was in a similar state as before; there was still one main Urdu paper, and many of the same people wrote for it. Born in a struggle over urbanity, however, Al-Punch had a new kind of outlook: where others tried to reassert hierarchies of geography and behavior, Al-Punch took an expansive view of who was urban and what was urbane.

Al-Punch’s world
Whatever role had once been played by Al-Punch’s contention with Shad and his supporters, by the early twentieth century the paper had other topics on its mind. Aside from Azad, who continued to attack Shad periodically, the paper’s contributors had little interest in pursuing old rivalries. The founding controversy did, however, deeply influence the relationship between the paper and its community of readers and writers. The former upstarts might have become well established by now, but the paper maintained its openness to contributors without aristocratic pedigrees, as well as its celebratory—sometimes defensive—attitude toward both Patna and the qasbas of Bihar.

A sense of how Al-Punch conceived of its identity and ancestry is imparted by a cover from 1901 (Fig. 1). The page is bordered by floral embellishments like those decorating any number of Urdu book covers from this period, and the inner margins are filled with a variety of announcements. The scene at the center announces the paper’s local loyalties and its ties to the cosmopolitan world of Urdu. The Al-Punch name is worked into a sun (a motif that the paper liked to use, as in Fig. 2), which shines down on a Mughal building overlooking a palm garden. The image is dominated, though, by Patna’s most

“Khāk meñ mil ke to Dilhī hut kab kt mahrūm, / Lakhnaī kt bhi haqīqat nahīn kisē ko mālam, / Ek Paṭna thā jahānī khalq-e khudā kā thā hujām, / Kis muhalle meñ na thī ik naye mehmān kt dhūm. / ... / Dāstān tāl hai Paṭna kt zabān-dānt kt, / Guftagū rekhta thī shahr-o-dihgānt kt.” “Yād-e Guzashtagān” (The Memory of Things Past), ibid., 71, 73. The fact that this poem mentions Shad in a positive light suggests that Azad may have written it in a later period.
iconic building, the Gol Ghar granary.\textsuperscript{75} Realism is clearly beside the point; nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the domed granary (represented realistically in Sita Ram’s 1814 painting, Fig. 3) has nearly become a globe. At the same time as the image adopts a transregional idiom of Persianate ornamentation and evokes the “new light” (nai roshni) of Islamic modernism, it also suggests that Patna, embodied in the famous Gol Ghar, is a world of its own.

\textit{Al-Punch’s} simultaneous localism and cosmopolitanism emerged partly from the ways in which it participated in what I call the Urdu literary formation, using Farina Mir’s term for “a group constituted through its members’ shared practices of producing, circulating, performing, reading, and listening.”\textsuperscript{77} The practices and institutions that made up this literary formation linked Patnaites to each other and to colleagues and rivals elsewhere, and drew strength from Patna’s position in the social geography of the region. Not only was the city an important link between north India and the imperial capital of Calcutta, but as Bihar’s most important urban center since the late seventeenth century, it drew people from towns and cities throughout the region. In particular, a steady stream of Muslim and Kayastha intellectuals arrived from several nearby qasbas; after some time at institutions like Patna College or the Muhammadan Anglo-Arabic School, they would often fan out again to take up government work in colonial capitals like Lucknow and Lahore, or in princely states like Bhopal and Hyderabad.

Among the most prominent of these qasbas was Desna, about 40 miles southeast of Patna. Maulvi Sayyid Rahimuddin “Mahjur,” who founded \textit{Al-Punch} in 1885, when he was in his late 20s, and edited it until shortly before his death in 1903, was originally from Desna, as were many of \textit{Al-Punch’s} regular contributors.\textsuperscript{78} Another qasba called Asthanwan, a few miles north of

\textsuperscript{75} For an interesting discussion of the history and symbolism of the Gol Ghar, which has never been filled, see Rebecca M. Brown, “Paṭnā’s Golghar and the Transformations of Colonial Discourse,” \textit{Archives of Asian Art} 55 (2005): 53–63.

\textsuperscript{76} BL APAC, Shelfmark Add.Or.4706.

\textsuperscript{77} Farina Mir, \textit{The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab} (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010), 97–100.

\textsuperscript{78} Ahmad, \textit{Haqqaq Bht Kahan Bht}, 468–88. Desna’s most famous product was the scholar Sayyid Suleiman Nadwi, a close associate of Shibli Numani at the Nadwat ul-Ulama and Dar ul-Musannifin. Sabih Muhsin, ed., \textit{Desnavī} (Desnaites) (Karachi: Desna Association, 1990), 58–61.
Desna, supplied many other contributors, including Sayyid Rahimuddin’s contemporary, Maulvi Abdul Ghani Warsi. Both men’s careers followed trajectories typical of sharif intellectuals in Bihar: each left home to study, first in larger towns in Bihar and then in Bhopal and Aligarh, respectively. As teens, they both arrived in Patna, where friendships in Sadar Gali secured them an entry to the literary and scholarly salon of Allama Hakim Abdul Hamid “Pareshan,” which attracted literati from Patna and the surrounding area. They gained experience at the Urdu Indian Chronicle, and then applied that experience to Al-Punch when the Chronicle folded. Warsi soon moved to Hyderabad to become an administrator, but he maintained his friendships on visits home and continued to contribute to Al-Punch, as well as Awadh Akhbar, Awadh Punch, and the intellectual circle of Shibli Numani.

This personal and professional genealogy ramifies at each stage: take, for instance, the central figures in the Urdu Indian Chronicle, Bisheshwar Singh and Guru Prashad Sen. Although the Chronicle had been founded (first in Urdu and then in English) as a conscious effort to speak to and for elite Biharis who were anxious to catch up in Bengal, Sen was key to the paper’s operations despite being a Bengali. He would go on to found the Behar Herald, the English organ of the Bengalis domiciled in Bihar, while Bisheshwar Singh and his brother Saligram would found the Bihar National College and patronize Hindi and English newspapers. Sen also hired journalists like Gokulananda Prasada Varma and Mahesh Narayan who, as vocal advocates of “Bihar for the Biharis,” would eventually write for and edit papers opposing Sen’s Herald.

Journalism in late nineteenth-century Bihar was chronically unstable, with papers regularly appearing and disappearing due to their small staffs and the vagaries of patronage. It was natural, then, that journalists would move among different papers and languages, and that contributors would send essays to many papers. This flexibility points to the role of personal associations in forming a public sphere. Ties of friendship, family, and education were integral to helping journalists, who were often quite young, to find opportunities for employment and exposure. The example of Gokulananda Prasada Varma shows how these ties extended to the institutional level. Varma had begun a Hindi paper in Muzaffarpur, the Kayastha Kaumudi; but it had failed. A relative who was involved with Mahesh Narayan’s Kayastha Gazette recommended Varma, who was hired and assigned to cultivate the Behar Times’s links with other papers. Given piles of newspapers and magazines, he says, “like an intemperate glutton at the prospect of a feast, I fell a victim to the debauchery of reading newspapers.” Like many of Al-Punch’s contributors, Varma drew on personal and professional ties to enter the Patna print media and achieve some of his cosmopolitan ambitions.

79 Ahmad, Haqiqat Bht Kahant Bht, 489–91.
80 Both Warsi and Rahimuddin were aided in their introduction to literary society by Sayyid Badruddin Ahmad’s father, Khan Bahadur Zamiruddin Ahmad. This account comes from ibid., 455–61, 486–91.
82 See chapter 4.
83 Gokulananda Prasada Varma, My Experiences and Observations (Bankipore: Khadga Vilas Press, 1901), 21–22.
Focal points

Comparing Al-Punch with its contemporaries helps clarify what made it distinctive in Patna as well as in the pan-Indian Urdu public sphere. It was the city’s only Urdu newspaper in the 1900s (although there were several literary magazines), but Patna also hosted three other newspapers, two in English and one in Hindi, all of them well-known throughout Bihar. The English papers were the Behar Herald (Fig. 4), catering primarily to Bengali lawyers living in Bihar, and its rival the Behar Times (Fig. 5), which largely represented Bihari Kayasthas. Where Al-Punch was passionate and highly aestheticized, the Times and Herald adopted a stolid appearance and a measured, erudite tone.

By the same token, where Al-Punch was participatory and democratic to some degree, both English papers were organized hierarchically and limited readers’ involvement to an occasional letters column. The Behar Times was oriented toward a specific political goal, the separation of Bihar from Bengal; and toward the development of ethnregionally oriented commerce and public discourse. In keeping with that project, it emphasized Bihar in its coverage, and for the most part, its attention to other parts of India and the world was dominated by war coverage and lightweight wire stories. For its part, the Herald focused its attention on Calcutta and Europe, and devoted little space to matters specific to Patna or Bihar. Especially within the Behar Times, the concerns of urban Kayastha lawyers were regularly characterized as the interests of an entire province. Of course, Al-Punch was no less enmeshed in the concerns of an elite. But because it drew on the culture of the literary gathering and partook of the larger Urdu literary formation, it was both inclined and equipped to speak with local and dispersed interlocutors and to range further in topic and tone.

English in India was a cosmopolitan medium; like Persian and Sanskrit before it, an imperial, and in this case colonial, language of interaction across boundaries.84 As the poet and Patna College graduate Avadh Behari Lall noted:

It is this language which has enabled and still enables the Rulers and the Ruled of this vast Country... to understand and appreciate each other[,] it is this language by which the heterogeneous races of India, having separate dialects of their own,

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84 Urdu, too, was spoken and read over a very wide geographic area, and indeed publishing in the language was more dominant in Punjab than in its homelands of Delhi and the United Provinces. See Daechsel, Politics of Self-Expression, 13–14. However, by virtue of having such a territorial home within India, Urdu was not cosmopolitan in the same way that English was or Persian and Sanskrit had been. On Sanskrit cosmopolitanism and its decline, see Sheldon Pollock, “The Death of Sanskrit,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 43, no. 2 (2001): 392–426; Sheldon Pollock, The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). On the rise of Persian in India, see Alam, “Pursuit of Persian.”
communicate with one another; it is this language, this vehicle of thought, in which the state-education is imparted to us and which has thus laid open to us the vast unexplored treasures of the Literatures and Sciences of the West.\(^8\)

There was, of course, a long history of Indian literary production in English, going back to Henry Derozio in the 1820s.\(^8\) Nonetheless, English papers were narrowly focused on particular kinds of political concerns. Whether owned by Europeans or by Indians, and whether speaking in the name of a geographically broad public or a particularly Bihari one, they seldom engaged deeply with literature or belles lettres, as \textit{Al-Punch} did, but restricted their references to other newspapers whose political claims they either echoed or contested.\(^7\) Both the \textit{Times} and the \textit{Herald} published jokes—the \textit{Times} reprinting them from the \textit{Herald}—but their sensibility was pointedly alien. If one joke referred to Charles Lamb’s friend Ayrton, the next would rely on a Cockney accent and the one after would refer to Adam and Eve as “your first parents.”\(^8\) \textit{Al-Punch}’s allusive, charged wit had no place in the determinedly sober English press; instead, drollery was cordoned off under headings like “Fun and Frolic.”

Patna’s Hindi paper, the \textit{Bihar Bandhu} (The Friend of Bihar), presents a different contrast (Fig. 6). Founded in 1873, it eventually fell into difficulties, and when it was revived in 1901 it could only manage to publish monthly. Like many contemporary publications in Hindi, it was overwhelmingly focused on advocating official and societal support for Hindi and the Nagari script. It regularly congratulated itself on its past successes, especially on its role in establishing Hindi in the Bihar courts in the 1880s. The government, however, perceived it as marginal and unimportant, and the paper’s air of haranguing desperation suggests that the editors were aware of their paper’s decline.\(^9\)

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\(^8\) Citing the success of Irving and Longfellow in raising the English estimation of American talent, Lall expressed the hope that he might similarly change English minds about Indians’ literary skill with his poems on Bihar, modeled on Dryden and Pope (“With sweeping hand how Death ev’rywhere knocks, / Disguised in shape of Chol’ra or Small-pox:— / Sing, Muse! of these, the most part rueful song, / But sing with pensive, tragic force along”). “Behar,” Canto II, in Avadh Behari Lall, \textit{Behar and Other Poems} (Gaya: Avadh Behari Lall, 1898), viii – ix. Two of Lall’s poems, as well as the introduction to \textit{Behar and Other Poems}, are reprinted in Sheshalatha Reddy, \textit{Mapping the Nation: An Anthology of Indian Poetry in English, 1870-1920} (London: Anthem, 2012).

\(^8\) On Indian, and especially Bengali, poets writing in English, see Rosinka Chaudhuri, \textit{Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project} (Calcutta: Seagull, 2002).

\(^7\) The position of English literature within Indian public spheres is now, of course, quite different. For a discussion of the ways in which contemporary writers and publishers negotiate the demands of English and Hindi, see Rashmi Sadana, \textit{English Heart, Hindi Heartland: The Political Life of Literature in India} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

\(^8\) See, for instance, \textit{Behar Herald}, November 15 and 22, 1899, and \textit{Behar Times}, August 19, 1898.

\(^9\) BSA, Annual General Administration Report for Patna Division for 1895-96.
The *Bihar Bandhu* invoked a world that largely conformed to the geography of the wider Hindi movement, as articulated by organizations like the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Benares and, in Patna itself, the Khadgavilas Press, a longtime stalwart of the Hindi movement and the first literary publisher in Hindi.\(^90\) Although there was some coverage of events in Patna and south Bihar, the paper generally treated Bihar as a convenient subdivision of the Hindi-speaking nation, rather than as a coherent social unit. But while *Bihar Bandhu* had little interest in reporting on events in the region, its linguistic politics were shaped by Bihar’s subordination to Bengal. Unlike its allies to the west, *Bihar Bandhu* tempered its rejection of Urdu and the Arabic script, and its grudging attitude toward the Kaithi script (a competitor of Nagari), with a countervailing concern about Bengali influence.\(^91\) It portrayed Bihar as the easternmost bastion of authentic north Indian language and culture, whose sophistication came from its Urdu-speaking past, even if that heritage had to be domesticated and Sanskritized.

Like *Al-Punch*, the *Bihar Bandhu* articulated its stance through contrast with other papers. The Calcutta Hindi paper *Bharat Mitra* was a particular target: even as the *Bihar Bandhu* itself regularly misspelled Urdu words, it attacked the Calcutta paper’s Hindi as corrupt and rustic for its poor grasp of Persian vocabulary and for its opposition to the diacritical dots used in Nagari script to mark Urdu sounds.\(^92\) The editor of *Bharat Mitra*, Balmukund Gupta, was a vocal critic of these dots who cast their use, advocated by the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, as a “sickness” that

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\(^90\) On the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, see King, *One Language, Two Scripts*, chap. 5; Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, chap. 1–2. On the Khadgavilas Press, see Dhirendranāth Singh, *Ādhunik Hindī ke Vīkās Meñ Khadgavilās Press kt Bhāmikā* (The Role of the Khadgavilas Press in the Development of Modern Hindi) (Patna: Bihār Rāshrābhāshā Parishad, 1986). The two organizations were linked in a variety of ways; for instance, the Khadgavilas Press printed the magazine of the Arrah branch of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, the *Nagari Hitaishini Patrika*, which started publication in 1904.

\(^91\) *Bihar Bandhu*, September 15, 1901. Nagari, also called Devanagari, was not the only script used for Hindi. Its main rival was Kaithi, whose name reflected its origins among Kayastha scribes, reinforcing its association with Urdu and Persian in the minds of the mostly Brahmin advocates of highly Sanskritized Hindi. See King, *One Language, Two Scripts*, 65–77. Urdu is typically written in a script called nāstaltq that is a modified version of Arabic by way of Persian. Aside from script, it is mainly distinguished from Hindi (by which I mean the Sanskritized *khāṛ bōlt* form promoted by Hindi activists in this era) in that it uses more words of Persian and Arabic origin, where Hindi tends to use words of Sanskrit origin.

\(^92\) By “Urdu words” and “Urdu sounds,” I primarily mean those coming from Persian and Arabic. Although no strict dividing line can be drawn between Urdu and Hindi, some of these words and sounds were, and are, widely thought of as imported from Urdu. Although *Bihar Bandhu* used dots fairly consistently to mark these “foreign” sounds (z, f, q, ǩ, and ǧ), it also frequently printed solecisms like *makhsad* (मखसद) for *maqsad* (मक़सद), “purpose.” See, for example, *Bihar Bandhu*, September 15, 1901. According to Dhirendranāth Singh, “Bihar Bandhu didn’t have any special language policy. The friends of [founder Madan Mohan] Bhatt were mostly inclined toward Urdu, so its language was mainly Urdu and Farsi. Under Pandit Keshavram Bhatt’s editorship, its language was a mixture [khiχṛ], so it could not display the true form of Hindi.” Singh, *Ādhunik Hindī*, 165. For Singh, the “true form of Hindi” is embodied by the Sanskritized approach of the Khadgavilas Press and its ally Bharatendu Harishchandra.
would lead to anarchy. It is worth quoting one of the *Bihar Bandhu's* polemics at length to show how the paper’s concerns and subjectivities interacted with each other:

The boy who, reading *Bharat Mitra*, gets in the habit of saying ‘karjā’ and ‘hājir’—won’t he be considered a bumpkin [gañwār] by his own society? You live in Calcutta, so you’re surrounded by Hindustanis wallowing in the stink of Bengali or Bangla. Whether you say ‘rupaye kī kisht’ or ‘farzī kī qist,’ nobody there will question you, but if you come here and a mistake like that slips out of your mouth, people will mock you immediately. The Urdu partisans’ main objection to the spread of Hindi is that the language will become rustic [gañwārī]. In order to protect Hindi from this rusticity, dots are applied under several letters. These letters have been in use for many decades. To the west and in Bihar, wherever Hindi books are taught or newspapers are printed, this rule is followed. It is surprising that the *Bharat Mitra* wants to break this rule.... It is now being investigated in Bihar whether the local vernacular is Urdu or Hindi; in this context, the partisans of Urdu can point to the *Bharat Mitra* to prove the rusticity of the Hindi language.

The *Bihar Bandhu* argues here that the *Bharat Mitra* is neglecting its didactic obligations. Hindi advocates, like those of other languages, invariably cast newspapers as crucial pedagogic tools. As Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi of the magazine *Saraswati* said, “one can determine how educated and civilized a country is from the number of its newspapers and periodicals.” Not only were newspapers essential for politicizing Hindi readers, but they were also classrooms for

93 Gupta’s argument rested on the fact that dotted letters did not represent the full variety of Urdu characters—for instance, there was only one z in Hindi (formed by putting a dot under j), corresponding to four different zs in Urdu. His argument is somewhat specious, though, given that all four zs (ze, zal, zwād and zoe) are pronounced identically in Urdu. Bālmukund Gupta, “Hindi mēn Bindī” (The Dot in Hindi), in *Bābā Bālmukund Gupta- Nibandhāvalī: Hindī ke Anyatam Nirmātā Swargtya Bābā Bālmukund jit Gupta ke Mukhya Mukhya Lekhoñ aur Kavitāoñ ka Sangrah*, ed. Jhābarmall Sharma and Banārsī Dās Chaturvedi (Delhi: Gaurav Gāthā Sangam, 1994), 149–52. The fact that Gupta had previously been a well-known Urdu writer and editor, contributing to the *Awadh Punch* and other Urdu papers, made these attacks somewhat ironic, though not unusual given that many Hindi advocates, including Harishchandra, shared a background in the Urdu public sphere. Madan Gopal, *Bālmukund Gupta* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1986), 11.

94 These are non-Persianized pronunciations of qarz, “debt,” and hāzir, “present.”

95 The examples given are less and more Persianized ways, respectively, of referring to paying a debt by installments.

96 “Hāth ke Āsakt Mūchh Terhī” (The Twirled Moustache is Fond of the Hand), *Bihar Bandhu*, September 15, 1901.

97 Quoted in Sujata Mody, “Literature, Language, and Nation Formation: The Story of a Modern Hindi Journal 1900-1920” (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2008), 111. Such views were commonplace among the champions of Hindi; see, for example, Harishchandra’s account of English coachmen reading newspapers and discussing politics, quoted in Dalmia, *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, 23.
reformed language. Thus Bharat Mitra’s irresponsible speech endangers its readers’ social status and threatens the entire language’s claims on official patronage.

As the Bihar Bandhu points out, Urdu partisans regularly argued that Hindi was coarse and rustic. Especially in the United Provinces, Hindi activists tended to respond to such aspersions by insisting on the chaste, Sanskritic nature of Hindi, against Urdu’s supposed sensual degeneracy. As Alok Rai has pointed out, this anxious desire “to acquire a desparate urbanity” led Hindi writers to abandon tadbhava vocabulary—those everyday words which were imported neither from Sanskrit nor from Persian or Arabic—in favor of a strained Sanskritization.

Hindi activism in Bihar undoubtedly showed this tendency as well, but in this case a different dynamic is at work. The Bihar Bandhu accepts Urdu’s sophistication and warns not against deviations from Sanskritic purity but from Urdu refinement. To be sure, ideology is present here alongside regionalism: Bihar Bandhu takes the side of the Benares-based Nagari Pracharini Sabha and neglects to acknowledge that Gupta himself came from north India rather than Calcutta. Nevertheless, there is something regionally particular about the framing that Bihar Bandhu chooses. The repeated word gañwār (from gaño, village), connoting stupidity or lack of civilization, casts the imperial metropolis as the site of boorish provinciality, against the sophistication of “the west [i.e., the United Provinces] and Bihar.” More than simply inverting Bihar’s apparent subordination to Calcutta, though, Bihar Bandhu is asserting that, to prove its superiority to Urdu, Hindi must preserve its ability to represent the Persianate inheritance of north India despite the oafish influence of Bengali. The perversity of Bihar Bandhu’s argument is what makes it interesting: plenty of people in Bihar itself were already saying karjā and hājir without ever having been to Calcutta. To blame such pronunciations on Bengali and Bengalis is to paint Patna and Bihar as the true home of Persianate culture, much as the Al-Punch faction haddone during the Nawā-e Watan conflict.

Print and poetry

Urdu publishing thus shared traits, and sometimes participants, with its English and Hindi counterparts, with which it helped make up the increasingly influential print culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though circulations were low, Al-Punch and other papers were critical to structuring and reorganizing communication in what C.A. Bayly calls the north Indian ecumene, the cosmopolitan intellectual networks of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Sanjay Joshi has argued for colonial Lucknow, public activity—both in print and

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98 However, advocates of Sanskritized language often preached more than they practiced. For example, Alok Rai points out that in his Hindi comic paper Brahman, Pratap Narayan Mishra oscillated between a playful polyglossia and a doctrinaire sense of “Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan”—a formula that he originated—that easily bled into anti-Muslim hatred. Alok Rai, “The Possibility of Satire: Reading Pratap Narain Misra’s Brāhmaṇ, 1883–1890,” in Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair, ed. Hans Harder and Barbara Mittler (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 72–73; see also Prabhat Kumar, “From Punch to Matvāla: Transcultural Lives of a Literary Format,” in Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair, ed. Hans Harder and Barbara Mittler (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 82.
99 Other advocates of Hindi were equally aware of this criticism. For instance, in his memoirs, the Nagari Pracharini Sabha leader Shyam Sundar Das bitterly remembered a time when “Hindi speakers were regarded as stupid yokels.” Quoted in King, One Language, Two Scripts, 126.
100 Rai, Hindi Nationalism, 76–82.
101 Like non-Persianized registers of Hindi, Bengali lacked the z, f, q, kh, and gh sounds.
102 Bayly says in passing that the forms of debate typical of the ecumene “persisted in conjunction with the press and new forms of publicity into the age of nationalism”; I would propose that they continue in some ways to the
in the new institutions of civil society—was the mechanism that allowed “relatively insignificant men, primarily, though not exclusively from family background in the ‘service gentry’, to emerge as the arbiters of social, political, and cultural conduct.”

In the case of Al-Punch and other Urdu papers, though, the emergent print culture was inflected by existing institutions, and influenced them in its turn. Bayly identifies several kinds of places, including markets and shrines, that served as important nodes in the ecumene. To these, we must add the central site of Urdu literary culture, the poetry gathering (mushaira or mehfil).

Immediately from its foundation, Al-Punch was embedded in the Urdu literary formation that linked Patna with cities and towns across northern India. The refined—and sometimes rough-and-tumble—culture of the literary assembly provided more than the inspiration and financial support for newspapers like Al-Punch; it bequeathed an ethical and aesthetic, which in turn was reworked in print. As Jürgen Habermas has pointed out, self-recognizing publics often form symbiotic relationships with critical circles. This was certainly the case with Al-Punch; the opportunities it provided for observing, and participating in, aesthetic production and criticism contributed powerfully to its construction of a community of readers and correspondents.

Al-Punch and its contemporaries did not produce critical publics out of a vacuum, however, but built on the existing ecumene of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whose norms were largely set by elites but which allowed some measure of popular participation and critique. While dominated by elite men, institutions like the mushaira were also open to others, including women (especially courtesans) and men of ordinary occupation. The chief qualification was artistic expertise—poets might include barbers and cobblers, although a humble background could expose one to patronizing treatment. Though sponsors might be present, the gatherings were largely under the control of the poets themselves, and included few attendees aside from the participants. As Bayly has argued, however, critical thought and artistic production rarely

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105 As Farhat Hasan has argued, eighteenth-century literary critics were already addressing critical texts beyond the “secluded spaces” of literary reception. Farhat Hasan, “Forms of Civility and Publicness in Pre-British India,” in *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship: Dialogues and Perceptions*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), 98–99.

106 In the twentieth century, however, they expanded and developed a distinction between performers and audience. Audiences continue to respond vigorously during the performance, as listeners had in the earlier mushairas, but expectations of connoisseurship are much lower than before. More intimate gatherings still exist, but are now typically called by other names, including mehfil or nishist. C.M. Naim, “Poet-Audience Interaction at Urdu Musha’iiras,” in *Urdu Texts and Contexts: The Selected Essays of C.M. Naim* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 108–12; Frances Pritchett, “A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part 2: Histories, Performances, and Masters,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 870, 895. A similar expansion of audiences, together with lowered requirements of expertise, has also taken place in other artistic traditions; on a comparable trajectory in qawwālī, or Muslim devotional music, see Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini, “Bund Sama’ (or Closed Audition),” *Islamic Culture* 44, no. 3 (1970); Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, “His Master’s Voice? Exploring Qawwali and ‘Gramophone Culture’ in South Asia,” *Popular Music* 18, no. 1 (1999).
remained isolated within the contexts where they was produced, but moved freely in all
directions within society.107 Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accounts often describe the speed
with which poetry made its way from elite gatherings to the streets and markets. According to the
literary historian Muhammad Husain Azad, for instance, the poems of the eighteenth-century
poet Sauda “used to spread so fast that the moment they were composed they were on the lips of
every child.”108

By the late nineteenth century, the wider availability and lower cost of print had
dramatically intensified and expanded these existing forms of public discourse. As Ulrike Stark
has argued, this revolution in commercial publishing produced “a hitherto unknown general
access to the products of written culture among literate audiences,” so that “knowledge was no
longer the preserve of small elites but expanded into the public realm.”109 Readers were vividly
conscious of this transformation: one Zaman Kaftori wrote in 1906 that “great benefit has come
about from periodicals and newspapers, so that within many hearts the discussion of critical
writing takes place, which is unprecedented.”110 As Kaftori suggests, the explosion of print
entailed a new critical subjectivity on the part of individuals and also their awareness of
belonging to a community of readers.

This community undoubtedly shared much with Benedict Anderson’s “imagined
communities,” including a sense of simultaneity and commonality among people who would
never meet.111 The community invoked by a newspaper like *Al-Punch* was imagined somewhat
differently, however, from those described by Anderson. Certainly, none of *Al-Punch’s* readers
knew all of their fellow-readers, and the paper took pains to remind readers of parallel
communities living in other cities and reading other papers. But its small circulation and its
entwinement with local literary life meant that many readers did, in fact, know a substantial
number of their fellows; moreover, they were reminded of this fact by the paper’s constant
demands for particular readers’ written and monetary contributions. Thus, the imagined
communities of various scales summoned up by *Al-Punch*, urban as well as regional and
national, were inseparable from a real, local, community in which many of its participants
continued to interact.

The relationship between an intimate network of friends and acquaintances and the wider
reading public was, however, undoubtedly shifting. The rapid growth of Urdu publishing in the
late nineteenth century entailed not only an expanded reading audience, but also a radical
widening of opportunities for expression. Just as the power to speak on and for religion became
increasingly available to those without traditionally sanctioned authority, so the multiplication of
venues for publishing opened literary production to new groups.112 Even when participants came

107 Bayly, *Empire and Information*, chap. 5.
110 Zaman Kaftori, writing in *Zamana*, April 6, 1906; quoted (with slightly different punctuation) in Perkins, “From
the *Mehfil* to the Printed Word,” 51.
111 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York:
112 Two classic treatments of the reconfiguration of authority within Indian Islam are Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic
Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Francis Robinson,
229–51. On the entry of nonelite groups into Bengali writing and publishing, see Anindita Ghosh, *Power in
from historically educated groups, which was largely the case with the readers and contributors of *Al-Punch*, the proliferation of printing, and of the cheap, accessible publications that followed, meant that publication and dissemination were vastly more accessible. Nonetheless, papers like *Al-Punch* provided unprecedented platforms for readers wishing to become writers, whether they hoped to report on local events, or to comment on art and politics, or to test their poetic prowess.

*Al-Punch* continually printed poems, both serious and comic, and reports from mushairas in and outside of Patna. Such literary interests were typical of Urdu newspapers; the *Awadh Akhbar*, for instance, did the same, and also hosted mushairas at its offices. The personal relations and traditional networks structuring the world of mushairas were easily adapted to print. For instance, Shad Azimabadi grumbles in a 1901 letter that despite his considerable renown, he is having trouble being published in any newspaper or *guldasta* (poetry magazine), because the press is dominated by the disciples of Nawab Mirza Khan “Dagh,” of Delhi, and of Amir Minai “Amir,” of Lucknow.

But beyond merely reproducing and recording the largely oral culture of poetry, newspapers like *Al-Punch* provided new routes into public culture. At the same time as Shad complains that his poetic lineage is interfering with his access to the press, he rejects the *guldastas* that are too open, publishing even the verses of prostitutes. But the accessibility that affronted Shad’s sense of propriety was an invitation for someone like the thirteen-year-old boy signing himself Abul Kalam Muhiuddin Ahmad “Azad” Dihlavi, later known as the scholar and Congress leader Maulana Azad, who contributed a long and self-confident report on a Calcutta mushaira in 1902. The young Azad was a prodigy, but it was through the mediation of print that he was able to project such erudition, at so early an age, that on meeting him in Lahore in 1904, the poet Hali thought that he must be meeting Azad’s son.

The resources of Urdu literary culture were part of what enabled a paper like *Al-Punch* to transcend the limits of its location to attract a widely dispersed community of both readers and writers, so that, in this case, a writer labeling himself a Dehliite was writing from Calcutta to a paper in Patna, while being read in Lahore. The union of poetic culture with print was neither a lingering archaism nor a transitional phase on the way to properly political media, but rather an enduring symbiosis: the culture of the mushaira changed permanently as private gatherings became fodder for public comment, and lively feuilleton sections remain integral parts of many Urdu newspapers.

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115 Ibid., 38. Shad uses the word *ranđī* (whore), rather than *tawāf* (courtesan).

116 Badruddin Ahmad gives his age as thirteen, but he may have been fourteen at the time. The next year, *Al-Punch* wrote in praise and encouragement of Azad’s new magazine, *Lisān us-Sidq* (*The Language of Truth*, Calcutta). Ahmad, *Haqīqat Bht Kāhānt Bht*, 461–65; *Al-Punch*, November 7, 1903.


118 Delhi is *Dīhlī* (also *Dēhlī* or *Dillī*) in Urdu, so a Delhīite is a Dihlavī.

119 The *Paisa Akhbar* (Lahore, founded 1887) is sometimes cited as marking the emergence in Urdu of a modern, empiricist model of the news. Ulrike Stark points out, though, that the magnitude of this shift is often exaggerated, and that Urdu papers’ literary interests continued. Stark, *Empire of Books*, 352n.
Give and take

*Al-Punch* took seriously its role as a medium for critical thought and publicity, regularly printing lengthy scholarly essays on Patna poets, as well as polemics when contributors felt that one poet or another had been wrongly evaluated. One series of articles in 1905 harkened back to the original tension between *Al-Punch* and Shad Azimabadi. Twenty years after the enmity between Shad and Fazl-e Haq Azad had been kindled, an article in the Lahore literary magazine *Makhzan* compared Shad to Indra, the king of the Hindu gods, and praised him and Azad as “old trees” who stood as wise exemplars for the “young saplings” among the magazine’s contributors.120 A flurry of pieces in *Al-Punch*, some unsigned and some written by Azad, took objection to Azad’s subordination to Shad, and to the implication that Azad’s poetry was out of date.121 It was true, the paper acknowledged, that it had treated Shad harshly in the past, but “what can be done—the era was like that.” And in any case, Shad’s poetry had been immeasurably improved by *Al-Punch*’s critiques, and today what mattered was securing Azad’s rights as a poet of the same caliber as Shad.122 But *Al-Punch* never spoke with only one voice. In the midst of this onslaught, the paper ran an opposing view, arguing that when Azad had “unjustly assailed [or erased] Shad,” he had degraded himself more than anyone else.123

The article also pointed to the keen interest that such debates inspired, observing that, “wherever you go in the city, people are talking about this.”124 This was a crucial role that *Al-Punch* played: along with original and translated poetry, criticism, reports on mushairas, and poetic obituaries (*qita-e tārīkh-e wafāt*) for writers, the paper kept readers abreast of literary news from Calcutta to Lahore.125 All different genres of books were reviewed: translated Turkish and American novels, histories and etiquette guides, medical and agricultural manuals—even railway timetables and a geography card game. With rare exceptions, these reviews were complimentary, and paid close attention not only to the quality of the writing and thinking, but also to paper and printing quality.

*Al-Punch* situated its reviews geographically, introducing authors by town and neighborhood and explaining how to obtain their books. These notices are telling indices of the ways that print tied together the archipelago of cities and qasbas that made up the Urdu world. For instance, one review asks, “what gentleman of taste is unfamiliar with the honorable ‘Taslim’ Lakhnavi?” It goes on to praise a biography of this Lucknow poet as a “composition of Purab”

121 This series of attacks ran from September 28, 1905 to January 4, 1906.
122 Nazīr, “Makhzan Sabhā,” *Al-Punch*, September 28, 1905. According to two scholars, Shad composed the following couplet in gratitude for the corrections he had received: “They told me, tread the path carefully; / May God reward, O Shad, the nags.” (“Batā diyā mujhe bach bach ke rāsta chalnā / Khudā bhalā kare e Shād nukta-chtoñī kā.”) Nayyar, Fazl-e Haq Āzād Bahaiyiat-e Nazm-Nigar, 4; Ahmad, Haqīqat Bḥt Kḥānt Bḥt, 461. However, the couplet is also open to a more sardonic reading.
123 “Āzād ne Shād ko Nā-Haq Miṭāyā” (Azad Unjustly Effered Shad), *Al-Punch*, November 2, 1905.
124 Another example of *Al-Punch*’s commitment to detailed discussions of individual poets is the series on the early nineteenth-century Patna poet Ghulam Ali “Rasikh,” which reprinted his poems with commentary and ran from February 14, 1903 to May 16, 1903.
125 *Al-Punch* was appreciative of translation efforts, prefacing one poem (reprinted from the *Calcutta University Magazine*) with the comment, “the translation of an English poem [nazm] into an Urdu poem? There’s just as much pleasure in the translation as in the original poem.” *Al-Punch*, December 20, 1906. For another example, see *Al-Punch*, August 2, 1902. The *Bihar Bandhu* was similarly encouraging of poetic translations, praising Shivnandan Sahay’s transcreations of Tennyson, Homer, and Wordsworth on September 15, 1901, and publishing two similar transcreations (mislabeled as ghazals) on April 20, 1901.
that proves that the author, “our kind and special correspondent, Munshi Zamiruddin Ahmad sāhib ‘Arsh,’ from muhalla Karimganj, Gaya,” has a right to call himself Taslim’s disciple (shāgīrd). Finally, the review directs purchasers to the author and to the owner of the Public Book Agency, Lahore.¹²⁶ Another book, written by a disciple of “our city’s skillful doctor, Janab Maulana Hakim Abdul Hamid sahib” and published by “our city’s famous bookseller, Hafiz Dost Muhammad sahib from muhalla Ghat Khwaja Kalan, Patna City,” is recommended over its many competitors as a source of plague cures.¹²⁷ In each of these cases, the book’s value is established by locating it within a cultural and social network. When local figures were concerned, the normal rules of inclusion could even be stretched, so that when the Patna notable Sarfaraz Hussain Khan wrote a volume called Rulers and the Ruled, Al-Punch took it under its purview, even though it was in English.¹²⁸

Always mindful of distant audiences alongside its strong local allegiances, Al-Punch reviewed and advertised publications from places like Gorakhpur, Bareilly, and Hyderabad. Its sense of responsibility for maintaining open exchange was all the stronger when it came to the margins of the Urdu public sphere. Commenting on Al-Mashriq, a new magazine from Dhaka publishing “Islamic, literary, ethical, and historical essays,” Al-Punch said, “since this is the only Urdu magazine of East Bengal, we hope that the literati [ahl-e qalam] of our province will also help Al-Mashriq with their own essays.”¹²⁹ This passion for exchange extended to the wider intellectual sphere. On another occasion, an article on the history of Muslims in Bihar led up to an appeal on behalf of a historian in the nearby town of Danapur, who was chronicling Bihar’s Islamic scholars: “he has already finished the accounts of about 700 clerics.... Oh, nobles and elders of the nation..., please help the laudable maulana by taking a little effort to send an account of the clerics in your family.”¹³⁰

Al-Punch was equally aware of how its own words were circulating. Following a trend of the day, in 1903 the paper had begun publishing a monthly guldasta, or “bouquet,” a kind of printed mushaira composed of poems readers submitted on an assigned pattern.¹³¹ According to

¹²⁶ Al-Punch, July 19 and 26, 1902. Munshi Zamiruddin was typical in contributing to Al-Punch and simultaneously having his writing reviewed. Another example is Munsha Kundan Lal “Sharar” Saharanpuri, who is addressed as a contributor in the issue of March 7, 1903, a few pages after a glowing review of his Theosophical masnavī (epic poem).
¹²⁷ Al-Punch, June 14, 1902.
¹²⁸ Al-Punch, November 8, 1902.
¹²⁹ Al-Punch, December 6, 1906. Long before the separation of Bihar and Orissa from the Bengal Presidency in 1912, writers regularly referred to Bihar as a province (sūba in Urdu, and prānt in Hindi). However, Al-Punch also made references to “our suba of Bengal.” Al-Punch, February 6, 1904.
¹³⁰ Al-Punch, May 17, 1906.
¹³¹ On guldastas and their relation to the tazkira genre (discussed in chapter 6), see Bal Mukund Gupta, “Māsik Patra” (Monthlies), in Bābā Bālmukund Gupta-Nibandhāvalī: Hindī ke Anyamāt Nirmātā Swargīya Bābā Bālmukund ji Gupta ke Mukhya Mukhya Lekhoñ aur Kavitāoñ kā Sangrah, ed. Jhābarmall Sharma and Banārsī Dās Chaturvedi (Delhi: Gaurav Gāthā Sangam, 1994), 291; Nadir Ali Khan, A History of Urdu Journalism (1822-1857) (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 2009), 192–94; Pritchett, Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics, 34–35. A similar genre existed in Hindi, as well: Hindi poetry gatherings modelled on mushairas, called kavi sammelans, sometimes published poems matching a particular fragment or “problem” (samasya). The Patna Kavi Samaj (Patna Poets’ Society) published a magazine called Samasyapurtī, under the leadership of the head priest of the Harmandir gurudwara, of Ramdin Singh, the publisher of the Khadgavilas Press, and of Shivnandan Sahay. The magazine printed poems by contributors from all over Bihar and from as far as Agra in the west and Mymensingh in the east. Most of its contributors were Brahmin and Kayastha men, but Muslims and women
Badruddin Ahmad, this guldasta, called Bihar, was regarded with some surprise because, although Al-Punch was known for its hostility to Shad Azimabadi, Bihar was unusual in disregarding cliquishness entirely.132 The new guldasta seems to have gotten a negative review from the Vakil newspaper in Amritsar, which alleged that poetry had ruined the Muslim nation, or qaum. Despite the distance involved—about 750 miles—Al-Punch took umbrage at the attack on what it called “Asian” poetry, and retaliated for a month with articles like “The Amritsar Vakil Newspaper: Our Tasty and Zesty ‘Review’ of Its Bitter and Sour ‘Review’.”133 Just as Al-Punch acted as a gatekeeper, critic, and cheerleader for other entrants into the public sphere, it was anxious that its own words and ideas should be well received, no matter how far from its home territory. This was particularly true when its high-spirited tone met with resistance.

Al-Punch’s entwinement with other newspapers went much deeper than simple encouragement or opposition. Reporting and commenting on events was not adequate in itself; the proper role of a newspaper included active commentary on other papers’ representations. Short and long articles, mostly from Urdu papers but also from English papers like the Behar Herald and the Amrita Bazar Patrika, would be reprinted, quoted, summarized, and analyzed. Al-Punch encouraged other papers to reciprocate: when the Etawah paper Al-Bashir reprinted the first installment of an article on mysticism, Al-Punch drew its colleague’s attention to the second part of the story, saying, “in our opinion this article is worthy of being reprinted by our very dear contemporaries, especially in the valuable columns of Al-Bashir, to banish the misconceptions of educated gentlemen about Sufism.”134

Colonial officials derided these intertextual practices, complaining that “of originality there is little, and a great proportion of the articles are simply reproduced from other papers in an exaggerated and highly coloured form. A common plan is to invent an imaginary opposition and then to knock it down like a kind of Aunt Sally with a shout of self-congratulation.”135 What was at stake here, for both publishers and irritated officials, was not just editorial laziness and the need to fill column-inches, but the promotion of a self-aware public. Contributors writing for their own pleasure could have the satisfaction of writing, not for five hundred readers, but for perhaps five thousand. And by recognizing allies and enemies, and if necessary creating them, a paper could appeal to external authority and strengthen a network of sympathetic authors.136 Al-Punch welcomed Abdul Halim “Sharar”’s new biweekly, Ittihad, as a votary of communal amity,
saying, “our newspaper has the same policy. But now that we’ve found a like-minded contemporary, we will begin to work with greater interest.” Other articles assumed as a matter of course that readers would be aware of the news from beyond Bihar, so that a correspondent from Lucknow begins an account of Shia-Sunni conflict by saying, “Maulana Al-Punch! ‘Good morning!’ Sitting where you are, you must already be hearing the tale of the discord [nā-ītifāqī kī dāstān] in our Lucknow.”

Readers were repeatedly reminded of their position relative to Al-Punch and to its community. Patna was “here,” and other papers and authors were referred to as ham-asr, or “contemporary.” The sense of simultaneity and proximity promoted by such language added immediacy to readers’ experience of listening through others’ ears and to their awareness and hope that their hearers would imagine yet other hearers. Al-Punch was set up not only as a medium for conversation, but also as a participant. It spoke and was spoken to, not as a disembodied authority, but as a concrete and lively interlocutor. Contributions would begin with comic bouts of stammering, or with a breathless, “Maulana Al-Punch! Have you heard?” In a sense, then, contributions were always overheard; each reader was complicit with his fellows in eavesdropping on their mutual friend, the Maulana.

This conversational air was not purely imaginary: larded with rhyme, onomatopoeia, and propulsive rhythms, articles would beg to be read aloud. Farina Mir refers to such elements, appearing in Punjabi story literature, as “protocols of orality” meant to guide oral performances of printed texts. Drawing on Charles Hirschkind’s concept of “soundscapes,” she suggests that “engaging in a highly refined practice of listening such as sama’ [ritual listening to song] might have similarly produced ties that helped the Punjabi literary formation cohere.” Naturally, a newspaper like Al-Punch could not be performed as straightforwardly as the romances Mir describes. However, both prosaic and poetic elements of Al-Punch drew on oral antecedents—storytelling traditions as well as poetic assemblies—and could reappropriate the aesthetics of oral performance. The habits of the mehfil or mushaira were easily transferred to Al-Punch, where borders between reading and writing, poetry and prose, humor and gravity were all mutable and reading could take on aspects of eavesdropping, gossip, or shared merrymaking.

Readers’ involvement with the paper, and with each other, went beyond simply subscribing through the mail: Al-Punch invited, rewarded, and even demanded engagement. All the playful terms of address that correspondents used—Qazi Al-Punch, Mahatma Al-Punch, Khan Bahadur

137 Al-Punch, July 9, 1904.
138 Al-Punch, May 24, 1906.
140 Mir, Social Space of Language, 91–92, 107.
Al-Punch—served to focus the paper’s humorous charisma into the figure of Punch. Articles that were not submitted by contributors came unsigned and untitled, encouraging readers to identify the anonymous author as the paper itself (a convention I have followed here). This conceit, that *Al-Punch* was an embodied confidant—a recipient, as well as a source, of information and humor—invested the paper and the community it created with an intimacy that inspired loyalty and zeal. Contributors would even write poems of praise:

*It gives joy to its lovers, the Bihar Al-Punch,*
*The enemies of Al-Punch are the prey of Al-Punch.*

... 

*Should I call it a rose of Al-Punch or a rose of Paradise?*
*It’s no less than a heaven, the country of Al-Punch.*

... 

*Curing the ills of the nation and serving its homeland,*
*Oh, my heart and soul, you’re a sacrifice to Al-Punch.*

*I pray to the Creator at dawn and dusk,*
*For the progress, night and day, of Al-Punch.*

This devotional idiom encouraged contributions of money as much as of writing. Like most of its contemporaries, *Al-Punch* was constantly anxious about finances. Notices regularly appeared encouraging readers to pay the agent making the rounds of Bihar’s various districts, saying, “*Īd mubārak* to our admirers and the purchasers of *Al-Punch,* but please remember the Maulana a bit, too.” Those who paid up were listed each month under the heading “*jhanājhan kā shukriya*”—perhaps best translated as “Thanks for the Cha-Ching.” On the other hand, the paper explained, it was forced to handle defaulters strictly, and to cross out their names “like misspelled words—good riddance to bad rubbish.”

Although these subscription lists are clearly incomplete, they do give a useful sense of the paper’s readership. Of the 118 individuals whose information I have, about 15% have Hindu names—most of these Bihari Kayasthas—and the rest are Muslim. As Table 1 illustrates, the

142 Bāligh ul-Mulk Azmābādī, “Bihār Al-Punch,” *Al-Punch,* November 29, 1906. Part of the pleasure of the original ghazal comes from the poet’s play with the Arabic prefix *al-* , which forms the possessive in some of these cases, but I have kept the name *Al-Punch* for consistency. It would also be possible to read “the Bihar Al-Punch” as “Al-Punch’s Bihar.” The words I have translated as homeland (watan) and nation (qaum) are complex. Watan typically refers to a fairly circumscribed native place; while qaum can refer to Muslims or to India, among other things. Faisal Devji argues that Aligarh intellectuals in the late nineteenth century defined the qaum as a community of elite north Indian Muslims occupying an “imagined space situated at an angle to the sovereignty of the state”; see Faisal Devji, “A Shadow Nation: The Making of Muslim India,” in *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, c. 1880–1950*, ed. Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 126; see also S. Akbar Zaidi, “Contested Identities and the Muslim *Qaum* in Northern India: c. 1860-1900” (Ph.D., University of Cambridge, 2008).

143 *Al-Punch,* February 8, 1906.

144 The *Awadh Akhbar* did the same, under the heading “List of Receipts.” Stark, *Empire of Books,* 358–59.

145 *Al-Punch,* August 31, 1905. The phrase used is *khas kam jahān pāk,* that is, the fewer the twigs, the purer the earth.

146 Members of the Kayastha caste were historically engaged in scribal work and closely involved with Persian and Urdu literary production. These figures do not include the copies sent to the government translator or to C.K. Sen and Co., the leading manufacturer of prepared Ayurvedic medicines. On C.K. Sen and Co., see Brahmananda Gupta, “Indigenous Medicine in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Bengal,” in *Asian Medical Systems: A
largest numbers are listed as noblemen (rausā) or landholders, but there were also good numbers of lawyers and doctors. Court employees, policemen, and students nearly rounded out the numbers. Table 2 offers a different way of reading the subscriber list, through readers’ titles and honorifics. Nearly half of the subscribers are given the title of maulvī, or in a few cases, mullā or maulānā, indicating their high attainment in Islamic scholarship. Almost another quarter are called munshī, also indicating their training within a Persianate model of education, and several more are called hakīm, qāzī, hāfiz, or hājī, marking various achievements of piety or learning.147

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aristocrat (raīs)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Maulvī, Mulla, or Maulana</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landholder (zamīndār)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Munshi</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer (barrister)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hakim</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer (vakīl)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hafiz</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer (mukhtār)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Qazi</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court deputy (peshkār)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Haji</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court clerk (muharrīr)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious leader (sajjāda nashīn or muhtāmim-e madarsa)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pandit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor (doctor, hakīm, or surgeon)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nawab</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policeman (sub-inspector, constable, or head constable)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Khan Bahadur, Rai, or Rai Bahadur</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student (student or tālīb ul-ilm)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Honorary magistrate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant (saūdāgar)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtesan (tawāīf)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orderly (chaprāsī)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Occupations of Al-Punch subscribers.148

Most of Al-Punch’s readers thus belonged to the landed and professional elites, linked with the old order by birth and training; these included a number of prominent Patna citizens, like Shad Azimabadi and Sayyid Khurshid Nawab, as well as men like Shah Muinuddin Ahmad, the spiritual inheritor (sajjāda nashīn) of a Sufi hospice in Sahasram. Others, though, were more ambiguously positioned. Bi Nazir Jan “Nazir” was a courtesan in the employ of the Darbhanga estate; Munshi Tarab Ali was a police constable (and later a head constable) in Gaya; and Munshi Zahurul Haq was an orderly (chaprāsī) in Samastipur.150


148 In each subscriber’s case, either no occupation, or more than one, might be listed.

149 I have left out honorifics like Mr., janāb, sāhib, and bābā, which simply mark respect (and, in the last case, usually indicate that the bearer is a Hindu). In some cases, a subscriber was referred to by more than one title or honorific; in others, a designation to which a subscriber was entitled was omitted.

150 The audience for Al-Punch resembles those of other well-known Urdu papers. For instance, in 1875 the Awadh Akhbar acknowledged payments made by a number of rausā, tālīqārs, and princely rulers, but also merchants, pleaders, government servants, library secretaries, policemen, and a schoolteacher. Stark, Empire of Books, 358–59.
The subscriber rolls also reflect the geography of *Al-Punch*’s readership, which was clustered in Patna and the surrounding area. About 40% of *Al-Punch*’s subscribers were in Patna or its vicinity, and another 10% lived elsewhere in Patna district; altogether, almost 85% were in Bihar, with the remainder scattered throughout India (see Map 1). However, just as the paper’s readership was socially more diverse than it first appeared, so its circulation reached farther than this concentration in Bihar might suggest. Many far-off contributors didn’t appear in the subscriber lists, perhaps because they were excused from payment in exchange for enhancing the paper’s distant connections. In particular, people wrote regularly from Lucknow, Calcutta, and Lahore, as well as from Peshawar, Ajmer, and Hyderabad. In one case, *Al-Punch* even hosted a dispute between two well-known Lahoris. While noting that “it would be more appropriate to send it to one of Lahore’s local papers,” *Al-Punch* published a long open letter from Muharram Ali Chishti, in Ayesha Jalal’s words “the disputatious editor of the *Rafiq-i-Hind,*” lambasting Lala Lajpat Rai for communal rhetoric.151 Presumably, Chishti also wrote to papers closer to home, but 800 miles away, the largely Muslim readers of *Al-Punch* must have been a valuable audience for an attack on Punjab’s communally polarized politics.

Map 1. Locations of *Al-Punch* subscribers.152

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152 This map excludes 15 subscribers whose locations are not given, as well as the Government translator in Calcutta. The 43 subscribers shown as living in Patna include 14 in Bankipur, 12 in Patna City, and 17 simply listed as living in Patna. One subscriber living in Danapur is marked separately.
Al-Punch’s finances were typical of an era when, as A.R. Venkatachalapathy has shown for Tamil Nadu, older models of courtly patronage were no longer tenable, but texts were not yet sold entirely as commodities or supported by advertising.\(^{153}\) Both Al-Punch and its poetic offshoot, Bihar, charged on a sliding scale. The general public (awām) paid Rs. 6 annually for Al-Punch, with Patnaites paying a rupee less than those in the mofussil, and two rupees’ discount for students.\(^{154}\) While not trivial, this rate was fairly affordable for a white-collar readership; by comparison, a few years later a college student in “straitened circumstances” spent more on betel and cigarettes than a subscription would have cost him.\(^{155}\) Unlike several contemporaries, Al-Punch did not have any one primary patron, but it did ask the rich (rausā-o-umrā) to subsidize poor and middle-class readers by paying as much as their “generosity and courage” demanded.\(^{156}\) To complaints from the other end of the economic spectrum, the paper pointed out that multiple people read each copy.\(^{157}\) Some subscribed on behalf of libraries and clubs, like Munshi Wahid, the assistant secretary of a public library in Darbhanga district; others, like Maulvi Sayyid Muhammad Abdul Naim Desnavi, a student of Tej Narayan College in Bhagalpur (and a native of qasba Desna), doubtless shared Al-Punch with their friends. Such practices were common—not only did friends and family members pass papers around, but papers also traveled through multiple hands via the post.\(^{158}\) Besides, Al-Punch added in its own defense, “what can we say? The difference between us and our cheaper competitors is that our essays are true and theirs are false.”\(^{159}\)

Money was never the paper’s only concern, however. Rather, its commercial viability was portrayed as subordinate to its aesthetic and social vitality. This attitude comes through in a poem


154. Shorter terms, and even individual issues, were also available, at somewhat higher rates.

155. This student, who attended the Bhumihar Brahmin College in Muzaffarpur, met his expenses by working as a tutor. He spent 7 annas monthly on betel and cigarettes, or Rs. 5/4/- annually. Patna College Chanakya Society, *Family Budgets, Collected by Members of the Patna College Chanakya Society, 1910-1913* (Bankipore: The Beharee Press, n.d. [1913]), 27–29.

156. Al-Punch, September 14, 1900, and October 4, 1902. Most important Patna papers had patrons: the Bihar Bandhu’s revival in 1901, after a fallow period, was patronized by the lawyer Saligram Singh and the Maharaja of Gidhaur; in the next decade, the Express (English) and the Pataliputra (Hindi) were supported by the Darbhanga and Hathwa estates, and the Beharee (both English and Hindi editions) by the Banaili estate. Bihar Bandhu, July 20, 1901; The Behar Times, August 2, 1901; Bihar State Archives (BSA), Government of Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special Section, 178 of 1914. For a helpful summary of newspaper patronage, see James Hagen, “Indigenous Society, the Political Economy, and Colonial Education in Patna District” (Ph.D., University of Virginia, 1981), 415n; Hagen’s information is drawn from N. Kumar, *Journalism in Bihar* (Patna: Government of Bihar, 1971).

157. Al-Punch, November 28, 1903.

158. Referring to the Awadh Akhbar, Ulrike Stark says, “that the paper also enjoyed growing popularity among those sections of society who could not afford to subscribe to a newspaper regularly is borne out by the quaint testimony of a correspondent... who, writing from Hoshangabad in 1874, complained of the common malpractice of servants of the post office who were in the habit of opening the covers of the paper addressed to him. Not only did they read it themselves, they circulated it among their friends, on which account the paper reached him very late.” Stark, *Empire of Books*, 360–61.

159. Al-Punch, November 28, 1903.
by Ishrat Lakhnavi, titled “Maulana Al-Punch’s ‘Appeal,’” which admonishes negligent readers to render the paper its due:

Why did you buy the paper?
Why did you spill the blood of the talented?
If you weren’t interested at all,
You should have ordered a headache.

...
Oh, how we make you laugh and cry,
That’s our job twenty-four hours a day.

...
If you don’t pay the price, then you’ll be disgraced,
This price will redeem your half-stained spirit.160

Ishrat’s hectoring poem illustrates the link between commerce and commitment. To be sure, readers must contribute their money, lest they be disgraced. But they are not merely participants in a commercial transaction: if they pay money but not attention, Ishrat tells them, they are no better than murderers of the talented. This attitude was in keeping with Al-Punch’s general approach: it recognized the economic value of cultivating affection, but also the ways that affection helped form an intimate public. Dependent as it was on submissions from often distant contributors, the paper constantly addressed them: “E.J. Bhagalpuri, keep trying”; “A.B., congratulations; your essay will be published”; “‘Shor’ Bihari, write useful things”; “‘Nazim,’ your ghazal is being edited.” Al-Punch pouted when it received too few letters; and when contributors were tardy, it chided them.161

Intimacy also demands discipline. Al-Punch was open to a wide range of topics and opinions, but not to an unlimited public. As in the mushairas where Al-Punch readers met, certain criteria had to be met, whether of literary attainment, social status, or personal acquaintance. And just as poets would meet and quote the evening’s poetry after the mushaira candle was extinguished, Al-Punch similarly fostered a community where intellectual and social relationships were closely linked. The paper took advantage of Patna’s small size to address readers individually, often presuming that they knew each other.162 Those who failed to fully join the paper’s community were unwelcome: in addition to publicly shaming those who were delinquent in sending articles or money, Al-Punch repeatedly announced that anonymous submissions would go straight into the trash.163 Other papers had similar policies, and conversely

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160 “Kharīdā kis liye akhābār tum ne / Behlāyā khaṅ ahl-e hunr kā // Agar dilchaspiyāṅ ūs se na ihtīn kuchh / Tō mangvāṅā hī thā ik dard sar kā // ... // Hansāte haiṅ rālāte haiṅ kaise ham / Yāhāṅ yeh shughl hai āṭhun pahr kā // ... // Na doge dām to bādnām hoge / Yeh dar ntm dāgh bakhshega jīgar kā.” Ishrat Lakhnavī, “Maulānā Al-Punch ki Appeal,” Al-Punch, October 4, 1906.

161 See Al-Punch, July 27, September 7, and December 27, 1900, among others.

162 In this regard, Al-Punch resembled the masculine “flash press” of 1840s New York. Like Al-Punch, papers like the Flash and the Whip addressed themselves to a much smaller and less anonymous public than did the satirical London papers that had inspired them. While these papers’ lower-class readership and frank discussions of sex distinguish them markedly from Al-Punch, they similarly gained much of their appeal by cultivating a sense of community through the enthusiastic participation of an individuated readership. Patricia Cline Cohen, Timothy J. Gilfoyle, and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, The Flash Press: Sporting Male Weeklies in 1840s New York (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 27.

163 Al-Punch, October 4, 1906, for instance. It is possible that, since authors were commonly identified by pen-name
would sometimes accept otherwise inadequate submissions because of personal ties. Before a long and dull letter in the _Bihar Bandhu_, for instance, the editor inserted a note saying, “because the writer of this letter is known to be a good man [nek ādmī], it is being printed.”

The discipline of _Al-Punch_ was partly oriented around questions of offense—not, for the most part, the weighty questions of communal relations and political critique that motivated activists and government censors, but the more mundane forms of offense that could disrupt a virtual public. This project was all the more delicate given the balance that _Al-Punch_ sought to strike between local particularity and cosmopolitan generality. So when one Babu Karopaddya complained about a caricatured Bengali _babū_ character who showed up speaking silly Urdu in a piece titled “Entertaining Travelogue,” the paper was quick to defend itself against his charge that they had mocked him specifically.

Our paper’s true admirer, Babu Karopaddya sahib, landholder [zamīndār] and nobleman [raîs] of Rajgir (Bihar), has gotten the suspicion, or some madman has planted the suspicion, that the Babu Hasiru in the “Entertaining Travelogue” in a previous issue of _Al-Punch_ is our own Babu Karopaddya himself, and that the essay is by someone from Shaikhpura. But this isn’t so; our Babu’s suspicion is absolutely wrong.... Our admirer the Babu Sahib unjustly shows his temper.

It is unsurprising that _Al-Punch_ couldn’t please all the people all the time, but it is notable that it seems to have felt an obligation to acknowledge this failure publicly. Of course, one reason _Al-Punch_ might have been so solicitous toward Babu Karopaddya is out of fear of losing a customer; on that count, its efforts to mollify him seem successful, since he renewed his subscription a year later. Aside from this pragmatic reason, though, when _Al-Punch_ acknowledged the dissonances within its community, it was able to represent itself as a public institution: a venue for diverse views, rather than an authoritative monolith; and an impartial force for reform, rather than a platform for personal enmity.

This beneficent air was critical to the production of _Al-Punch_’s public. But the multivocality with which it produced that demeanor could also provoke anxiety. After all, when lighthearted texts like the “Entertaining Travelogue” were juxtaposed with political commentary and news reportage, it was unclear whether criticism and mockery was aimed at individuals or at entire groups or, indeed, which of these was worse. These anxieties were particularly heightened when articles touched on community membership, whether in the context of tension between Biharis and Bengalis, as in the case of Babu Karopaddya, or between Hindus and Muslims, as in the case of an article on cow protection that drew angry criticism from a Hindu reader in 1906. By casting the offending piece as ethnic parody rather than personal invective, the paper

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164 _Bihar Bandhu_, March 20, 1874. Along the same lines, Ryan Perkins cites an occasion when the _Awadh Punch_ “explained that although [it] does not generally publish these types of be namak (‘bland’) articles, ‘because this article came with a recommendation letter from a good friend it was published.’” Perkins, “From the _Mehfil_ to the Printed Word,” 66.

165 “Mazedār Safarnāma,” _Al-Punch_, June 25, 1904.

166 _Al-Punch_, July 16, 1904.

167 _Al-Punch_, August 3, 1905.

168 _Al-Punch_, June 7, 1906.
encouraged Babu Karopaddya and other readers to understand themselves as members of a broad public, but one that now assumed clearer ethnoregional boundaries. As Michael Warner says in a similar context, “individual readers who participate in this discourse learn to place themselves, as characterized types, in a world of urbane social knowledge, while also ethically detaching themselves from the particular interests that typify them, turning themselves into the reading subjects of a widely circulating form.” At the same time, though, Al-Punch’s readers and writers were routinely addressed as individuals, and identified by status and location. The public of Al-Punch was undoubtedly dispersed and mediated, but it was also intimate.

**Mobile genres**

Unlike many of its contemporaries, Al-Punch was neither driven by a single goal, nor did it represent any individual or established social body. A congeries of influences and concerns, it reveled in versatility and hybridity. The figure of Maulana Al-Punch provided a symbolic focus for the imaginative work of suturing together the paper’s public and unifying divergent impulses. He was a reminder that Al-Punch belonged to the global Punch genre, while also representing the ease with which such forms could migrate and mutate, absorbing and discarding elements at will. As Vasudha Dalmia says of the dialogues starring Punch that ran in Bharatendu Harishchandra’s Hindi magazine Kavivachansudha in the 1870s, “raucous and impious, clown and man-about-town, usually at odds with authority, he has a lineage which goes far back in European tradition.... He was to fuse yet again in the Indian context with the vidūsha tradition of Sanskrit drama, but also, by virtue of the similarity of name, with the Pañch of the village judiciary [i.e., the sarpanch]. Hariśchandra’s Pañch had then both the irreverence of the clown and the authority of the village judge.”

The most famous Punch paper in the world was, of course, *Punch, or, the London Charivari*. Itself modeled on a Paris paper, *Le Charivari*, Punch had been an immensely popular and commercially successful magazine since its inception in 1841. Papers from Denmark to Japan soon took up the *Punch* name, especially in British colonies like Hong Kong and Australia and, most of all, India. These papers varied widely in style, politics, and audience, and often shared nothing but the Punch name and, sometimes, the figure of Punch himself. Rather than following a fixed model or mimicking their ancestors, Punch papers were participants in a fluid genre structured by a satiric and playful style.

In this respect, the Punch genre shared much with another itinerant urban genre, the “mysteries” novels popularized by George W.M. Reynolds. From the 1840s, Reynolds’s melodramatic tales of urban life were read and translated around the world, perhaps most voraciously in India. Seemingly everywhere that Reynolds was read, an entire mysteries genre

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172 Eugène Sue’s *Les Mystères de Paris*, published in Paris in 1842-43, inaugurated the genre, while drawing on English antecedents. The English translation of Sue’s story proved extremely popular, but in even greater demand was Reynolds’s *The Mysteries of London* (1844-48), the best-selling book of nineteenth-century England. According to Priya Joshi, he was “possibly the most popular British novelist in India.”
developed in his wake. Original novels began to appear in various Indian languages in the 1870s, bearing titles that signaled with the word “mysteries” that the narrative inside would be a fast-paced, titillating exposé of corrupt elites and degraded social institutions. As A.R. Venkatachalapathy remarks, the ubiquity of Reynolds’s name in Indian popular fiction of the turn of the twentieth century, to the exclusion of other widely-read English writers, suggests that his name may have served as “a metaphor for the whole class of popular fiction.”

Punches and mysteries sometimes crossed paths; for instance, Al-Punch reviewed an Urdu edition of Reynolds’s *The Necromancer* that had been published in Lucknow. Notwithstanding that the original novel was written by Reynolds himself, the translation was straightforwardly retitled *Asrār* (Mysteries), a choice that illustrates the potency and recognizability of the “mysteries” label. The review effused, “we don’t intend to review the book itself; it is written by a person who’s been granted the title of ‘novelist’ by a country as educated as England. We will discuss the translation—our munshi sahib hasn’t translated it, he’s breathed a new soul into this novel. Oh God, what magical narration! ... It’s a praiseworthy translation; the zesty language of Lucknow provides its own interest.” For Al-Punch, the translator’s introduction of local flavor and imaginative language instills life into an imported narrative skeleton. The value and foreign origin of the story go without saying; but its indigenization, far from representing a betrayal of the author’s intent, becomes its chief virtue.

From Paris to London to Patna, Punch papers and mysteries novels followed twin trajectories, holding on to outward signs while their inner substance remained fluid. As the two genres were read and rewritten—often by the same people, as the review in Al-Punch suggests—they took on new forms, but maintained their ambivalent relationship to urban space. In both cases, too, the persistence of recognizable names masked other influences. As Ritu Khanduri has

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173 In the United States, for instance, novels appeared with titles like *The Mysteries and Miseries of New Orleans and The Quaker City, or, the Monks of Monk Hall: A Romance of Philadelphia Life, Mystery, and Crime*.


176 Al-Punch, February 8, 1901.

177 Sucheta Bhattacharya notes that Bengali writers were given to adjusting Reynolds’s books to suit their purposes. In some cases, this meant depoliticizing his arguably radical texts, while elsewhere it meant adapting his titillating style to a critique of colonial society. Bhattacharya, “Reynolds Rewritten.” As the prologue to a recent volume on Asian Punch papers phrases it, this was a process not of “creative translation but more of fundamental re-contextualisation.” Hans Harder, “Prologue: Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Asian Punch Versions and Related Satirical Journals,” in *Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair*, ed. Hans Harder and Barbara Mittler (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 3–5.
pointed out, “the emplotment of a derivative colonial modernity” has retrospectively exaggerated
the importance of the London Punch and effaced the memory of the vernacular Punches. The London Punch did find readers in India, especially after the turn of the century, but the
vernacular Punches” were much more visible. The Awadh Punch had a particularly strong
affinity with Al-Punch’s style and appearance, unsurprisingly given that the two papers shared a
number of contributors, including “Ishrat” Lakhnavi, “Shahbaz” Azimabadi, and Mirza Machchu Beg “Sitam-Zarif.” Such commonalities helped establish a sense of coherence among Al-
Punch and its contemporaries—a relationship based on family resemblances and horizontal ties,
rather than on similarity to a common ancestor.

The movement of genres and styles was not limited to the imperial routes followed by
Punch papers and mysteries novels. Urdu also remained bound to the international culture of
Persianate letters, and Indian publishers cultivated links with markets abroad. Indeed, much of
Arabic and Persian publishing originated in India. In the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of
1905-1911, satirical newspapers came to play a crucial role in articulating and organizing
nationalist critique, in tones of ironic naïveté and mock pomposity.

The most successful Persian satirical paper was Mulla Nasruddin, a polyglot journal
published from Tbilisi (and at times from Baku and Tabriz) and named after a folk character

179 Punch was certainly read in Patna; for instance, Gokulananda Prasada Varma assumes his readers are familiar
with it. See Varma, My Experiences and Observations, 17–18. On the relationship between the London Punch
and the vernacular Punches, see Khanduri, “Vernacular Punches”; Harder and Mittler, Asian Punches. A number
of Anglo-Indian papers, beginning with the Delhi Sketch Book (1850) and culminating in the Indian Charivari
(1872), had taken Punch as their model. Indian-owned papers inspired by Punch began to appear in the 1870s;
see Mitter, Art and Nationalism, chap. 4; Dubrow, “From Newspaper Sketch to ‘Novel,’” chap. 2; Hasan, Wit
and Humour; Abd us-Salām Khūrshīd, Sahāfat: Pakistān-o-Hind meñ (Journalism: In Pakistan and India)
(Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqī-e Adab, 1963), 183 et passim; Shaista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardy, A Critical Survey of
Urdu, the short-lived Bihar Punch, published from Patna, preceded the Awadh Punch by seven weeks.
Unfortunately, little information on the Bihar Punch survives. Kumar, Journalism in Bihar, 78; Muhammad
Sultān Āzād, Bihār meñ Urdu Tanz-o-Zarāfāt (Urdu Satire and Humor in Bihar) (Patna: Maktaba-e Āzād, 1989),
15.

180 Shad Azimabadi also says that the editors were close. Samdanī, “Shād kī Kuchh Khūd Navisht Sarguzasht,” 3.
181 There is a substantial literature on the life and afterlife of Persian in India, and especially on its relationship to
Urdu. See, for instance, Alam, “Pursuit of Persian”; David Lelyveld, “Zuban-e Urdu-e Mu’alla and the Idol of

182 Until the early twentieth century, publishing in Iran was strictly controlled, so much of the Persian press was
located outside of Iran, including all seven newspapers critical of the government. For instance, the Habl ul-
Matin of Calcutta was an especially important critic, with a circulation substantially larger than any Urdu paper
in the Bengal Presidency. Edward Browne, The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia, Partly Based on the
Manuscript Work of Mīrzā Muḥammad ‘Alī Khān “Tarbiyat” of Tabrīz (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 1914), 73–74; Hasan Javadi, Satire in Persian Literature (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University
Press, 1988), 137–38; Report on Native Papers in Bengal, January 6, 1900, January 7, 1905, and January 1,
1910. According to one anecdote, the Shah of Iran said in 1888 that he had come to India in order to meet two
people, the viceroy and the publisher Naval Kishore. On the Naval Kishore Press’s involvement in Persian
publishing and exports to Iran, Afghanistan, and central Asia, see Stark, Empire of Books, 179–80 et passim.

183 See Balaghi, “Print Culture in Late Qajar Iran”; Ali Gheissari, “Despots of the World Unite! Satire in the Iranian
Constitutional Press: The Majalleh-ye Estebbad, 1907–1908,” Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the
Middle East 25, no. 2 (2005): 360–76; Javadi, Satire in Persian Literature, chap. 6 and 7.
popular in many Muslim societies for his accidental wisdom. Like Punch, Mulla Nasruddin spoke for his namesake journal; as Hasan Javadi says, he “signed the poems, answered the letters, advised the youth, and parodied the viewpoints of the establishment. He was even present in the cartoons, always peeping from the corners.” Other papers incorporated images of their own avatars, like Azerbaijan’s Hajji Baba, learning at Mulla Nasruddin’s feet.

Tracing these histories of influence helps illustrate the continued affinities between Urdu and Persian literatures, as well as the roving habits of wit. Persian satirical papers arose after most of the Indian Punch papers had already been founded, grown to maturity and, in many cases, gone out of business. Nonetheless, they resemble each other in a number of respects. Apart from their shared cultural ancestry and senses of humor, satirical papers in both countries circulated in similar ways. Owing to stricter censorship in Iran, the Persian papers were far more international in their production and circulation, but papers in both languages sought to amplify their voices through give-and-take with their colleagues. A comment made by a French diplomat in 1907 points to a further similarity: “it is very amazing that the capital should be the city least advanced in illustrated journals.... If Baku with its far superior Mulla Nasreddin dominates the scene, Tabriz, though to a lesser degree with Azerbaijan... represents a progress not expected from a provincial paper.” Like Al-Punch, and indeed the Awdh Punch and others, these Persian papers overcame their distance from the metropolis, instead gaining prominence by dint of wit and by forging relationships with like-minded contemporaries. Finally, the figure of Mulla Nasruddin himself worked much like that of Punch. By displacing the editorial voice onto a semi-mythical character who melded moral authority with disarming humor, both groups of papers invited their readers to join in a playful fantasy. And, with images like those of Hajji Baba paying homage to Mulla Nasruddin, papers dramatized their relationships, helping to consolidate an incipient genre that crossed borders.

None of the vernacular Punches, however, can be fitted into a linear ancestry, either from European or Persian models. Though the Punch name was a valuable token within the commercial print economy, many satirical papers did not adopt it, and those that did drew on

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185 Javadi remarks that Mulla Nasruddin joins old and new forms of satire, “combining as it does the technique of caricature with that of the ‘wise fool.’” Javadi, *Satire in Persian Literature*, 118, 147. One of the most accomplished Persian satirists, according to critics, was Ali Akbar Dehkhoda, about whom Ghulam Husain Yusufi comments that “Dakow, Dehkodā’s favorite pseudonym, is a dialect form of Dehkodā (village headman) and in folk literature the name of a rather stupid village headman (like Mollā Naṣr-al-Dīn) from Qazvin, about whom many silly and funny anecdotes are told.” Gholām-Hosayn Yūsūfī, “Čarand Parand,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 1990. Both Dakhow and Mulla Nasruddin bear a striking similarity to Punch’s evocation of the village judge, or sarpanch, noted by Dalmia: in each case, the effect is to simultaneously claim and reject moral authority. See Dalmia, *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, 253. On Dehkhoda, see the collection of his columns, *Charand-Parand*, annotated and translated by Janet Afary and John Perry, forthcoming from Yale University Press; Javadi, *Satire in Persian Literature*, 147–57. Although Dehkhoda had previously traveled to Austria and the Balkans in the company of the Persian ambassador, John Perry suggests that any influence exerted by Western European papers on Persian satire would have come through the editors of *Mulla Nasruddin*, who might have been familiar with *Le Charivari*. Personal communication, September 24, 2013.


187 For instance, *Hasharat al-Arz* and *Sur-e Esrafil* regularly responded to each other. Ibid., 157–59.

188 Quoted in ibid., 161.
other sources as well. Urdu traditions of wit and satire date to the eighteenth century, and include a store of anecdotes about the Emperor Akbar and his advisor Birbal, and, in poetry, the courtly but barbed satires of Sauda, the lusty ribaldry of Nazir, and the joyous obscenity of Zatalli. Under the influence of reformist thought and, more broadly, the late nineteenth-century divergence of elite and popular culture, the earthier elements of Indian popular culture were suppressed or, at least, driven into more secluded contexts. In chaster forms, though, satire remained alive, as writers like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, in Bengali, and Akbar Allahabadi and Ratan Nath Dhar “Sarshar,” in Urdu, mocked the absurdities of colonial modernity for wide and appreciative readerships.

Self-portraits

Maulana Al-Punch, then, had international company in the (admittedly small) brotherhood of Urdu traditions of wit and satire. Ayesha Jalal mentions several satirical papers with delightful names, including “Sheikh Chili, invoking the name of the dreamer whose dreams came to nought, ... Tees Maar Khan, a reference to a paper tiger pretending to be a killer of thirty men, and Shareer, which literally means naughty.... Chalta Purza, meaning a busybody, from Delhi was not a bad competitor as far as ingenuity of names is concerned.” She calls these “Punch-style papers,” but it is unclear whether the papers saw themselves that way. Jalal, Self and Sovereignty, 56.


On the development of high- and low-brow distinctions, see Sumanta Banerjee, The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta (Calcutta: Seagull, 1989); Freitag, Collective Action and Community. Of course, efforts to reform and bowdlerize culture were neither entirely successful nor uncontested, even among elites. For instance, as Anindita Ghosh has argued, the Bengali middle classes participated in “a bawdy and robust print-culture that scoffed at these high-caste fears and pretentions.” See Ghosh, Power in Print, chap. 5.

On Bankim Chatterjee, as he is also known, see Sudipta Kaviraj, The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). Shamsur Rahman Faruqi points out that Akbar, like other Urdu humorists and satirists, suffered a loss of prestige after his death, thanks partly to critics’ increasing fixation on seriousness as the measure of literature, and partly to readers’ discomfort with his apparent hypocrisy in working for the colonial state while criticizing it in his poetry. On Akbar and Sarshar, see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “The Power Politics of Culture: Akbar Ilahabadi and the Changing Order of Things,” Think India Quarterly 6, no. 1 (2003): 24–55.
fictional representatives of satirical newspapers. Like his colleagues in India and Iran, he helped give his paper a voice and a personality, and at the same time his image gave sensory proof that, distinctive as it might be, Al-Punch was not laboring alone, but was part of a recognizable and, in its own way, prestigious genre. When he began to show up in person (Fig. 7), it was a foregone conclusion that he would appear as a “a big-nosed picture,” the famous pulcinello of the London Punch (Fig. 8).\(^{193}\) All the important features are there—Punch’s paunch, his hooked nose, and his protruding chin.

Maulana Al-Punch also calls to mind other ancestries, from the pot-belled and deformed vidūṣaka, or fool, of Sanskrit drama as well as modern theaters, to the costume-changing bahurūpiyā, or clown, about whom more below.\(^{194}\) He has been redrawn in the crosshatched, somewhat rigid style common to the Awadh Punch (Fig. 9) and, indeed, to the Urdu press in general.\(^{195}\) Emerging from this already well-established lithographic tradition, with roots in Mughal and Persian manuscript illustration, the drawings in Al-Punch exemplify a reconfiguration of artistic patronage that parallels that in literary patronage.\(^{197}\) The paper wrote in 1902 that it had hired a cartoonist from Delhi, having been unable to find an appropriate one before (presumably, pictures appearing on its covers had been individually commissioned).\(^{198}\)

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\(^{193}\) The phrase comes from “Al-Punch,” Al-Punch, October 4, 1902.

\(^{194}\) On the vidūṣaka in Sanskrit drama, see G.K. Bhat, The Vidūṣaka (Ahmedabad: New Order Book Co., 1959). This is not to imply that all Indian cultural forms must trace their origins to the Sanskrit past. However, whatever the historical relationship between “classical” theater and “folk” theaters like the north Indian nauṭankī, the name and figure of the vidūṣaka are common to both; see Kathryn Hansen, Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 46–47.

\(^{195}\) Comparable line drawings appear in a wide variety of contemporary texts, including dāstān and qissa story literature. The cartoons in some of the Persian satirical papers, for instance Kashkul, also employ a similar style. See, for instance, Balaghi, “Print Culture in Late Qajar Iran,” 170, 172.

\(^{196}\) Hasan, Wit and Humour, 34.

\(^{197}\) Not just pictures, but all manner of decorative embellishments, were carried over from the manuscript tradition. See Stark, Empire of Books, 274. On illustration in nineteenth-century Persian publishing, see Ulrich Marzolph, Narrative Illustration in Persian Lithographed Books (Leiden: Brill, 2001). Like other aspects of Persian publishing, illustration crossed the porous boundaries between Iranian and Indian public spheres. For instance, a Bombay illustrator copied the work of an Iranian colleague for a 1910 reprint of Nizami’s Khamsa; see ibid., 43.

\(^{198}\) The article glosses the English word “cartoon” as “pictures related to events.” Al-Punch, October 4, 1902. This sense of the word originated, in fact, in the London Punch. Partha Mitter, “Punch and Indian Cartoons: The
Later cartoons, though, were sometimes signed (in English) by Jaygobind Lall and Mahadeb Lall, local painters in the style called Patna qalam (pen) or Patna School, whose patronage had evaporated by the 1890s.199

Where Patna School paintings are generally realist in their renderings, though heavily stylized in composition, the cartoons in Al-Punch are exaggerated and whimsical. Even where other figures are sometimes depicted more or less realistically, Maulana Al-Punch is always marked by his outlandish physiognomy. On one representative cover from 1902 (Fig. 10), he appears as a sharif Muslim, whose floral-patterned achkan signals his allegiance to the Persianate culture of north India and whose fez nods to self-consciously modern Muslim reform.200 He is flying the flags of his creed: wit, progress of the language, freedom, love of the homeland (watan), national (qaumi) progress, integrity, and constancy or stylistic vigor.201 First among all these commitments is zarafat, which apart from wit also means jocularity, beauty, and ingenuity.202 Joining zarafat to the remaining items on the list was central to Al-Punch’s ambitions.

Though the design of the cover, and the image at its center, changed once or twice a year, the text surrounding the image was largely fixed. Most of it is taken up with announcements of

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200 Sayyid Ahmad Khan had brought the fez (Turkī ṭopī) to Aligarh in the 1870s, as a sign of admiration for Ottoman reformism. Sharar notes that, at first, the fez was widely hated and publicly mocked as “the nechart’s hat” (that is, the hat of Sir Sayyid’s “naturist” followers), but that Sir Sayyid eventually succeeded in making it popular. Margrit Pernau, “Shifting Globalities—Changing Headgear: The Indian Muslims between Turban, Hat and Fez,” in *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*, ed. Achim von Oppen and Ulrike Freitag (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 263–65; Abd ul-Halīm Sharar, *Hindūstān meñ Mashriqī Tamaddun kā Ākhīr Namūna, yānt Guzashta Lakhīnāī* (Lahore: Mercantile Press, n.d. [c. 1920]), 237–38; Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, trans. Fakhir Hussain and E.S. Harcourt (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 173. The fez seems to have become an increasingly common symbol of Muslim identity, and of support for the Ottoman state, around the turn of the century. In 1897, the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, Antony MacDonnell, reported that the Commissioner of Agra had told him that “many more people than formerly have taken to wearing the Turkish Fez; and this is perhaps a straw indicating how the wind is beginning to blow.” Quoted in M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 45. The fez would gain even greater prominence during the Khilafat movement after World War I. For further discussion of hats as icons of cultural flux, see conclusion.

201 *Zarāfāt, taraqqa’t-e zabān, azādī, hibb-e watan, qaumī taraqqa’t, rāstī, and matānāt.*

subscription and advertising rates, along with a list of books sold by the Matba Al-Punch (the Al-Punch Press). To the right, though, is a “Royal Announcement,” which addresses readers in the tone of a carnival barker, explaining the relationship between wit and reform:

Have you still not looked at Maulana Al-Punch? Definitely look! It’s not a newspaper, it’s potent magic—a “portmanteau” of wit [zarāfāt]. If you’re not beside yourself with laughter after reading one sentence, then it’s our fault. If you look at one piece of news without grabbing your gut, then we’re sinners. And it’s not as if it’s nothing but “haha heehee” and useful things are completely missing. No, it’s brimming with “political,” “social,” and “moral articles.” We cleverly take mighty pinches of articles on national progress [mulkī taraqqī] and ethics [akhlāq]. What can we say about its linguistic purity and idiomatic panache? Read it and you’ll be rolling on the floor. And if you want to know the price, even with all that, it’s nothing at all. Just pay six white royal faces (Rs. 6) annually and revel in it all year.203

This brief statement can be read as an elaboration of the image of the Maulana with his flags, something like a manifesto for the paper. Wit, the primary substance of Al-Punch, has intrinsic value—so much that the announcement equates unfunniness with sin. But laughter alone is not enough. Political, social, and moral reform, together with literary grace, are also needed. The image of the portmanteau encapsulates the argument: the paper is figured as a portable container overflowing with wit, but also a vessel for disparate ideas, merging reform and humor without compromising either.204 This emphasis on offering both wit and reform, which recurs nearly every time Al-Punch tries to define itself, contains two opposing impulses. On the one hand, the announcement oscillates so quickly between promises of laughter and of virtue that they seem to be consonant with each other. On the other, though, its protesting tone anticipates doubt about the possibility of doing justice to both “haha heehee” and “useful things” (“kām kt bāteñ”).

Clowns and judges

Of course, wit and critique are old friends. But their relationship can be contentious: there will always be someone who insists that a given subject is no laughing matter, and someone else who complains that a social message ruins a gag. This was true of Al-Punch’s public as much as of anyone else. Neither the paper’s espousal of a reform platform nor its jocular insouciance exempted it from the criticism and dissent of its readers and contributors. If anything, the tension between these two commitments made Al-Punch’s job harder. One author complained about the difficulties of advocating social reform to a fun-seeking audience:

My personal experience is that every time I’ve written anything on national reform, there’s the same controversy. That’s why now I’m afraid to lift my pen.... I have to confront even greater difficulty in a witty [zarif] newspaper. If essays are more whimsical and comical, then people protest, “this is just ‘haha heehee’—this isn’t wit, it’s just scurrilous prattle.” If one strikes a deeper tone, then they protest, “

203 “Shāhī Ailān,” in many issues of Al-Punch, including those of March 15, 1901 (see Fig. 1), and October 18, 1902.

204 For the latter definition, see the Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed., s.v. “portmanteau.” Of course, this somewhat unusual sense is a natural extension of the literal meaning of “suitcase,” by a similar analogy to that driving the more common metaphorical meaning of a word formed by combining two other words. Of six Urdu dictionaries that I have consulted, none includes an entry for “portmanteau.”
buy *Al-Punch* for diversion—if there’s no fun and joking, then what’s the point in buying *Punch* [sic]?*205*

Despite such dissents, *Al-Punch*’s exuberant eclecticism was central to its aesthetic and ethical projects. Like the paper’s collaborative authorship, the variety of its contents evoked the serendipity of urban life. A single twelve-page issue might contain news of weather and health conditions in Patna and the surrounding area; reports from fairs; medical ads; updates on legal cases; Reuters wires from Europe and the Middle East (the latter under the heading “Islāmī Duniyā,” or “Islamic World”); predictions by a Hindu astrologer; travelogues; notices of official tours; a plea for contributions to the Bankipur Anjuman-e Islamia; highbrow literary criticism; sarcastic and sincere commentary on politics in Patna, Bengal, India, and the world; and poetry ranging from doggerel to the devotional. Even within individual items, *Al-Punch* took pleasure in mixing idioms and tones. Countries and diseases, for instance, were always referred to by mock-respectful names, so that Russia was Miyān Rūs, cholera Haiza Khān, and plague Mirzā Tāwūn Beg.206 By personifying such abstract, often threatening, forces, *Al-Punch* domesticated them, bringing āl China Begam and Miyān France into an imaginary neighborhood society.

The instability of the paper’s project was, perhaps, a refraction of the more fundamental instabilities of urban life and of colonial modernity. Wit and reform, country and city, substance and appearance all seemed inseparable at the same time as they were opposed. It was fitting, then, that when they tried to define the paper, *Al-Punch* and its contributors regularly invoked the bahurūp, the chameleonic master of many forms. In one ghazal, for instance, Ishrat Lakhnavi celebrates *Al-Punch*’s versatility through the ambivalent image of the bahurūp:

*It’s Al-Punch that keeps you laughing,*  
*Each new day it tells you the news.*

*...*  
*Sometimes it turns advisor to the Governor General,*  
*Sometimes it raises a tumult in the city.*  
*Sometimes it’s a maulvi, sometimes a Brahmin;*  
*It keeps making itself a bahurūp.*  
*Riding the horse-carriage of the age,*  
*Every day it goes hither and thither.*  
*Sometimes it becomes a judge in the court,*  
*Sometimes it causes a stir in the street.*207

For Ishrat, humor and news, moral judgment and provocation are not at odds. Rather, the virtue of *Al-Punch* is precisely its ease in adopting different roles. At one moment it might be loyal, at another critical; now national, then local; here Muslim, there Hindu. But the figure he invokes, that of the bahurūp, is complex. Literally a person of many appearances, a bahurūp (or bahurūpiya) is a jester and a mimic, able to transform his figure and persona to mock, praise, or


206 The latter two were chronic problems in Patna and the surrounding region, and regular subjects of coverage in *Al-Punch*.

criticize his audience. While Ishrat’s tone is admiring, though, the bahurup can also evoke dishonesty, hypocrisy, and insincerity. Perhaps Ishrat intends this ambiguous metaphor to suggest the instability of the press’s power. Able as it is, in his view, to whisper in the ears of the mighty and to judge society on its own account as easily as it could mix it up in the streets, Al-Punch risks seeming inconstant. The last of the watchwords on Maulana Al-Punch’s flags is relevant here—matānāt could refer to fixedness and solidity, but this meaning sits uneasily with another sense, of stylistic vigor; whether these two senses were aligned or in tension was an open question.

Speaking on its own behalf, in a 1902 article titled “Al-Punch,” the paper similarly argues that variety is of the essence. It meets the charge of being a bahurupiya with two, not necessarily consistent, responses. First, it concedes that it changes its garb readily, but argues that in a volatile time, these metamorphic talents are its strength:

Some of our true sympathizers will say that Al-Punch is a bahurupiya. The present era keeps changing its nature. What they say is true: wherever Al-Punch sees the wind blowing, it makes a name for itself [by sailing against that wind]. Estimating the taste [mazāq] of the “public,” it also changes its nature. And this is, and should be, the way of the world. Neither has there been any one “standard” of the Punch newspaper [i.e., Al-Punch], nor can there be any. Neither does it have a specific taste, nor can it. Nor is there any “Parliament” here, such that any newspaper could be called “liberal” or “conservative.” Yes, there are several papers that occasionally take sides on some issue, but not permanently. The Punch paper can’t have any fixed taste. It will say everything and do everything. But through the ornamentation of its wit, it will also guide.... Our Al-Punch is a witty [zartf] paper which, according to its goals, is fulfilling its duty. In national [mulkī] matters it is the partisan of its just government, and it performs this service with loyalty. It publicly proclaims the defects it finds in “society.” Among the indigenous [destī] newspapers of the province of Bengal, only Al-Punch has obtained the distinction of the government’s appreciation and patronage.... It follows the news of every national [qaumī] organization, and as far as possible leads movements for progress.

In the context of colonial political limits, Al-Punch argues, allegiance to a particular ideology is impossible. By delving into its costume chest, it is able to respond to the zeitgeist. It counters prevailing trends, but also responds to the public’s mazāq (a word which carries both senses of the English “taste,” but also means pleasure, discernment, and humor). Whether oppositional or opportunistic, it is adaptable. But the paper insists that its apparent caprice is underlain and sanctioned by a consistent morality; so that whichever way the winds blow, it can.

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208 In their article on Hajari Bhand, a Rajasthani bahurupiya, John and Ulrike Emigh underscore the clown’s ability to dispense “both flattering praise and stinging abuse.” This freedom was historically dependent on his ability to navigate the limits of critique, especially in front of royal patrons. John Emigh and Ulrike Emigh, “Hajari Bhand of Rajasthan: A Joker in the Deck,” The Drama Review 30, no. 1 (1986): 104, 113–17. For an ethnographic account of bidāpat, a related clowning genre in rural north Bihar, see Ian Woolford, “Renu Village: An Ethnography of North Indian Fiction” (Ph.D., University of Texas, 2012), chap. 4.


210 “Al-Punch,” Al-Punch, October 4, 1902.

211 Dehlavī, Farhang-e Āṣafīyya, s.v. “mazāq.”
guide its readers “through the ornamentation of its wit.” Like the jester, it uses humor to exert its moral authority; and also like him, it is careful to respect the limits of loyalty.

Continuing, the editorial addresses a second aspect of the imagined accusation that Al-Punch is a bahurupiya. Though proud of its ability to adapt to changing times, the paper is much less comfortable with the connotation of mimicry:

The charge that the Punch paper is a bahurupiya is purely based on ignorance and naïveté. The reason for Punch’s naming is that in England, in many families, a very special type of alcohol is used, called “punch.” This word is taken from the Persian word panj [five]. And the punch alcohol is made by mixing several alcohols. For this reason, we call a paper Punch when it’s a compilation of various tastes. It’s neither the “master” of all tastes, nor is it a seeker of all wits.... In English, “punch” also has another meaning, of beating someone’s head. For this reason, it [i.e., Al-Punch] also softens the tops of the heads of its opponents.212

It is not that Al-Punch denies that there are other Punch papers, both in India and England; indeed, it goes on to emphasize that “from London alone, there are eleven Punch newspapers being published,” and that “at this time, the twentieth Punch is coming out in India.”213 But at the same time as it outlines a definition of the Punch genre, Al-Punch emphatically denies any suggestion that it is derivative. It dismisses these other papers as undistinguished, and suggests that its own inspiration comes from an originary meaning of “punch,” a blend of Persian and English influences, half hybridity and half pugnacity. Of course, a bahurupiya shares the very same qualities; hence, perhaps, the paper’s vacillating response to potential critics.

**Imagined space**

Al-Punch undoubtedly paid close attention to provincial politics, as well as to various Muslim causes—reformist or conservative depending on the issue—and other national and international news, on which its line tended to be loyalist. But much of what distinguished Al-Punch from papers in other languages was its relationship to its city and region. There is a striking contrast, for example, with Varma, working in English, who sees the task of a newspaper as instructing a quietist public in world affairs. Thus, the most emotional, formative moment he mentions is when his editor informed him of the Russian tsar’s death: “methought we were present in the Czar’s dying room. The air, the weather, the day, all responded to my thought; they all really had foretold Czar Alexander’s death. Such a characteristic day will never again occur.”214

It is hard to imagine any of Al-Punch’s contributors expressing a similar investment in an event bearing so distantly on them. To be sure, Al-Punch took an interest in remote affairs, reporting enthusiastically on Ottoman politics and the Japanese victory over Russia. This coverage, though, was framed in terms of readers’ identities and interests. Whether marking the successes and deaths of local grandees, or collecting funds for the construction of the Hijaz Railway, Al-Punch always ensured that issues it took up were firmly embedded in an intelligible social world.

Al-Punch’s local commitments imparted a flexibility of tone and affect that English papers lacked. Where papers like the Behar Times or the Behar Herald rarely deviated from their dry

212 “Al-Punch,” Al-Punch, October 4, 1902.
213 Ibid.
214 Varma, My Experiences and Observations, 30.
empiricism, *Al-Punch* mused on character types, the passage of time, and everyday pleasures. One pun-ridden article seems initially to concern the genealogies of the elite families of Hajipur, across the Ganga from Patna, but then turns out to be about the elite genealogies of mangoes that are grown there. Like *Al-Punch*’s literary writing, and its essays on local politics and social issues, these sketches and vignettes addressed a public that might belong to Patna but was not restricted to it. On holidays like Holi and Rabi ul-Awwal, *Al-Punch* and other Punch papers would print and exchange fanciful prose and poetry, and often dedicate entire issues to these moments of social solidarity and contestation.

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Fig. 11. *Al-Punch*, May 14, 1904.
“The sweet sleep of the Patna Municipality”
Caption: “Wake up, you sleep-drunken! How long will you sleep with the shades drawn?”
(Skeleton labelled “Plague.”)

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215 A decade later, the *Herald* did start running satirical pieces under the pen-name Shamla. In this era, though, it was fairly resolute in its serious tone.

216 “Hājīpūr ke Āl-Aulād” (The Dynasties of Hajipur), *Al-Punch*, August 9, 1901. Āl, dynasty or family, ends up being a pun on the name of a tree, *Morinda citrifolia*, that gives a red dye. Hajipur is still famous for its mangoes.

217 Dubrow notes that the fictional sketches in the *Awadh Punch*’s holiday issues, often reprinted from other Punch papers, were an important influence on the “realist” style of *Fasāna-e Āzād*. Dubrow, “From Newspaper Sketch to ‘Novel,’” 68.
At the same time, Al-Punch’s intense identification with its city meant that, at the same time as it effusively mourned Queen Victoria’s death and bragged about its good relations with the imperial government, its approach to local matters had more bite. Particularly when it came to sanitary concerns, the paper easily took the stance of a watchdog, as in Fig. 11. What one official called Al-Punch’s “semi-comic” style made these criticisms more caustic at the same time as it might have protected the paper from government rebuke. Thus, one article complains:

I was going to bathe [ashnān, i.e., snān, connoting Hindu ritual ablutions] in the Ganga this morning when kapow [arrṛṛṛḍhaṛī]! ... I was hurt so badly. I got up and then fell again, and then got up.... Flopped down, got up, sat down, and finally got to the banks of the river. Do you understand? You’ll never be able to understand. Sir, now there isn’t any street or lane (with exaggeration) where any gentleman [sharīf] can walk. Moved, then stumbled. Smacked in the face. Fell in the ditch. The difference between earth and sky became obvious.

Part of Al-Punch’s assertiveness comes from the fact that sanitation was a local matter, and one for which Indians were partially responsible. Bihari criticism of provincial and imperial governments was still largely tentative before 1905, especially as Bihari activists increasingly based their claims on contrasts with Bengali extremism, but municipal government was fair game. Where more fundamental critiques of colonial rule might meet with repression under the Press Act, criticism of sanitary policy did little to disrupt the alliance between the administration and Patna’s middle class.

Al-Punch was not alone in making these complaints; as I have shown in chapter 2, many newspapers lambasted vice-chairmen and sweepers alike for wasting taxes, ignoring contagion, and simply for allowing filth to accumulate. Even the straitlaced Bihar Bandhu would occasionally turn to the absurd, its accustomed sobriety enhancing the pungency of the rare satirical article. One piece is written in the voice of an opium-addled bird flying around Bihar, who complains about Patna’s excellent sanitation and general good governance, lamenting that “there wasn’t any filth in any alley or sewer or bathroom where I could land and catch my breath.... Truly, if this calamity should end soon and the city become dirty, then I would be happy.” The first inversion in meaning comes from the bird’s fondness for filth, and the second from his opiated delusion, which gives him license to coat his true feelings in a veneer of nonsense. But this tone of outraged disbelief at sanitary calamities, adopted by Urdu and Hindi papers in Patna and elsewhere, remained foreign to Patna’s English press until the mid-1910s, when the Bihar Herald joined the satirical club with pieces run the pen-name Shamla (“greenish-black” in Bengali).

218 Al-Punch, February 22 and March 1, 1901, and October 4, 1902.
219 BSA, Annual General Administration Report for Patna Division for 1895-96.
220 The parenthetical remark on exaggeration appears in the original. “The difference between earth and sky” is an idiom equivalent to “a world of difference,” but of course the joke is that when one trips and falls, the difference becomes salient. Al-Punch, June 27, 1903.
222 Bihar Bandhu, October 15, 1901.
223 For instance, “Shamla” published what purported to be a speech at the annual smoking assembly of the Trans-
The same network that stood *Al-Punch*’s literary aspirations in good stead also added force to its interventions in sanitary politics. Correspondents actively compared grievances, almost in a tone of one-upmanship. One writes that “it’s true that the Darbhanga municipality is the sister of our Patna municipality, because wherever you look, there’s a stench like Patna; whichever street you walk on, there’s filth like Patna.” Another correspondent, originally from Patna District, writes from Lahore to describe in great detail what he sees as the revolting and shameful consequences of the Lahore Municipality’s failure to provide public restrooms. He says he has already complained to the Lahore *Païsa Akhbar*, but wants *Al-Punch*’s help too: “Brother *Al-Punch*, swear on your pot-belly and nose that you’ll say yes [हाँ में हाँ मिलना, a phrase connoting a yes-man].” The conversational style that knit together *Al-Punch*’s dispersed public merges here with mobile vocabularies of filth and of honor. For this correspondent, what Dalmia calls “the authority of the village judge” was not merely a literary style invested in the figure of Punch, but a sign of the real power of the public sphere. The intimacy and the dense web of associations that endeared *Al-Punch* to its literary correspondents also encouraged a form of political protest that, while hardly radical, fortified an awareness of shared grievance.

By the turn of the twentieth century, riverine cities like Patna, not to mention nearby qasbas like Desna and Asthanwan, were thoroughly provincial by most measures—trade had declined, populations had shrunk, and many saw all of Bihar as a stagnant backwater. But through papers like *Al-Punch*, these places were well connected to distant cities and important debates and, no less, to each other. The idioms of the Urdu literary formation—not only the highflown tropes of poetry but also the rhythms of earthy banter—provided a language both local and cosmopolitan. An informal style was matched by a collaborative ethos that drew on old relationships but also produced new ones, not just among readers but among places. *Al-Punch* had a Patna public and a Bihar one, but also one that reached much farther. And crucially for its readers, it didn’t just speak to these publics, but listened as well.

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224 *Al-Punch*, August 16, 1906.
225 This writer signs himself Dihqani (i.e., Villager) Sayyid Rajgiri, identifying himself with a town in Patna District (present-day Nalanda District); presumably, he had already been a reader of *Al-Punch* before leaving for the Islamia Boarding House in Lahore. He also notes that Calcutta has better public sanitary facilities than Lahore. *Al-Punch*, November 5, 1904.
4 Bihar’s Separation from Bengal

At the very first railway station in Bihar, I noticed a tall, robust and stalwart Biharee constable wearing the badge with the inscription “Bengal Police.” It almost embittered my feelings of joy and gratification on my return home, after an absence of more than three years abroad.... I resolved then and there to do all that lay in my power to secure for Bihar a distinct and honourable status as an administrative unit.

—Sachchidananda Sinha

When the 1905 partition of Bengal was reversed in 1912, the new province of Bihar and Orissa was carved out of the Bengal Presidency and Patna made its capital. After two decades of yearning, a few dozen Biharis, led by Sachchidananda Sinha, had fulfilled their ambition to obtain autonomy from Bengal. Although they might sympathize with the cultivators and artisans in whose name they spoke, the lawyers and other professionals who were most active in support of Bihar’s separation were precisely those who stood to gain the most. The separation was the product of years of public debate and secret negotiations held against the backdrop of growing mass politics, middle-class Biharis’ mounting resentment of Bengalis, and debates over how to be modern. The most important event in Patna during this era, its transformation into a provincial capital, was thus a product of the city’s public cultures as much as of politics outside.

Scholars of Bihar’s separation from Bengal, basing their analyses primarily on the English-language press, have tended to produce a narrative in which Bihari passivity and backwardness gave way to regional awakening within the nationalist movement. They have celebrated the separation as an unequivocal step toward the fulfillment of Bihar’s destiny, and have examined neither the elite character of the separation movement nor its careful loyalism—nor, indeed, the tension between regionalism and nationalism. Neither have they questioned the unity of the

1 Sachchidananda Sinha, Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries (Patna: Himalaya Publications, 1944), iii.
Bihari people or what was actually gained from the separation. Though these accounts are useful, all of these questions remain.

One way to look at the narrative that follows is as an alternative history of the Bengal partition, in which eastern Bengal and Assam became a province separate from western Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. I explain how the effects of the partition and the backlash against it were felt far away from Calcutta and the other centers of agitation. For middle-class Bengali activists, the partition was an assault on their freedoms and an attempt to dismember an organic homeland. By contrast, for their counterparts in Patna and elsewhere in Bihar, the partition was an occasion to define who was a Bihari, to reflect on the nature of backwardness and progress, and to remake their city and province. They pounced on the opening left by the struggle in Bengal by presenting themselves as the representatives of Bihar and its “sturdy loyal people,” who were distinguished from the Bengalis by their loyalism and their harmonious communal relations. At the same time, many Bihari activists struggled to reconcile nationalist impulses with these appeals to the ideals of imperial citizenship. For their part, colonial officials came to see Bihar’s separation from Bengal as a way out of the partition quagmire. Fifteen years after they had dismissed the call for separation as the frivolous product of a “silly season,” it became imperial policy.

The separatists

The question of Bihar’s political relationship to Bengal, and especially of Biharis’ representation in colonial administrative and educational institutions, had come up periodically during the late nineteenth century. Given their suspicions of Bengali loyalty after the 1857 rebellion, officials regularly tried to diminish the government’s reliance on Bengalis by

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3 David Ludden’s rethinking of the partition’s effects in east Bengal has provided a helpful model. See David Ludden, “Spatial Inequity and National Territory: Remapping 1905 in Bengal and Assam,” *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 3 (2012): 483–525.
increasing Bihari numbers in colonial education and employment. In 1871, the Bengal
government directed that Biharis be given preference for appointments in Bihar, and reiterated
the order nine years later. Partly because the rules were soon amended to include “domiciled
Bengalis,” or Bengalis permanently living in Bihar, the number of Biharis in government service
remained low. Similarly, noticing that Patna College was dominated by domiciled Bengalis, the
Lieutenant-Governor complained in 1872 that “we do not keep up and specially protect a College
in Behar to educate immigrant Bengalees only.”

Administrators occasionally even suggested separating Bihar from Bengal, either for
administrative convenience or to isolate loyal Biharis from Bengali troublemakers. In 1867, the
India Secretary had proposed placing Bihar under a separate administration as a way to diminish
the workload of the Bengal government, but the Viceroy doubted “that anything would be
gained.” Five years later, when Assam was being split off from Bengal to become a Chief
Commissioner’s province, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal argued there should also be a
“special administration” in Bihar, on the grounds that “Behar is a country very different from
Bengal, and inhabited by a people extremely different.” Seeing an opportunity, two Urdu papers
joined in, arguing that Bihar was unfairly subordinated to Bengal, to the detriment of educated
Biharis.

None of these efforts had much effect, but they represented a tradition of thought among
administrators and educated Biharis that framed Bihar’s inclusion within Bengal as a matter of
the subordination of a Bihari people to a Bengali people. The issue arose again in the 1890s
when the government considered transferring Chittagong to Assam. By this point, a new set of
activists had emerged, set on securing Bihar’s status and their own. Foremost among these men
were two Kayasthas, Mahesh Narayan and Sachchidananda Sinha, who had founded the Behar
Times in early 1894 with two fellow Kayasthas, Nand Kishore Lal and Krishna Sahay, with the
express intent of “carrying an active propaganda for the separation of Bihar from Bengal.”

When the Chittagong question came up, they seized the opportunity to put forward Bihar’s own
claim to autonomy. They argued that fully half of Bengal proper would have to be carved out and
assigned to Assam in order for the Bengal government to save as much administrative burden as
it could by separating Bihar from Bengal, either with or without Orissa.

Narayan’s and Sinha’s proposals received some measure of support from journalists in
Bihar and elsewhere. At first, the Allahabad Pioneer sneered at the fixation of its “youthful
contemporary” on raising “the cry of ‘Behar for the Beharis’” to the neglect of conveying news,
while at the same time praising it for announcing a commitment to political moderation at a time
when “‘only extreme views for or against Government seem to find favour.’” By the next year,

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5 John Lawrence to Stafford Northcote, November 15, 1867. BL APAC, Mss. Eur. F. 90. 32 B (John Lawrence Collection).
6 Jha and Thakur, “Political History of Bihar,” 222.
7 Chaudhary, The Creation of Modern Bihar, 37.
8 Sinha, Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries, x.
9 Ibid., xiii – xiv.
10 The Pioneer, February 17, 1894.
though, the same paper was explaining the reasons why, “if the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal must be eased of a part of his seething millions,” Bihar was a better candidate for separation than East Bengal. These reasons were the same ones that the Bihar activists would put forward throughout the 1890s and 1900s: Bihar’s antiquity, its historic and present unity, its ethnic and cultural difference from Bengal, and Bihari Muslims’ resentment of “the tutelage of Calcutta rule.”

The paper added in 1896 that in its present state, Bihar was “the El Dorado of countless Bengali kiranis, the asylum of how many Bengali Subordinate Judges and munsiffs, the source of income to how many Bengali managers of princely estates.” Given the European-run Pioneer’s strongly pro-government views, and its resultant distrust of rising nationalism in Bengal, the argument that counted most was that “a Behar with a capital at Patna would undoubtedly be more independent of Bengali wirepulling than the present Behar.” For the time being, though, nothing came of these arguments. The government viewed the idea of separation as an “academic suggestion,” meant to sow discord; finally, in an 1896 address to the Gaya Municipality, Alexander Mackenzie, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Bengal Presidency, dismissed the campaign as “purely a newspaper agitation,” inspired by a “silly season” when there was “nothing more useful to discuss,” and the matter ended there.

Activist journalism

Narayan and Sinha would remain the leaders of the campaign for Bihar’s separation, popularly identified as “Makers of Modern Bihar” as early as 1909. Though Narayan died in 1907, for years afterward Sinha would retain an authority in Bihar politics matched by few others. Though the two men were unusually energetic and single-minded, in many ways they

11 The Pioneer, June 22, 1895.
12 The Pioneer, June 30, 1896. A kirānt was a clerk, and a munsif was an Indian civil judge of the lowest rank. Narayan and Sinha would later use identical phrasing in their 1906 pamphlet advocating the latter over the former (discussed below). See Bihar State Archives Library, Mahesh Narayan and Sachchidananda Sinha, “The Partition of Bengal or the Separation of Behar? An Ideally Perfect Scheme,” typescript, 1906, 16. They may have written the unsigned Pioneer article; alternatively, they may have borrowed its language for their pamphlet. Certainly, others would continue to use similar language as well. According to one of Sinha’s biographers, a contemporary rumor claimed that the Pioneer’s coverage of the matter was secretly written by the prominent civil servant Antony MacDonell, who was acting Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal for six months in 1893 and Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces from 1895 to 1901. See Bagishwar Prasad Sinha, Sachchidananda Sinha (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1969), 46. MacDonnell’s own biographer refers to the Pioneer as his “mouthpiece.” See Michael Brillman, “Bengal Tiger, Celtic Tiger: The Life of Sir Antony Patrick MacDonnell, 1844-1925” (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 2009), 43. Whoever wrote the piece, the Bihar activists’ arguments, couched in loyalist language, met with sympathetic treatment in the Pioneer.
13 As one English journalist later said, the Pioneer was “to all intents and purposes the official organ... practically an official gazette.” Pat Lovett, Journalism in India (Calcutta: The Banna Publishing Company, n.d. [1929]), 43; The Pioneer, June 30, 1896.
15 Narayan was identified by this sobriquet in the Beharee’s coverage of the second anniversary of his death; see the issue of August 6, 1909. The term was also used beyond the devoted columns of the Beharee. For example, Jagannath Prasad Chaturvedi cited Narayan as such (in English) in his presidential address at the first meeting of the Bihar Pradesh Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. Reprinted in Ramalochan Sharan, ed., Bihār ka Sahitya (The Literature of Bihar), vol. 1 (Laheria Sarai: Hindi Pustak Bhandār, 1926), 6. Both Narayan and Sinha were, and are, routinely identified by this epithet.
resembled the other new Bihari politicians of the early twentieth century. In their backgrounds and professions, these men, including Mazharul Haque, Parmeshwar and Nand Kishore Lal, Ali and Hasan Imam, and Rajendra Prasad, were like many of the politicians and journalists discussed in the previous chapters. Most were Kayasthas or *sharif* Muslims. A majority were lawyers, often with significant land holdings; in addition, many were employed by large estates. Narayan, for instance, earned Rs. 10,000 annually from his lands in Rajmahal, and had been associated with the Darbhanga estate and the Behar Landholders’ Association (B.L.A.) since his youth.\(^{15}\)

Many of the activists were already accustomed to public prominence, often in an oppositional stance meant to jolt Kayasthas, and the Indian nation, into action.\(^{17}\) Sinha, for instance, intentionally courted controversy by going to England in violation of caste rules barring foreign travel, and became the first Bihari Hindu to join the bar. While there, he consolidated friendships with Mazharul Haque and with Ali and Hasan Imam, whose father was a friend of his own father’s; all of these friendships would last for decades.\(^{18}\) When he returned in 1893, and further enraged elements of the Kayastha establishment by refusing to undergo a ritual of penance and by marrying outside his subcaste, Sinha found a community of journalists and others aspiring to authority who were ready to support him in the press and in public assemblies.\(^{19}\) Foremost among them was the journalist Mahesh Narayan, twelve years his senior. Narayan, then the editor of the *Kayastha Gazette*, had already spent years urging Bihari Hindus, and Kayasthas in particular, to keep up with Muslims, “the more progressive community,” by joining the bar in London.\(^{20}\)

Sinha, Narayan, and their allies founded the *Behar Times* to argue for a higher political status for Bihar; but at the same time, they continued to pay special attention to the Kayastha community, regularly running reports on Kayastha organizations’ meetings and on the need for caste reform and English education.\(^{21}\) In 1904, when Nand Kishore Lal’s younger brother Parmeshwar followed in Sinha’s steps to London, he faced criticisms similar to those Sinha had encountered. Unlike in Sinha’s time, though, by this point there was a ready-made support

\(^{15}\) Narayan had worked as a clerk in the Association’s office as a youth, and in the 1890s and 1900s received a stipend and other forms of support from the Maharajas of Darbhanga. Rajmahal lay in the Santhal Parganas (present-day Jharkhand). See the *Beharee*, August 16 and 27, 1907.

\(^{17}\) As Lucy Carroll points out, however, the controversies that emerged were distinctly local. Lucy Carroll, “The Seavoyage Controversy and the Kayasthas of North India, 1901-1909,” *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (1979): 291, 297.


\(^{20}\) The *Beharee*, August 26, 1909; Bishop, “Sachchidananda Sinha,” 29. Bishop incorrectly identifies the paper as the *Shahabad Gazette*.

\(^{21}\) See, for instance, the letter from “A.B.C.” in the *Behar Times* of September 9, 1898, celebrating the establishment of a Kayastha Conference in Bihar and urging Bihar’s Kayasthas to establish “a Kayestha Boarding House... just like the one we have in Allahabad. It is a want which... all of us feel keenly and on account of which most of our promising Kayestha boys have to put an end to their educational career, after passing their matriculation. Those who have lived for some time in Bankipore which is the chief seat of education in Behar and have been in touch with the student community of the place will, I am sure, bear testimony to the fact above stated.”
network and platform for Lal’s own views. Both in London and after his return, he regularly defended his decisions and exhorted others to follow his lead in the pages of the Behar Times and its successor the Beharee, as well as in Sinha’s magazine, the Hindustan Review (formerly the Kayastha Samachar), and newspaper, The Indian People, both published from Allahabad. Not all of the contributors to these journals were Kayasthas, nor were they all as intent on Bihari separation as Sinha and Narayan were. Nonetheless, the two issues of Kayastha reform—which meant, in large part, the promulgation of English education—and separation from Bengal continued to be closely linked. As Sinha later wrote:

The only educated section of the people, in Bihar, then consisted of but two small communities—the higher strata amongst the Muslims, and the Kayesthas among the Hindus. It is these two communities which offered the largest number of recruits both for Government and the legal profession. But... the vast bulk of the public services were recruited from amongst natives of Bengal, who were then far ahead of the Biharees in knowledge of English.... The Biharees... were content to play the second, or rather the third, fiddle in their own province.

This slippage, from “the only educated section of the people” to “the Biharees,” recurred persistently. The Bihar activists—never more than a few dozen men—portrayed themselves as an enlightened vanguard, the young, educated representatives of the public. “Education,” which always meant English education, underlay their claims to representativity: by virtue of their cultivation on a colonial model, they positioned themselves as the ideal intermediaries between Biharis of all classes, on the one hand, and the colonial state, on the other. A 1912 comment by the Beharee exemplifies this conception of representation, based on claims not of typicality but of exemplarity:

The meeting of educated Beharees held the other day at Calcutta with the Maharaja Bahadur of Darbhanga as the President... was a most representative gathering of Behar that could be convened. It was attended by heads of all the important estates in Behar, Beharee members of the Imperial and Provincial Councils, eminent lawyers and Zemindars. The deliberations of the meeting, therefore, represent the united

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22 When he was about to return in 1907, the Beharee published a long “open letter to the Kayasthas of Bihar in general and of Gaya in particular,” in which one Iswar Saran of Allahabad, who claimed not to know Lal, urged his readers to accept Lal, both for the advancement of Kayasthas and on nationalist grounds: “How on earth can this movement make any progress, if you do not send your young men to foreign countries to learn different arts and industries? I maintain that foreign travel is at the root of the Swadeshi movement. Not only Amastha [sic] Kayasthas but members of all the other subsections who feel for their community and country should muster strong at Gaya to help the solution of one of the most pressing social problems of our country.” The Beharee, August 2, 1907.


25 According to C. James Bishop, government files before 1919 listed no more than about 70 men as “prominent” or “to be watched.” Bishop, “Sachchidananda Sinha,” 185n.
Another category, equally important to defining the right of certain people to articulate Bihar’s interests, was “public life,” which referred to the network of associations and journals, primarily Anglophone, through which elite Biharis addressed each other and the state. Both Biharis and Bengalis agreed that Bengal was advanced and Bihar backward in the development of such public life, but they also agreed that since Mahesh Narayan had founded the Behar Times, the public life of Patna and Bihar was improving. The participants in this “public life” were a subset of Bihar’s “representatives.” Large landlords frequently underwrote newspapers, but rarely participated directly in the public sphere. The Maharaja of Darbhanga, head of Bihar’s largest estate, was something of an exception, but even his pronouncements tended to be in the nature of presidential addresses at various associations’ meetings, rather than commentaries on events. That primarily left lawyers, most of whom belonged to the two groups Sinha identified—sharif Muslims and Kayasthas. The latter, in particular, persisted as the prototypical Biharis in the eyes of the Bihar activists. For example, when Bihar and Orissa’s separation had been announced but the boundaries of the new province had not been fully determined, demands that Bhagalpur district go to Bihar centered in part on the affiliation of the local Kayasthas. Though the district’s several hundred Uttar Rarhi Kayasthas had come from Bengal long ago, the activists said, they “have entirely forgotten the Bengali language and their mother tongue is purely Hindi,” indicating their transformation into Biharis.

The foil to the Behar Times in the debates over Bihar’s political status was another English-language Patna paper. Representing the Bengalis living in Bihar, and especially the lawyers, landlords, and estate managers among them, was the Behar Herald, founded in 1875 by Guru Prasad Sen. Originally from eastern Bengal, Sen came to Patna as a Deputy Magistrate in 1868, whereupon he resigned from government service and took up legal practice there, “at a time when the front position there was held by Urdoo-knowing legal practitioners of the old school.” In addition to attaining success and recognition as a vakil, he was also the Secretary of the Behar Landholders’ Association and a member of the Bengal Legislative Council, where he represented his native Dacca Division. His primary legacy, though, was the Behar Herald. Founded as an organ of the B.L.A., the Herald subsequently came into Sen’s own possession, whereupon it became a more forthright defender of Bengali interests; he remained at its helm until shortly before his death in 1900. Despite Sen’s opposition to the idea of Bihar’s

26 In the same issue of the paper, Parmeshwar Lall wrote, “It has never been my good fortune to attend so thoroughly representative a meeting of my countrymen.... The Hon. Mr. Mazharul Haque remarked to me very truly that every body who was anybody in Behar had been present at the meeting and that he in his long experience had never seen so representative a gathering.” The Beharee, January 12, 1912.

27 For one articulation of this view, among very many, see the notice of the anniversary of Narayan’s death in the Beharee, August 12, 1910.

28 The Beharee, January 19 and 26, 1912. The role of language in Bihar politics is discussed further below. On the genealogy of the idea of the “mother tongue,” see Mitchell, Language, Emotion, and Politics, introduction.

29 Sinha, Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries, 13; The Behar Times, October 26, 1900.


31 Bhakat Prasad Mazumdar, “A History of Behar Herald,” in Behar Herald: Centenary Number, ed. S.N. Chakravorty (Patna: Bengalee Association, 1975), 20. According to his obituary in the Behar Times, while Sen was the Herald’s founding editor, he received support from others, including Durgagati Banerjee, who himself was attacked as an outsider while serving as personal assistant to the Commissioner of Patna Division. See The
separation, Sachchidananda Sinha would remember him magnanimously, both for his personal kindness and “for what he did towards organizing public life in Bihar, when Biharees were too backward to do so.”

Behind the Anglophone parochialism expressed by Sinha’s remark is the truth that Sen was critical in fostering an English-language public sphere in Bihar. In his various journalistic ventures—the English Behar Herald, its short-lived Urdu edition, and the Urdu and English Indian Chronicle (the latter of which was incorporated into the Herald)—he worked with many younger Bihari journalists, including Bisheshwar Singh, Mahesh Narayan and his older brother Govind Charan, Abdul Ghani Warsi, and Sayyid Rahimuddin, who went on to exploit the skills they learned at his side, even as they diverged from his political program.

As in the other Patna papers, there was always a place in the Herald for local issues, especially for the perennial complaints about sanitation. The paper also sought common cause with Bihar’s elites, both lawyers and landlords, placing its provincial location above ethnic solidarity when the situation warranted it. In a representative item from 1898, the Herald defended the B.L.A. from the Calcutta Hindu Patriot’s argument that the British Indian Association (B.I.A.) was the only legitimate representative of the landlords of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The Herald’s fear was that zamīndars [landholders] living outside Calcutta, both Biharis and Bengalis, were in danger of being shut out of the governance of the Calcutta-based B.I.A. “We never found Mofussil zemindars in any number attending any one of these meetings.... Will [the Patriot] tell us what chances the Mufussil Zemindars [have] if they do not come within the inner circle of the present day[?]” At the same time, the Herald was relatively forthright about its allegiance to the well-to-do Bengali community in Bihar, regularly running advertisements in Bengali, reports on insults against Bengalis, and the like. As the Behar Times complained in 1901, “the paper has become officially known as ‘the organ of the Bengali colonists in Bankipore’ (vide some recent Administration Reports of the Patna Division).” Though the Herald’s partiality toward Bengalis was a tendency rather than a strict rule, articles with titles like “Petty Provincial Differences” demanded that Biharis recognize “the right of our neighbours to be our rivals on fair terms.”

Bengali settlement and employment in Bihar, along with the paper’s own authority, were justified through this rhetoric of meritocratic impartiality. For years, the paper capped its leader with a quotation from the Encyclopædia Britannica, which read in large, italic type: “Several Newspapers are published at Patna, the most important being the ‘Behar Herald’... conducted by

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33 The Behar Times, October 26, 1900; The Beharee, August 6, 1909; Sayyid Badr ud-Dīn Ahmad, Haqīqat Bht Kahānt Bht: Azmābād kī Tahzīb Dāstān (Both Truth and Story: The Cultural Tale of Azimabad) (Patna: Bihar Urdu Academy, 2003), 454–58. On Bisheshwar Singh, see chapter 2; on Abdul Ghani Warsi and Sayyid Rahimuddin, see chapter 3.
35 See, for instance, The Behar Herald, July 20, 1898, and January 17, 1903. Products like Keshranjan Oil, a hair oil advertised as a “brain cooler and cerebral tonic,” were advertised in both Bengali and English in the Behar Herald but only in English in the Behar Times and the Beharee. See, for example, The Behar Times, July 2, 1909, and The Behar Herald, July 10, 1909.
36 The Behar Times, August 2, 1901.
37 “Petty Provincial Differences,” The Behar Herald, July 20, 1898.
the Native Pleaders of the Patna bar.” Sometimes, for variety, this would be replaced with W.W. Hunter’s remark in his *Statistical Account of Bengal*, which said much the same thing and added that “it is likely to exercise a considerable degree of influence upon the intelligent and English speaking portion of the community.” Aside from the obvious boasting intent, the latter quotation might be read as a rebuke to officials who criticized the *Herald*, and indeed nearly anything connected to Bengal and politics, as radical. In fact, the *Herald* was never particularly rebellious, but its reputation for political extremism opened up an opportunity for the *Behar Times* to establish itself as a moderate, loyalist competitor.

After the *Indian Chronicle* was absorbed into the *Behar Herald* in 1894, according to the Bihari journalist Gokulananda Prasada Varma, a veteran of the *Behar Times*, “the young educated Biharis had no organ of their own, they had no representative, no mouthpiece and this state of things was naturally very tedious and troublesome to them.” Therefore, he says, the *Times* was founded as a Bihari English paper with an explicitly moderate political stance. “It was declared to be all and all conciliatory, and the democratic radicalism of the Metropolitan Bengali press was in the very first issue denounced as not only futile but to a great degree harmful.” Sachchidananda Sinha recalled that the name “The Behar Times” was arrived at because he and Mahesh Narayan considered “The Beharee” to be too presumptuous a name; by 1907, this consideration was less convincing, and the paper was renamed the *Beharee*, despite competition from a Bengali-run paper of the same name. Whatever name it went by, the paper was only moderate when it came to the colonial state. Where Bengali settlers in Bihar were concerned, it was fiercely aggressive. Frequent and blistering attacks lambasted Bengalis as exploitative, money-grubbing colonialists.

The *Times*’s simultaneous insistence on a very mild nationalism and a vitriolic opposition to Bengali presence in Bihar led to some awkward maneuvering. When the *Times*’s support for a European over a Bengali candidate for Secretary of the Patna Municipality led the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* to complain sardonically of “the cry raised by some patriotic Beharees [of] Bihar for the Beharees,” the *Times* turned the aspersion around and accused the *Patrika* of bias and inadequate patriotism. Hitting its stride, the *Times* asked how it would be possible to discredit the Bengalis, as the *Patrika* had claimed the *Times* had tried to do. “Discredit the Bengalees, indeed, when there is the *Patrika* to immortalise from day to day in leader column and type the deeds of Bengalee lion-tamers, tight-rope dancers cat-killers and mosquito grinders *Et hoc genus omne*. All that the Beharees ever said was that they did not see the value to them of the exploration [sic] of their Province by such a superior class of gentry as the *Patrika*’s heroes.” To the *Patrika*’s call for the Biharis to “make common cause with the Bengalees and save their Province from the inroads of European adventurers,” the *Times* replied:

Yes, but what about adventurers who are not Europeans? Is the province to be saved from the inroads of this latter class of adventurers and will our contemporary help us

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38 See, for instance, *The Behar Herald*, January 10, 1903.
40 See, for example, BSA, *Annual General Administration Report, Patna Division, for 1895-96*.
41 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 24–25.
44 Sinha, *Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries*, xi; “A Sensational Prosecution: The ‘Beharee vs. Beharee,’” *The Indian People*, July 22, 1906. The problem was resolved through the incorporation of the Bengali-run *Beharee* into the Bihari-run *Beharee*, which by this point had also absorbed the Bhagalpur *Behar News*.
in doing so? If not, if it is the fate of Behar to be ridden by adventurers then it is practically immaterial whether they are white or black, hatted or bareheaded. Indeed, of the two evils white adventurer is the lesser, because he has at least this drawback that he cannot import Patwaris from England for village work in Behar.45

The Behar Times functioned as a kind of central clearinghouse for all its readers’ regionalist needs. It reprinted other papers’ commentary on events in Bihar, and promoted Biharis’ endeavors in the public sphere and in the legal and commercial worlds. Most of all, it reported on the Beharee Students’ Conference and the myriad Bihari clubs that were springing up throughout Bihar and outside it as well.46 Recognizing the commercial potential of this approach, one pharmacy, the New Medical Hall, inserted an advertisement immediately below the newspaper’s nameplate in every issue, proclaiming itself “the oldest and only Behari Medical Hall” and offering to execute “Mofussil orders.”47 Where the Herald’s claim to authority rested on its air of impartial competence, the Times tried to remind readers of its greater claim to Bihari authenticity. Thus, for instance, it criticized the Herald for uncritically repeating the Patrika’s false report of the death of a certain Bihari Brahmin scholar from Chhapra, the Patrika having confused him with a man from Arrah: “It is much to be regretted if papers of Behar should give publicity to such false reports considering the deaths of important Pandits of Behar. The Behar Herald ought to have enquired into the matter before silently copying it from the columns of its ‘High priest in the Calcutta Press.’”48

By leveling a steady stream of such remarks, the Times sought to portray the Herald as alien to Bihar and beholden to the Calcutta Patrika, the most prominent Bengali English paper. The real differences between the papers, however, were slight. The Times regularly copied items from the Herald, both with and without acknowledgement; the reprinted items even included the Herald’s Anglophilic jokes.49 Both paid close attention, too, to the doings of administrators, lawyers, and landlords, and to cultural and political life in Europe. But neither one gave much notice to events or debates that took place outside the English-language public sphere. Instead, each reprinted and praised the views of sympathetic English papers, and assailed their rivals, most of all each other.

This orientation toward English prevailed despite each paper’s organizational links with vernacular papers. The Behar Herald had originally published an Urdu edition, the Mushir-e

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45 “Adventurers White and Black,” The Behar Times, August 26, 1898. Patwārīs were village accountants, stereotyped as corrupt accomplices to grasping landlords and estate administrators.

46 In addition to the Bihari students’ clubs discussed in chapter 2, these included a Beharee Students’ Association in Benares, a Beharee Students’ Club in Sasaram, and a Beharee Literary Society in Ranchi. See The Beharee, August 23 and 27, 1907; and the postcards sent by the Literary Society’s secretary, Prabhu Narayan Mukhtar, to Dadabhai Naoroji in 1892 and 1893, National Archives of India, Dadabhai Naoroji Papers, B-133 and B-133 (1). Thanks to Dinyar Patel for drawing my attention to this last reference.

47 For instance, see The Behar Times, September 1, 1899.

48 The Behar Times, October 14, 1898.

49 For examples of reprints, see the briefs on the kidnapping of a Brahmin girl from Burdwan and Babu Ram Anugrah Narain Singh’s receipt of money for a scholarship for a Babhan (Bhumihar Brahmin) student at Patna College, in the Behar Herald, July 30, 1898, and the Behar Times, August 5, 1898. The jokes, in any case, were far from uproarious. In one representative example, a “Boston Lady (at Niagara Falls)” remarks, “Oh, what a stupendous waste of water!” To which “Colonel Peppers, of Kentucky,” replies, “Yes, but think, ma’am, how much more waste it’d be if it was whisky.” The Behar Herald, August 2, 1899. On the papers’ humor columns, see page 77.
Bihar, which had been edited by Mahesh Narayan and his brother Govind Charan Narayan, and at the beginning of his career, Narayan had contributed articles to the Bihar Bandhu.50 Narayan’s Times celebrated the Bandhu’s revival in 1901, and tried to raise funds for its preservation when it landed in financial trouble again four years later.51 None of these links and affinities, however, had much effect on either paper’s content. References to any newspaper not published in English were exceedingly rare, and the Times even warned a correspondent that “vernacular letters are not attended to.”52

Thinking backward

Though Narayan, Sinha, and the other Bihar activists spoke to several audiences, there was no sharp distinction between the arguments that they addressed to fellow Biharis and those they aimed toward British administrators. In both cases, they adhered to a loyalist nationalism that posed regional autonomy as a counterweight to Bengal’s supposedly extremist nationalism. The activists called on history, ethnography, and linguistics to portray Bihar as fundamentally different from Bengal, except insofar as Bengal was a wayward child of Bihar. When appealing to Bihari audiences, they often embellished these arguments by characterizing Bengalis as extractive colonists who posed a greater threat than the British thanks to their proximity, numbers, and local knowledge. Regardless of who was listening, they were candid about their goals. Though they expressed sympathy for artisans and peasants, the intended beneficiaries of separatist politics were altogether different: by emerging from Bengal’s shadow, the province’s scribal and landholding elites hoped to come into their own.

Patna’s primacy in this scheme was nearly always assumed. As the past capital of great empires, it was destined to regain greatness; as the principal city of Magadha, it was already the economic and political capital of the Bihari heartland. While other regions of Bihar might have their own cultural identities, their spokesmen rarely contested Patna’s place at the head of Bihari politics.53 As an ḍāvīsāī or “tribal” area, Chota Nagpur, present-day Jharkhand, was asserted to be part of Bihar by virtue of the presence of Bihari settlers. Orissa, for its part, was an afterthought, ultimately sutured to Bihar by administrative convenience, and not entirely to the liking of its own elites. Whether or not Patna truly represented all of these territories, it was the

50 The Behar Times, August 20, 1907, and August 6, 1909. The Mashahir-e Bihar, an Urdu paper apparently shut down in 1913 over its “seditious” comments on the Kanpur Mosque case, appears to have been a different paper, contrary to the interpretation of C. James Bishop and others (although Mushir, or messenger, is a more plausible name than Mashahir, or eminent men). Alternatively, it may have changed hands and severed its connection with the Herald. Certainly, by 1913 it was owned and edited by Muslims and no ties to the Herald are mentioned by administrators. See BSA, Political Department, Special Section, 30 of 1913; Report on the Administration of Bihar and Orissa: 1913-1914 (Patna: The Bihar and Orissa Secretariat Book Depot, 1915), 110; Bishop, “Sachchidananda Sinha,” 144. Badruddin Ahmad says that the Mushir-e Bihar was founded in 1913 and lasted until 1915, and had no connection with the Herald. According to him, its files were destroyed in the communal violence of 1946. Ahmad, Haqīqat Bihār Kāhānt Bht, 465–68.

51 The Behar Times, August 2, 1901; Rāmji Manohar Mishra, Bihār meñ Hindī-Putrakāritā kā Vikās (The Development of Hindi Journalism in Bihar) (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1998), 70. The Behar Times, Sepembert 2, 1898. Both papers did, however, occasionally run short notices of books published in Bengali, in the case of the Herald, and Hindi, in that of the Times.

53 This was true, at least, of those in south Bihar. On the construction of a Maithil, or north Bihari, identity, see Aryendra Chakravartty, “Territorial Self-Fashioning: ‘Place-Making’ in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Colonial India” (Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University, 2013); Paul Brass, Language, Religion and Politics in North India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974) ch. 2.
ground on which these contests would take place. The activists based their newspapers and organizations there, and took for granted that the university and high court that they demanded would be located there. Aside from Nand Kishore Lal, of Gaya, all of the activists were based in Patna.  

Though they were careful to frame their demands in terms intelligible to the colonial state, the separation activists drew on a simmering sense of inadequacy and resentment among Bihari elites. This feeling is encapsulated in two stories told by Sachchidananda Sinha, which have taken on the aura of an origin myth in the later historiography of the separation. While studying for the bar at the Middle Temple in London, as Sinha relates it, he was made aware of the salience of official categories and terminology for sanctioning claims to identity.

As official imprimatur even in matters of spelling—witness the official “Bihar” now in use—still counts for much in our public life, it is not surprising that, except to the Biharees themselves, the very name of Bihar was almost unknown.... I made the painful and humiliating discovery that not only was Bihar a terra incognita to the average Britisher, and to even the retired Anglo-Indians, but also to the majority of the Indians there. Some of my Indian friends, in Britain, even challenged me to a literary combat, and dared me to point out any such province as “Bihar” in a recognized text-book of geography! It would be difficult for me to convey to the Biharees of today the sense of shame and humiliation which I, and some other equally sensitive Biharee friends, felt while prosecuting our studies in Britain, on realizing that we were a people without any individuality, without any province to claim as ours; in fact, without any local habitation with a name.

In a way, Sinha’s account represents the inverse of the experience of Bihari students in Calcutta, described in chapter 2. In Calcutta, Biharis were surrounded by Bengalis, both in the University and in their social lives. Institutions like the Behar Sporting Club and the Bihari mess gave them some comfort and, at the same time, supplied opportunities to maintain a sense of cultural and social distinction, but both Biharis and Bengalis understood the regions and peoples to be different. In London, on the other hand, the most salient identification for young Indians tended to be their Indianness rather than their regional origins; indeed, the experience of “pilgrimage” in the metropole was formative in the development of many nationalists.

Asserting regional difference became difficult in London, especially since living in the imperial center seems to have heightened the sojourners’ sense of the authority of codified data and official categories. After all, what Sinha reports is not resentment at being teased, but humiliation at recognizing what appeared to be a fact ratified by textbooks: that since Bihar was

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54 Sinha, Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries, x.

55 For example, see Chaudhary, The Creation of Modern Bihar, 52.

56 In this case, “Anglo-Indian” refers to Englishmen who had lived in India, and not to people of mixed European and Indian ancestry. Sinha, Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries, ii – iii. The conversion from the accustomed “Behar” to the more phonetically transparent “Bihar” does seem to have been a conscious choice on the part of government. See, for instance, the pencilled-in correction from “Behar” to “Bihar” in the draft of a letter from the Secretary of State for India, St John Brodrick, to the Governor-General in Council, June 9, 1905, BL APAC, IOR L/P&J/6/709.

not a distinct province, Biharis “were a people without any individuality.” The region was very well represented among Indians in London—Biharis, most of them from Patna itself, made up a full 20% of the South Asians at the Middle Temple while Sinha was there—but the presence of fellow Biharis was little comfort when others could justify their mockery with “official imprimatur.”

The blow to Sinha’s sense of regional dignity was redoubled when, as he tells it, the gibes of the nascent national elite in London were proved right by the first Bihari he saw on his homecoming:

The sense of this painful conviction was, if anything, intensified when on my return to India, early in the year, 1893, at the very first railway station in Bihar, I noticed a tall, robust and stalwart Biharee constable wearing the badge with the inscription “Bengal Police.” It almost embittered my feelings of joy and gratification on my return home, after an absence of more than three years abroad. But as if it were by an impulse, I resolved then and there to do all that lay in my power to secure for Bihar a distinct and honourable status as an administrative unit, with an individuality on the same footing as that of the more important provinces in the country.

This image, of the proud and vigorous Bihari yeoman disgraced by his misnaming as a Bengali, would underwrite much of the argument for Bihar’s separation. Sinha slides from the figure of the constable, who appears to be entirely innocent of his dishonor, directly to the impassioned resolution to secure Bihar’s honor and individuality through a political change that would, in all likelihood, have negligible effect on the constable himself. However Sinha’s motivations developed—and contemporary doggerel accused him of self-interest—his devotion to his cause was apparent.

The peripatetic journalist St. Nihal Singh, a friend of Sinha’s and a long-time contributor to his various publications, gives a picture of Sinha as a cosmopolitan and simultaneously a proud Bihari. Sinha traveled widely and lived outside Bihar for years, maintaining a particularly close

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58 It is doubtful whether well educated Indians would genuinely not have heard of Bihar, but this seems to be beside the point. As a matter of fact, Bihar was clearly marked in some of the atlases of the day, although of course Sinha’s friends could score a technical point since there was no official province of that name. For instance, “Bahar” is printed at the same size as “Oudh” and “Lower Provinces of Bengal” in Letts’s Popular Atlas (London: Letts, Son & Co., 1883), India plates 8 and 10. However, Bihar is not labeled in Constable’s Hand Atlas of India (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Company, 1893), plate 29.

59 Out of 139 South Asians who overlapped with Sinha at the Middle Temple between April 1890 and January 1893 (including 6 from Burma and 1 from Ceylon), 28 were from Bihar (15 of these from Patna and 6 from elsewhere in Patna district). By comparison, there were 19 from Calcutta and 13 from the rest of Bengal. Most of the rest were from either Punjab or Bombay Presidency. Renu Paul and Mitra Sharafi, “South Asians at the Inns of Court: Middle Temple, 1863-1944,” 2010, http://hosted.law.wisc.edu/wordpress/sharafi/files/2010/07/Middle-5.01.pdf (accessed January 2, 2013).

60 Sinha, Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries, iii.

61 In his introduction to Sinha’s volume of appreciative recollections of his contemporaries, the academic Amaranatha Jha quotes a satirical skit beginning with the lines, “Sachchidananda Sinha, / By the nine Gods he swore, / That ere a year was o’er, / He should be judge at Bankipore.” Amaranatha Jha, “Foreword,” in Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries, by Sachchidananda Sinha (Patna: Himalaya Publications, 1944), γ. Though Jha dismisses this suggestion (perhaps without the full weight of conviction), the Behar Times and Beharee took every opportunity to promote the careers of Sinha and his friends. See, for example, The Beharee, January 12 and 26, 1912.
connection to Allahabad and to Motilal Nehru there; at home in Patna, as nearly every recollection of Sinha mentions, he was proverbially hospitable. Singh twice mentions that he was long unaware that Sinha was Bihari, and that he easily forgot this fact; at the same time, he says, Sinha was “a very Behar-conscious Behari... For a man with this ‘bee in his bonnet’ to reside outside the ‘province’ of his nativity would have been a folly that his shrewd sense would never sanction. The years that he had lived in Allahabad had been spent there through compulsion.” Of course, Sinha had many other interests apart from securing Bihar’s provincial autonomy. As he traveled, though, he acquired numerous social and professional contacts, together with legal and journalistic experiences, which aided in his personal advancement and contributed to the political sophistication that he brought to his cause.

Progress, backwardness, and decline

Though Sachchidananda Sinha was unusual in his public prominence and the extent of his travels, his feeling of humiliation by Bengalis was commonplace. But “backwardness,” which from one perspective was a term of abuse, became a central concept underlying the demand for Bihar’s separation. The exact meaning of the term was often left vague; it could denote Bihar’s paucity of English newspapers, its low rates of English education, its political compliancy, its social and religious conservatism, or its poverty. Often, these apparent inadequacies stood in for each other, even as the idea’s nebulosity contributed to its currency. So protean an idea was easily molded to a variety of purposes, from disdain to self-reproach to supplication.

Elite Biharis routinely reported being made to feel their region’s backwardness: whether they remained in Bihar or left it, their origins brought them in for abuse. Sinha, of course, was mocked in London, while Rajendra Prasad was warned by his Bengali mentor in Chapra that when he reached Calcutta University, his Bengali classmates would try to undermine him. Biharis were keenly aware of others’ perceptions even inside Bihar. Anugrah Narayan Sinha, who would eventually become a lawyer and then the chief minister of Bihar, recalls in his memoir that when as a young man he started teaching history at Tej Narayan Jubilee College in Bhagalpur, there were few Biharis in teaching jobs. “It was thought that Biharis were sorely lacking in industry, talent and ambition. In their own province they commanded no respect.”

The opprobrium showered on Bihar by outsiders was matched by the Biharis themselves, who flagellated themselves for their backwardness. Such self-criticism was nearly required if they were to make a claim for better treatment from the government and its votaries in the press. The Allahabad Pioneer said as much when it cautiously welcomed the founding of the Behar Times: “the backward condition of the people in respect of education cannot be repaired in a

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64 For more on Sinha’s life, see Bishop, “Sachchidananda Sinha”; and Sinha’s own “Recollections and Reminiscences of a Long Life,” published in various issues of the Hindustan Review from 1946 to 1949.


moment, but an improvement may be expected when the community shows itself alive to its defects.”

Accordingly, the Bihar activists constantly acknowledged Bihar’s backwardness, the better to oppose that status and to publicize their own efforts to overcome it. Their thought was of a piece with what Partha Chatterjee has called nationalist thought at the moment of departure; as he says, “the nationalist’s claim is that this backwardness is not a character which is historically immutable: it can be transformed by the nation acting collectively, by adopting all those modern attributes of European culture.”

Thus, the Behar Times apologized in 1900 for the failure of a previous generation of Biharis to enter into colonial higher education at the same rate as Bengalis, in order to bolster its demand for more scholarships for Bihari students: “True, the opportunities were given to the Beharis too. But the sins of the fathers should not be visited on their children and their children’s children by a parental and Christian Government.... We pray that there be redistribution of the present allotment for High Education so as to give the backward provinces their full share.”

This sense of mission was hardly limited to the journalists in the forefront of the Bihar movement, but rather permeated many ventures in business and education. One Raghuraj Prasad Sinha, of the Behar Knitting Factory in Patna City, offered free knitting lessons to Bihari businessmen, “with a view to add to the Industrial advancement of the admittedly backward Province of Behar.”

A parallel between regions and castes was sometimes implicit: just as members of low castes, euphemistically called “backward classes,” might be objects either of disdain or sympathy, so backward provinces could be seen either as naturally inferior or, alternatively, as unfairly oppressed. A solicitous position toward one such group might also open one up to claims on another group’s behalf. The Behar Times, for instance, seized on a speech by Sir John Woodburn, the new Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, in which he told an audience of Muslims that “every one will rejoice that under the system of English Government there is a special

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67 *The Pioneer*, February 17, 1894.
68 The protagonists of the English public sphere in Bihar, in particular, liked to flatter themselves by reflecting on all they had done to bring Bihar out of its backwardness. Looking back later, Sachchidananda Sinha would open his volume of reminiscences by saying that, “though Bihar is still regarded—and, I fear, not unjustly—as one of the, comparatively speaking, backward provinces of India, nevertheless, it goes without saying, that the state of affairs, at present, is in many respects much in advance of that which obtained more than fifty years back, when I began my apprenticeship in public life, in 1893, and even till many years later, when it was created a separate province, in 1912.” Sinha, *Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries*, i – ii.
70 *The Behar Times*, January 26, 1900. This rhetoric, in which the speakers infantilized and abased themselves before the paternal state, was commonplace. For instance, in 1912 the Municipal Commissioners and District Board of Patna addressed the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal by saying, “We look up to Government as the children look up to their parents... as a last resort, it is our duty to approach our Ma Bap [mother and father, a reference to the state as a benevolent despot] and to cry for the redress for our grievances.... We, being the weakest and most backward children of Government, naturally claim, and we hope, deserve, a greater measure of care and attention on the part of Government.” BL APAC, IOR P/7863, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, October 1912, 56-58 A. On the paternalist or mā-bāp ideology of the colonial state, see Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), chap. 3; Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), introduction.
71 *The Beharee*, August 2, 1907.
regard for classes that are backward and behind hand in any matter.’’ While the Times rejected out of hand any claim to backwardness by Bihari Muslims, in contrast to Bengali Muslims, it took the occasion to point out that ‘‘these statements afford some encouragement to the Beharees. Beharis are ‘backward and behind hand’ in many ‘matters’ and they claim ‘a special regard’ at the hands of Government.’’ Therefore, the paper went on to say, the government should hold Biharis to a fair educational standard in recruitment to the Judicial Service.72

Through this repetitious invocation of Bihar’s backwardness, then, activists sought to advance particular agendas by tracing what they considered to be its decline. Not everyone, though, agreed with the diagnoses or prescriptions of these largely English-speaking critics. Their suggestions that Biharis suffered from inordinate conservatism and inadequate participation in the colonial educational system did not meet with universal agreement. Al-Punch, for instance, was ambivalent about the benefits of progress (taraqqī), whether the subject of progress was Bihar or the Muslim qaum (nation or tribe). On the one hand, it bemoaned Biharis’ lack of progress in articles criticizing their marginalization within colonial higher education, and even their poor turnout at a condolence meeting for the local notable Deonath Sahay, led by Khuda Bakhsh Khan.73 It printed essays and poems praising Japan’s progress, embodied in the schools that an Indian traveler reported seeing in every small town and village, funded by “national capital” (qaumī sarmāya).74 The paper also repeatedly warned that without educational reform and the cultivation of newspapers, “Muslims will continue drowning in the dangerous river of decline.”75

At the same time, Al-Punch lacked the English papers’ confidence in the unquestioned desirability of progress. When it spoke with a straight face, it appeared entirely convinced by the demands of reform; when it turned satirical, though, it was less sure. A piece titled “Progress! Make Progress!” mocked the imperative mood that enveloped discussions of the matter, warning readers that if they didn’t have their wives ride with them in horse-carriages, they wouldn’t progress; if they didn’t wear a coat and pants, they wouldn’t progress; if they didn’t read and pay for Al-Punch, and consider it their spiritual preceptor, they wouldn’t progress; and so forth.76 “A ‘Gentleman’s’ Letter to his Wife” presents a more sharply jaundiced view of “progress.” Writing from Bombay, the husband begins, “‘My dear wife,’ it’s a shame that you haven’t studied English. It violates my prestige as a ‘gentleman’ to write in Urdu, since this bankrupt language lacks the words to snap a ‘photo’ of true emotions and real situations; it can only present obsolete poetry and old religious bigotry.” Brushing off the kicks he received from Europeans and Eurasians (i.e., those of mixed European and Indian ancestry) en route to Bombay, he contrasts his wife’s backward conservatism with the unending courtesy shown him by Mr. Atheist, Miss Freedom, and the “several dear ‘ladies’” who took him to their house and fulfilled his every desire.77

72 The Behar Times, May 6, 1898.
73 Al-Punch, May 24 and September 20, 1906.
74 Al-Punch, February 8, 1906. The same article also praised educational philanthropy in Egypt and the United States, and lamented the inability of the Darul Ulum Nadwa to raise enough funds to bring a teacher from Egypt. See also Al-Punch, February 22, 1906.
75 Al-Punch, November 15, 1905. See also the issues of February 28 and October 18, 1902, and of February 13 and July 23, 1904.
76 “Taraqqi Karo Taraqqi,” Al-Punch, July 12, 1901.
77 A.A. Khair al-Amūr, “Ek Gentleman kā Khat Bīwī ke Nām,” Al-Punch, March 5, 1904.
Some of these gibes, to be sure, were specific to the debates roiling among sharif Muslims. But when Al-Punch insisted, with its tongue only halfway in its cheek, that progress demanded newspaper reading, or when the Behar Times slyly reinterpreted the Lieutenant-Governor’s protestations of concern for “backward classes,” they derived political bite from the portability of these teleological ideas. Concepts like progress, backwardness, reform, and modernity were mutable enough and modular enough—based as they were in universalisms—that they could be applied to regions, religions, castes, or any other collectivity.

By the same token, these ideas could be critiqued in much the same terms, regardless of their particular referents. As Lawrence Cohen has argued in the context of Bihar’s widespread portrayal in present-day metropolitan discourses as irrational and savage, “against the pretensions of a dominant national order associated with the metropolitan city and its forms of consumption, backwardness might mark itself as a state of authenticity set against a different kind of excess.”78 Thus, Al-Punch’s gentleman ends his letter to his wife by saying that, “as a result of those refined and thoroughly chaste ladies’ way of life, they are revered by their peers, and a wanderer (gharîb ul-watan, lit. one deprived of his homeland) like myself finds the comforts of home even in a big city like Bombay.”79 Social critique here takes a spatial form, as sharif norms and “the comforts of home” are sardonically equated with the deracination and sexual degeneracy of the big city, the better to highlight the chasm between the homeland and the metropolis.

“Dreams of childhood”

Al-Punch differed from the English press in directly critiquing the rhetoric of progress in this way. Even the most single-minded proponents of Bihari progress and political autonomy, however, carried a latent nostalgia that conflicted with their optimism about the sure benefits to be gained from a colonially derived form of progress. The writing of the young journalist Gokulananda Prasada Varma, for instance, is suffused with undigested ambivalence about the proper relationship between indigeneity and conformity to colonial norms, and between what he calls “sympathy” and politics in the public sphere.80 While Varma’s arguments accord in many ways with those made by Narayan, Sinha, and others, his intimacy and fervor gives them a greater poignancy than the writings of his less obscure allies. Precisely because they are less polished, they illustrate well the contradictions and vacillations of the separatist mindset. Varma insists that Bihar’s deindustrialization and impoverishment are inextricable from its moral decline, saying that “the people of Behar have, being oblivious of their own defects, attributed the retrogression of their province to various extraneous causes—to the advent of the indigo planters and to the encroachment of the Bengalis.”81 The simultaneity of this decline with Bihar’s


80 On Varma’s career in journalism, see chapter 3.

81 Varma, My Experiences and Observations, 5.
conquest by the British empire, though, gives rise to a problem of analysis and rhetoric that, like the other Bihar activists, Varma is not quite able to solve.

Though he permits himself to criticize the British as aloof and authoritarian, Varma’s rhetoric tends toward overwhelming loyalism as he represents the British empire as it represented itself: as the savior of Indians, especially Kayasthas and elite women, from the chaos of the eighteenth century. “At this time a deliverer was needed, and in came the White Men to bear upon themselves the burden of improving the country, establishing her peace and property, educating the people and infusing the influences of civilisation.” His prose turns deeper and deeper purple as he expresses his optimism about the civilizing potential of British imperialism. “The waning of the moon... can not drown us in the limitless ocean of utter despair, for verily I see morning approaching, and the time is not far distant when the never-setting sun of British duty will succeed in its ennobling work of educating the benighted Indians and thus giving us a realistic illustration how the white men bear the righteous burden of enlightening the dark land.” Unwilling to exceed critique and enter the realm of disloyalty, he focuses on Bihar’s own sins; persistent oscillation between nostalgia for antiquity and for his youth further blurs the contours of his criticisms. Ambivalence begets ambivalence, as Varma proves unable to decide whether Biharis are noble pastoralists or downtrodden serfs:

Mithila and Magadha... are the two most fertile, most beautiful and most romantic tracts in all India, and if we were to decide upon what we should attach its supereminence, whether upon the natural scenes, woods and villages, or upon the loving kindnesses of the inhabitants, their hospitality, their generosity, their now-fading sympathy, we are simply nonplussed and feel ourselves unable to decide correctly.... But much of what we had in ancient days, we have entirely lost today—and indeed the lost have left no trace behind. Much of what we had prized so greatly are now dreams of childhood.... Behar thus to begin with is an illustration of decayed glory, lost civilisation and neglected virtues. Well have they called her the Beotia of India.... Want of education and want of religious faith—which is the fountain-head of all noble energies—have helped to cripple the sweet country, and the present taste for accumulation of material wealth and sensual hours of repose have added fuel to the fire of destruction which is silently working mischief to this careless nation. Industries have died out, education is making very slow progress, and the habit in the people themselves of distrusting one another have made Behar a lamentable object-lesson to the world outside.

Varma collapses his childhood into the idealized ancient past, assimilating both to a kind of eternal present in which Bihar’s essence comprises certain virtues, chief among them a happy

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82 Ibid., 55–57.
83 Ibid., 45.
concord. Varma’s colleagues at the Behar Times were occasionally susceptible to a similar idealization of the recent past, before the introduction of the very changes they had helped to bring to Bihar’s public sphere. When the Bihar Bandhu was revived in 1901, the Times nostalgically if patronizingly evoked the era of its founding, “the earliest days of the wakening of a national and public life in Behar,” as “happy days when discord was unknown and union reigned supreme in the counsels of young Behar.... The memory loves to dwell on the freshness and fragrance of public life in those days and, by contrast, to feel all the poignancy of regret at what cannot return. The Behar Bandhu is about the only link with that period which we possess and must be preserved.”85 For both Varma and the writers and editors of the Behar Times, an innocent era is just out of reach, there to be remembered but never regained. Progress and decay are taking place simultaneously, and the task that has fallen to them as journalists is the construction of a public sphere that somehow recreates the virtues of the old while transcending the conflict and hypocrisy of the new.

Varma’s regionalism, like the nationalism of his contemporaries, focuses on cultivating an inner discipline based on mastering English culture without losing civilizational integrity, which for him is paradigmatically religious. Many other Bihari critics of Bihar alleged the reverse, casting religious conservatism as Bihar’s chief failing. A high school teacher in Siwan, for instance, complained to the Beharee that “the reason of this backwardness of Behar in respect of education is not its climate as many people suppose but is this that Biharees are indolent, superstitious, conservatives to the core, and subject to procrastination.... They do not like to introduce anything new or to do anything which their ancestors not did, however conducive that thing may be to their improvement.”86 No matter where one fell on this question—and of course, a critic could always do as Gandhi did and distinguish conservatism and superstition from “true religion”—the solution, for Varma and others, was to obtain “education,” meaning education within the colonial system, without losing one’s “sympathy.” Finding examples of people who had done so to Varma’s satisfaction, however, proved difficult. Speaking as a forthright promoter of the press and “other useful practical works,” Varma inveighed against “the educated young men of Behar who ought to have devoted a fraction of their leisure-moments to the consideration of the well-being of Behar.”87

Despite the affinities between Varma’s thought and the nationalism of his day, he has only contempt for organized nationalist politics. Without mentioning it by name, he assails the Congress as “the batch which poses as the educated body and which has rather ludicrously self-assumed the responsible function of acting as the mouthpiece for 33 millions of ‘dumb’ Indians,” the purveyors of “lip-patriotism and lip-philanthropy.”88 Despite his earlier rejection of the approach of casting blame on Bengalis, he now casts them as the embodiments of westernized greed and hypocrisy and the thieves of rural wealth and virtue. Like Al-Punch, Varma critiques claims of progress in spatial terms, albeit in a tone of sincere denunciation rather than urbane mockery:

People do not now care for their neighbours and relations as they did in the good old days. In villages fellow-feeling and sympathy exist a little... but in towns we have

85 The Behar Times, August 2, 1901. Note that this piece was not written by Varma; by this point, it had already been four years since Varma had worked for the Times. Varma, My Experiences and Observations, 25.
87 Varma, My Experiences and Observations, 44–45.
‘progressed’, and a person on the street will never feel his duty to go and enquire about the health of a next-door neighbour if the news of his illness have reached him. In larger cities, if a person dies in a house, the upper-storeyed neighbour will feel no moral scruples in sending for a dancing girl and spending the night right-out in the ‘pleasures of existence.’ ... Self-help and brother-help then are the dreams of the past.... Whether it is the effect of western civilisation or the peculiar corruption of our people owing to their inordinate love for money I can not fairly determine; but the fact is that we are become greatly distrustful of one another. The doctors and hakims have generally lost all sensibilities except that of amassing wealth.... The pleaders on the other hand except when they are in the lecture-rooms are least sensible to the dictates of humanity.... The translation of wealth from the villages into the town or the row of big buildings belonging to the Bengali pleaders in the town of Mozufferpore is one out of many illustrations to show you how the community, which advocates your rights, ultimately robs you of the very ‘rights’ and their values.89

For both Varma and Al-Punch, the city represents debauched westernization and the replacement of fellow-feeling with market relations. The villages, which have “progressed” the least, retain some of the sympathy of the “good old days.” As space gets more urban and time gets more modern, though, corruption and inauthenticity take over. Varma also shares Al-Punch’s sanguine attitude toward the benefits of British rule and the necessity of obtaining education on a colonial model. Lawyers and doctors, the paradigmatic recipients of the education he advocates, are in Varma’s view the most rapacious members of society. But though he valorizes the vernacular and precolonial against the materialistic hypocrisy of the colonial present and, in places, perceptively describes and denounces the uneven development introduced by colonial political economy, Varma never brings himself to attack the British or their imperial rule directly, nor to qualify his repeated demands for education. It seems that colonialism and its forms of discipline are both the cause of, and the solution to, Bihar’s woes.

At the outset of his screed, Varma expresses his regret that “much has to be said against the people of whose sympathy... I am earnestly solicitous. To some of them my standpoint may appear inconsistent [but] my love for them has the indelible hallmark of sincerity and their progress my own progress.”90 In structure and in many details, Varma’s understanding of Bihar’s present situation and future destiny resembles that of the leaders of the Bihar movement. Where it differs, though, and especially where it betrays his ambivalence and vacillation, is above all in his doubt that the problem can be separated from the morality of Biharis themselves. Thus, where more prominent men focus on the unfairness of Bengali supremacy within Bihar—a political problem that requires a political solution—Varma identifies both problem and solution in ethical terms. Like his colleagues, he sees Bihar as threatened by internal colonization by other Indians, and warns that Biharis must reform themselves, or else “we shall have to give way to the active, industrious and pushing among our countrymen... whether they be intelligent Bengalis or practical Marwaris.”91 But while Narayan and Sinha are wary of Bengalis’ dominance in white-collar employment and of their political extremism, for Varma the solution lies in Biharis’ internal reform and, especially, in elites’ cultivation of a lost form of ethics. Rather than hope for

89 Ibid., 49–51.
90 Ibid., 7.
91 Ibid., 8.
a return to the mythical past that he nostaligically evokes, Varma warns Bihar’s leaders that “if their heedlessness would continue in the same sweet oblivious way as at present, the total wreck of Behar in the not far future will be an accomplished fact.”92

**Ethnographic discourses on Bihari character**

The obverse of the widespread portrayal of Bihar as backward, conservative, and rural was the suggestion that Biharis were more innocent and loyal than those Varma calls their “active, industrious and pushing... countrymen.” True, many of the soldiers of the Bengal Army who rebelled in 1857 had come from Bihar and eastern Awadh; although some of Bihar’s “eastern Rajputs” were retained after the rebellion, for the most part, Bihar was largely cut out of army recruitment along with Bengal.93 Now that “the trust in the faith of the bewhiskered, faithful Bengal sepoys [soldier] was gone,” the British reformulated the concept of “martial races” in an effort to systematize military recruitment on regional and ethnic lines, favoring soldiers from Punjab and the northwest over those from Bengal Presidency and the south, and preferring rural men over urbanites.94

Nonetheless, Biharis were never tarred with the same accusations of non-martial effeminacy leveled at Bengalis. Quite the reverse: where Bengalis were characterized as loquacious, devious and effete “babus”—caricatures that grew more biting after 1857—Biharis (like their neighbors in the United Provinces) were seen as, and portrayed themselves as, honest, industrious, and docile.95 While the British were alert to the possibility that martial masculinity could be turned to rebellious ends, and there was no unanimity on which particular groups were martial, there was a certain inertia in colonial perceptions of group loyalties. Although the British had not forgotten Bihar’s role in the 1857 rebellion, and especially that of the Patna “Wahabis,” unrest in Bihar was generally blamed on outsiders.96 This is not to say that there were not other

92 Ibid., 11.


96 Warning against the dangers of the native volunteer movement, one Bengal official pointed out the difficulty of navigating between the Scylla of masculinity and the Charybdis of effeminacy: “The mere statement that such corps might, and probably would, include the sons and grandsons of the Brahmins and Rajpoots who fought against us under Kooer Singh [in Shahabad in 1857], as well as Wahabis in Patna and Ferazies in East Bengal, seems sufficient to dispose of the question. [But if English-educated Indians were allowed, then] the distinction
stereotypes, or that Biharis were all lumped together. Colonial stereotypes portrayed the people of Mithila as conservative, exclusive, and Brahmin-dominated; those in Magadha as poor, lazy, and uncivilized; and Bhojpuris as vigorous, pugnacious, and footloose. But as a group, Biharis were consistently described, both by themselves and by colonial administrators, in a phrase that drew on colonial esteem for stalwart peasants, as “a sturdy loyal people.”

When Biharis criticized Bengalis, they were less likely to invoke overtly gendered colonial stereotypes than they were to express resentment of Bengalis’ dominance of white-collar employment and their resulting outsized political influence. Rather than painting Bengalis as effete and sedentary, they portrayed them as irresponsible and aggressive. Such irritation with Bengalis’ leadership claims was prevalent throughout north India and Punjab, as well as in administrative circles, but Bihar’s status as a part of the Bengal Presidency produced particularly intense invective, expressed freely in the Bihari press. Recall, for example, the previous chapter’s discussion of the Bihar Bandhu’s excoriation of the Calcutta Bharat Mitra for its depersianized, and therefore uncouth, Hindi. The paper’s resentment of the “stink” of Bengali, presumably emanating from the diet of fish that north Indians loved to mock, was a continuation of its longstanding attitudes toward Bengalis and their language. Soon after its founding, when the Bihar Bandhu was published in Calcutta for a time, it had even mocked its own Bengali employees, writing in broken Hindi, “this Patna paper printed in Calcutta Bengali speakers its proofreading country language also here not good so purity of language and grammar we self are which in this way would be made between manly, high spirited, brave men like the high caste Hindoos of Shahbad, or the Mahomeddans of Behar and Bengal, and the weaker and more effeminate race who form the majority of the educated class, would create a danger little less grave than the one guarded against.” J.W. Edgar, quoted in Sinha, Colonial Masculinity, 88. Margrit Pernau points out that, while those perceived as Wahabis often aroused British fears about loyalty, their sobriety and discipline qualified them for government patronage and employment even in post-Rebellion Delhi. Margrit Pernau, Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 278–83.

As George Grierson said, “as fond as an Irishman is of a stick, the long-boned, stalwart, Bhojpuri, with his staff in hand, is a familiar object striding over fields far from his home.” George Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India: Indo-Aryan Family, Eastern Group—Specimens of the Bihārī and Oriya Languages, vol. 5, bk. 2 (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1903), 5. Shivpujan Sahay expresses similar views in Shivpujan Sahāy, Vihār kā Vihār: Arthāt Vihār kā Aiithāsik, Prākritik aur Bhaugolik Varnan (The Delight of Bihar: Or, a Historical, Natural, and Geographic Description of Bihar) (Bankipur: Granthmālā Kāryālāy, 1919), 84–88.

See the Englishman of August 11, 1908, clipping in BSA, Bengal, Political Department, Political Branch, August 1908, 301-2 B; Hardinge et al. to Crewe, August 25, 1911, in BL APAC, IOR Mss. Eur. 224/18. By the time separation was granted, the phrase had become proverbial, to be invoked self-consciously (often in quotation marks) and usually with the intent of demanding loyalty’s rewards; see The Beharee, January 19, 1912; The Express, September 19 and 28, 1915; Braj Kishore Prasad’s presidential address to the 1914 Behar Provincial Conference, BSA, Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special Section, 168 of 1914.

Of course, the two approaches cannot be neatly separated, and the Bihari press enjoyed mocking the stereotypically loquacious Bengalis for their flowery English. See, for instance, The Beharee, August 20, 1907.

at fault so whose flaws can see.” Likewise, *Al-Punch* regularly ridiculed “babu sāhib,” the stereotypical white-collar Bengali, for his accent and his love of “māshī” (fish).

The resentments that nourished these forms of mockery emerged not from differences of language or diet but from the overlapping inequalities that, in this case, congealed in geographic terms. The 1905 partition of Bengal, in which a new province of East Bengal and Assam was separated from the Bengal Presidency, was thus received very differently in Patna, and in Dhaka, than it was in Calcutta. Where the Calcutta elites, or *bhadralok*, many of whom owned lands in East Bengal, were incensed at their separation from their lands and the diminution of their political power, many others celebrated the partition for precisely these reasons, as well as for the promise of greater attention and investment from the colonial government. As David Ludden has pointed out for East Bengal, the implications of the partition were not lost on those marginalized by the dominance of Calcutta over smaller cities and the hinterland, of upper-caste Hindus over Muslim peasants, and of western Bengal over Assam, Bihar, and eastern Bengal. Thus, despite its titanic status in nationalist historiography, the Swadeshi movement for national self-reliance, begun by the *bhadralok* in protest against the partition, was seen on Bengal’s periphery as expressing “an economic nationalism that effectively naturalized existing spatial inequalities.”

It was true that some Bihari students in Calcutta, as well as Bengalis in Bihar, were already becoming assertive nationalists, but while the general ideal of promoting Indian business was attractive to many, the anti-partition agitation found few Bihari adherents. The *Beharee* argued that, on the one hand, “a country that has to depend for every necessary manufacture upon foreign countries is doomed” to fall short of nationhood “unless her sons make up their mind to encourage and protect her nascent and decaying industries with an almost ascetic self-sacrifice.” At the same time, it warned that “there is reason to hope that the magic of Swadeshi will shortly, like Aaron’s rod, swallow up the sinister boycott [of foreign goods].... It will not be then at all

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102 *Māshī* is a corruption of the Hindi-Urdu *machhī*. The fact that fish is called *machh* in Bengali was apparently irrelevant, as was the widespread consumption of fish in Bihar, especially north of the Ganges.

103 The *bhadralok* were the “gentlefolk” of Bengal, generally upper-caste Hindus in Calcutta who lived on income from a combination of white-collar employment and rural land holdings. They have been the subject of countless studies; three that I have found especially helpful are Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta* (Calcutta: Seagull, 1989); Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001). The definitive account of the Swadeshi movement remains Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1973).


105 Ludden, “Spatial Inequity and National Territory,” 27.

difficult to obtain a patient hearing from the British public and enlist their sympathy." Similarly, though *Al-Punch* was not opposed to the principle of self-reliance, it vehemently criticized Bengali agitators, on the grounds that they were communal (that is, religiously bigoted) and, more generally, that they were selfish troublemakers. The cartoon in Fig. 1 conveys this anxiety and resentment about Bihar’s unwilled connection with Bengal. Bihar, labeled a “province” and represented as a sharif Muslim, desperately begs Maulana Al-Punch to cut him apart from his conjoined twin, Hindu Bengal, clad in *dhotī* and collar and carrying a cane to mark his Anglicization.

Neilesh Bose argues that in East Bengal, the partition led to “the first awareness by Bengali Muslims... that Bengali Hindus claimed Bengal as the province of their own Hindu nation.” Similarly, in Bihar, the partition accentuated the sense that Biharis, and especially Muslim Biharis, were not included in the designs of Calcutta politicians. Thus, for instance, *Al-Punch* aligned itself equally happily with Biharis and with Bengali Muslims, and pointed to the parallels in their situations. Both groups appeared to be marginalized by the middle-class Bengali bhadralok, invariably referred to simply as Bengalis. The significance of the partition for *Al-Punch*’s worldview is suggested by the contrast between two moments in the career of the Patna barrister Sharfuddin. In 1904, when he received a university appointment, *Al-Punch* heralded it as a victory for Muslims. When he was made a High Court Justice two years later, though, region had replaced religion as the salient category: this time, the article was titled “Congratulations to the Province of Bihar on a Bihari Justice,” and began, “Here, Bihari brothers! Celebrate and blow bugles!”

When its mood swung from the satirical to the analytical, *Al-Punch* was an articulate critic of the enmeshed dominance of Calcutta and the bhadralok. For instance, two back-to-back articles, on higher education and the selection of High Court judges, made the point that

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107 *The Beharee*, August 23, 1907.
108 For instance, the paper reprinted a letter from a newspaper in Agra appealing for contributions of Swadeshi products for display and review. *Al-Punch*, June 28, 1906. For examples of the paper’s criticism of Bengali selfishness, communalism, and hypocrisy, see *Al-Punch*, September 7 and 21, October 19 and 26, and November 16, 1905.
110 *Al-Punch*, December 3, 1904; December 20, 1906.
mufassal areas were marginalized by the same processes that excluded Muslims. Every time university results came in, Al-Punch singled out Biharis and Muslims (and especially Muslims from Patna district), both to celebrate their achievements and to complain that government institutions were far from inclusive: “if the names of a few Biharis and Bengali Muslims are accidentally printed in the Gazette [the Calcutta Gazette, which recorded appointments and other official events in the Bengal Presidency], then what right does the University have to be considered ‘public’?” Others had noticed the similarity in the situation of Biharis and Bengali Muslims; several years earlier, the Allahabad Pioneer had noted that “the want of education among the Beharis is as great a handicap to them in the race for employment as it has been to the Mahomedans.”

“Subordinate patriotism” and the campaign for separation

Amplifying the nationalism of the Bengali middle classes, already ill favor with the colonial state, the partition of Bengal provided the longtime advocates of separation with the chance they had been waiting for. Two years before the partition was put into effect, Sachchidananda Sinha and Mahesh Narayan had already seized the opportunity presented by Viceroy Curzon’s public request for comments about the proposal to transfer Chittagong and Dacca to Assam. Sinha and Narayan carefully positioned themselves as moderate negotiators, deciding “that we should not embark upon any agitation,” but rather make their case to Bengali politicians and to the colonial government in terms of compromise and pragmatism. As Sinha’s Indian People said, “it is a question with the educated Beharees of Now or Never.”

Following a failed attempt to convince Bengali leaders to support Bihar’s separation instead of demanding that Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa be kept whole and given greater political autonomy, Sinha and Narayan turned to the press. Two articles appeared in Sinha’s Allahabad-based Hindustan Review in 1904 and 1905, and were then collected in a free pamphlet, ambitiously titled “The Partition of Bengal or the Separation of Behar? An Ideally Perfect Alternative Scheme,” which they published in 1906 and advertised in the Behar Times and Beharee as long as the partition lasted. In this pamphlet, in their newspapers, at meetings of the Bihar Provincial Conference (formed in 1908 by Sachchidananda Sinha and Ali Imam as a political forum exclusive of Bengalis), and through petitions from Municipal and District Boards to the Lieutenant-Governor on his periodic visits to Bihar, the activists repeated their demands over and over throughout the years of partition. Where colonial administrators were often skeptical of politicians’ claims to speak for Bengalis as a whole, the Bihar activists were perfectly happy to accept these assertions, both since they provided a convenient impression of a unified opposition and because they accorded well with their own claims to represent all of Bihar.

As Gyan Pandey has pointed out, the category of the “nation” was unstable in the late nineteenth century, and interchangeable to some extent with terms like “race” and “class.” In

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111 Al-Punch, September 20, 1906.
112 Al-Punch, May 31, 1906.
113 The Pioneer, February 17, 1894.
114 Sinha, Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries, xviii – xix.
115 The Indian People, December 25, 1903.
117 On the founding of the Behar Provincial Conference, see Bishop, “Sachchidananda Sinha,” 184–85; Sinha, Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries, 79.
later decades it was increasingly replaced with the vaguer term “community,” both by Europeans who sought to equate communalism and nationalism and by Indians who emphasized the gulf between the two.\textsuperscript{118} Whether Biharis and other regional groups were described as races, nations, or communities—all terms that were used at various times, sometimes within the same document—the point was that each possessed internal unity and could never be amalgamated with any other.\textsuperscript{119} At the same time, more than later “sons of the soil” activists, especially in south India, the advocates of Bihari separation stressed its compatibility with nationalism, and by and large hewed to the script of moderate nationalism.\textsuperscript{120} A personified—and feminized—Bihar who, despite obstacles thrown in her way by opponents, “knew her object, closed her ranks and overcame these difficulties,” was cast as the protagonist of what Sinha called “subordinate patriotism,” employing a phrase with an impeccably imperial origin, originating as it did in a 1902 speech by the Tory Prime Minister Arthur Balfour.\textsuperscript{121} When the \textit{Beharee} in 1907, it took its motto from the Congress politician and journalist Surendranath Banerjee, “the accredited leader of Bengal” and an advocate of replacing the Bengal partition with Bihari separation: every issue of the paper read, below the nameplate, “Behar for the Beharees, Bengal for the Bengalees, Panjab for the Panjabees, and so forth and the great Indian Continent for the benefit of all her sons is the cry of the Congress and the Conference and the primary article of their creed.”\textsuperscript{122}

This idea, that regional allegiances were crucial to the proper channeling of national loyalties, underwrote Bihari “legitimate aspirations,” and Sinha and his friends were at constant pains to establish the legitimacy, in other words moderation, of these aspirations.\textsuperscript{123} It was never from India that the Bihari activists sought separation, they emphasized, but only from Bengal: autonomous states like those of America represented “the only way in which the different races in the country can be politically unified.”\textsuperscript{124} Through this separation, the greater unity of India—which for them was not yet a reality—could be achieved.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{118} Gyanendra Pandey, \textit{The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India} (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 2.
\textsuperscript{119} Narayan and Sinha, “Partition or Separation,” 10, 35, 59.
\textsuperscript{120} See Janaki Nair, \textit{The Promise of the Metropolis: Bangalore’s Twentieth Century} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), chap. 6, 7; Sumathi Ramaswamy, \textit{Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
\textsuperscript{121} The \textit{Beharee}, February 17, 1911; Sinha, \textit{Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries}, 41. Balfour praised “this feeling of subordinate patriotism—if I might coin a phrase—which all Scotsmen feel for their country, and which in no way militates against that larger patriotism which we feel for Britain first, and for the British Empire second—that subordinate patriotism is, I think, one of the most valuable qualities which we possess.” Bernard Alderson, \textit{Arthur James Balfour: The Man and His Work} (London: Grant Richards, 1903), 275.
\textsuperscript{122} This testament to Banerjee’s authority appears in, for instance, \textit{The Beharee}, August 23, 1907.
\textsuperscript{123} The phrase “legitimate aspirations” appears frequently in moderate regionalist and nationalist arguments; see, for instance, Ali Imam’s speech appearing in \textit{The Beharee}, February 24, 1911, and the Monghyr District Board’s address to the Lieutenant-Governor in BSA, Bihar and Orissa, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, April 1913, 39-44 A. The same phrase was also used within administrative circles, for instance in numerous speeches by Viceroy Hardinge; see Charles Hardinge, \textit{Speeches by Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, Viceroy and Governor-General of India} (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1913), vol. 1, page 235 et passim.
\textsuperscript{124} Narayan and Sinha, “Partition or Separation,” 9.
\textsuperscript{125} The activists did sometimes evince sympathy for, or at least interest in, antinationalist arguments when they were aimed against Bengali presumptions of leadership over the nation. The \textit{Beharee} reprinted, without comment, a
In language anticipating the surgical metaphors employed for the 1947 partition of India, Narayan and Sinha argued that “the knife cuts through no vital tissues. You leave Bengal an organic whole to live its life undisturbed.”126 The biological terms employed by the activists conveyed a sense that India was composed of natural and homogeneous units that needed only the realignment of political boundaries to come into their own. It was on this principle that the activists carefully maintained the contrast between separation and partition, as Narayan and Sinha did by titling their pamphlet “The Partition of Bengal or the Separation of Bihar?” Where “partition”—a term taken from property law—suggested the potentially messy division of a single whole, “separation” implied a neat cleaving of two artificially joined entities. This terminological distinction between two formally identical procedures was carefully observed by supporters of separation, and usually by its opponents as well.127 While the Amrita Bazar Patrika, in particular, was unhappy about the prospect of Bihar’s departure, its writers acceded to the understanding that Bihar and Bengal were two distinct units, and almost always referred to separation as such.128 The exceptions to the rule underline the connotations of violence and destruction carried by the idea of partition. For instance, once the separation had been announced but details remained to be worked out, a correspondent wrote the Beharee from Bhagalpur to complain that the Bengalis,

being unable to bear the future prosperity of Behar which its separation from Bengal is destined to work out..., have set up an agitation for the dismemberment of Behar on the most flimsy grounds. They have begun dictating to the Government the actual partition of Behar and the transfer of the district of Bhagalpur and Purneah to the Bengal Presidency.... Let alone Behar as at present it stands. We do not want any amputation of our limbs.129

While the assumption that Bihar differed from Bengal was widely shared, much still rode on the activists’ ability to identify the essential unity of Bihar, and its dissimilarity with Bengal. One way to do this was to deny the existence of communalism there. As Pandey notes, colonial critics sought to undermine nationalism by reducing it to petty and atavistic communalism, or religious conflict.130 The advocates of separation, similarly, acknowledged religious tensions elsewhere but claimed that they were absent in Bihar. Sachchidananda Sinha, speaking on the second anniversary of Mahesh Narayan’s death, pointed out that “the type of nationality developed in Bengal is peculiarly of a Bengalee-Hindu type,” and likewise in Punjab. Speaking

long article from the Pioneer which conceded, “to each race, that is, to each community speaking the same vernacular, might be conceded a larger share in the management of its own affairs,” while insisting that “when a Bengali, however well educated and intelligent, demands a share in the administration of India as a whole, he must do so on other grounds, less easily established. He has to prove that other inhabitants of India are really his fellow-countrymen and really desire his interference in their affairs.” The Beharee, August 23, 1907.

Note: The references 126, 127, 128, 129, 130 correspond to the footnotes at the end of the text.
at the same gathering, Ali Imam concurred, observing that “in Behar... we are happily situated, it is here where Hindus and Mohamedan come to work together, build and imbibe true national Beharee spirit.” Particularly after the increase in communal tension surrounding the introduction of separate electorates in 1909, constitutionalists like Sinha and the Imam brothers advocated regionalism as a safer grounds for conflict than communalism, and offered Bihar as an example before “the eyes of all other Provinces... of bringing Hindus and Mussalmans on a common platform so as to upbuild a true nationality—catholic and territorial as opposed to sectarian and communal.”

Other arguments rested on assertions of Bihar’s unity in language, ethnicity, environment, and history. Drawing on imperial ideas of the relation between climate and character, the activists pointed to the similarity of Bihar’s landscape to that of the United Provinces to its west, and its difference from that of Bengal. They sidestepped any differences between north and south Bihar, and while they acknowledged that Bihar had little connection with Orissa, they imagined a marriage of convenience like that between Assam and Bengal. As for Chota Nagpur, they summarily dismissed its large population of “aboriginal” inhabitants and maintained that the remainder were purely Bihari (when the census made clear that a large number spoke Bengali), making Bihar and Chota Nagpur together “entirely homogeneous.”

Historical and linguistic evidence was adduced to demonstrate Bihar’s preeminent claim to indigenous authenticity, against which Bengal was portrayed as a civilizational johnny-come-lately. Janak, the Buddha, Chandragupta, Ashoka, Sher Shah, and Vidyapati were all cited as proof of the continuity of Bihar from antiquity, and much was made of the recency of Bihar’s political union with Bengal. Bengalis might be better represented in government offices, but Bihar was the older and purer region. As the Beharee said after the separation had been announced, when the Amrita Bazar Patrika and other Bengali papers were lobbying for Bengal’s retention of Bhagalpur and Purnea districts, “Bengal has been given elements of civilization by 131

131 The Beharee, August 6, 1909. In a letter to Madan Mohan Malaviya’s Allahabad-based paper, The Leader, Ali Imam’s brother Hasan Imam made much the same point, dilating it to insist that Bihar was so inclusive that it absorbed any true resident: “In Behar, in reality, we have no Hindus and Mahomedans. In this province we have the good fortune of having only one community and that is the Beharee. It is our boast, and we claim it to be just, that Europeans, Bengalees and all others who are domiciled in Behar are as much Beharee as the Beharee of the bluest blood.” The Leader, June 1, 1911.


133 Varma, My Experiences and Observations, 8–9; Narayan and Sinha, “Partition or Separation,” 50–51. These ideas, often seen as pure examples of Orientalism, were not exclusively colonial. On their Mughal heritage, see Richard Eaton, The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 241. When the United Provinces came up, the activists particularly emphasized Bihar’s affinities with the Benares region, where Bhojpuri was spoken and, more importantly, where land revenues were also covered by the 1793 Permanent Settlement. Narayan and Sinha, “Partition or Separation,” 70.

134 See also Braj Kishore Prasad’s speech to the 1914 meeting of the Behar Provincial Conference, BSA, Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special Section, 168 of 1914. Census data on language and ethnicity is notoriously imprecise, but it is clear nonetheless that large numbers of people in Chota Nagpur spoke various Munda languages, and large numbers also spoke languages of Bihar and Bengal (including Hindi and Bengali, but also other languages given as “dialects” by the census). See E.A. Gait, Census of India, 1901: The Lower Provinces of Bengal and Their Feudatories (Imperial Tables), vol. 6-A, bk. 2 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902), table 10.

135 The Beharee, August 9, 1907; Narayan and Sinha, “Partition or Separation,” 60–66.
different parts of Behar and naturally there was some affinity between master and disciple but that was a strange reason to deny the individuality of the master.\textsuperscript{136} The activists also triumphantly pointed out that Bihar used the Nagari script, which they cast, ahistorically, as the original script of the original language, Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{137} Thus, drawing on widespread arguments for Hindi’s recognition as the true national language of India, they assimilated Urdu and Bihari languages to Hindi to argue that Bihar was the easternmost extent of the Hindi region. All of these arguments drew heavily on colonial sources like George Grierson’s \textit{Linguistic Survey of India} and the historical notes included with the decennial census, as well as, whenever convenient, on Bengali authors like Romesh Chunder Dutt.\textsuperscript{138}

Without rejecting the British empire, the Bihar activists reproduced the nationalist logic that a people required its own polity in order to fulfill its destiny. All of the claims they presented—that Bihar was loyal, homogeneous, distinct from Bengal, and so on—were marshaled in service of their two central contentions, that Biharis received “stepmotherly treatment” from the Bengal government and that they were overrun by Bengali competition and favoritism in education and employment. In order to address both of these problems together, they argued, Bihar not only needed protection by government, but also a higher quality of government. Separation alone was inadequate without a closer relationship with a sympathetic administration, and one with a more prominent and autonomous position within the Indian Empire.\textsuperscript{139} Moreover, separation was not only desirable for the Biharis, but equally so for the Bengalis and the administration. It would promote the “better fostering of the especial genius” of the Bengalis as much as of the Biharis, and provide a graceful alternative to the Bengal partition that would save imperial face and disprove rumors of “secret sinister motives,” while fulfilling the stated goal of the partition, namely the creation of more manageable administrative units.\textsuperscript{140}

Separation did not, of course, enjoy unanimous support. The Bengali press was skeptical, understandably so given the separationists’ unflagging criticisms of the Bengali presence in Bihar. The \textit{Behar Herald}, for instance, charged separation’s advocates with lackluster patriotism: endorsing Hasan Imam’s exhortation to hold the nation first in one’s affections, followed by one’s province and finally one’s religious community, the \textit{Herald} groused, “we are afraid that such sentiments will not be appreciated by that class of politicians in Behar who urge in season

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{136} \textit{The Beharee}, January 12, 1912.
\item \textsuperscript{137} The cursive Kaithi script, associated with Kayasthas and widely used in Bihar, was usually acknowledged only to be dismissed. See Christopher King, \textit{One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India} (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 67–69.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Narayan and Sinha, “Partition or Separation,” 53–66; Sahāy, \textit{Vihār kā Vihār}, 97–98; \textit{The Kayastha Samachar}, July 1901, 23. The citations of Grierson were somewhat peculiar, since he had repeatedly written against the argument that Hindi or Hindustani was widely spoken in Bihar, outside of “Muhammadan towns” like Patna: “at present... the Bihārī dialects are mutually intelligible amongst the masses, while Bihārī and Hindūstānī are not.” Narayan and Sinha chose, however, to overlook the specifics of Grierson’s arguments, and to draft him as a sympathetic authority on the identity of Hindi and Bihari (as he collectively called the languages of Bihar), and on the poet Vidyapati’s foreignness to Bengal. See, for example, George Grierson, “In Self-Defence,” \textit{The Calcutta Review}, 1882, 258, 260; see also Aishwarj Kumar, “A Marginalized Voice in the History of ‘Hindi,’” \textit{Modern Asian Studies} 47, no. 5 (2013): 1706–46.
\item \textsuperscript{139} Narayan and Sinha, “Partition or Separation,” 9; \textit{The Beharee}, August 9 and 20, 1907; NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1908, 15-17 A; Henry Nevinson, \textit{The New Spirit in India} (New Delhi: Metropolitan Book Co., 1975 [1908]), 167; Sinha, \textit{Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries}, xxix – xxxii.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Nand Kishore Lal’s address to the Behar Provincial Conference, reprinted in the \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika}, November 8, 1911; Narayan and Sinha, “Partition or Separation,” 6–7.
\end{itemize}
and out of season that they are Beharees first and Indians afterwards.”\(^{141}\) The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was equally opposed, arguing that the push for separation was not only the result of petty resentment, but also naïve: it would weaken Bihar, and the same principles of regional origin meant to exclude Bengalis could also apply to Biharis whose ancestors had moved elsewhere.\(^{142}\) The *Patrika* charged Biharis with lassitude and dependency on government favor, denied claims of widespread Bengali support for separation as an alternative to partition, and blamed the agitations initially on “a handful of men... who are actuated with a desire of self-aggrandisement” and “have met with disappointment in life.” Later, the paper held responsible “some anti-Behari Bengalis, known as the ‘Patna clique of lawyers,’ and a lot of young Beharis, the real leading men of the province having kept themselves aloof from this suicidal movement [for separation].”\(^ {143}\) While the *Patrika* was correct that young Bihari lawyers were far more supportive of separation than were large landholders, there is no evidence of any major role being played by Bengali lawyers in Patna, either sincerely or as *agents provocateurs*. As for personal ambition as a motive, of course it cannot be ruled out, and certainly men like Sachchidananda Sinha had big plans for themselves.

The *Patrika*’s letters column offered a particularly welcoming platform to dissenting Biharis. One pleader, signing himself Brajanandan Sing, wrote from Bankipur to warn that Bihar’s weak bar and press would leave it prey to overreaching administrators, particularly if it ended up with administratively inferior institutions like the Chief Courts of Punjab and Burma, rather than Calcutta’s full High Court.\(^ {144}\) He and an anonymous correspondent who called himself “A Patnaite” argued that, being confined to a small and elite group of Biharis, the separation agitation was unfair, unrepresentative, and unlikely to be successful. Especially given the increasing attention paid by the provincial government to Bihar, there was little to be gained by any but a small group of elites who hoped for appointments to the Legislative Council for themselves, or for posts as Deputy Collectors for their sons. To the contrary, said “A Patnaite,” the administrative changes would positively injure ordinary people: “one of the disadvantages from the partition will be that poor litigant class of people would be debarred from procuring good legal help at a cheaper rate than now.”\(^ {145}\)

A few Biharis dissented publicly, even outside the pages of Bengali papers. Alakhkumar Sinha, who had received an M.A. from Calcutta University, joined his father, the prominent Patna Kayastha lawyer and politician Gajadhar Prasad, in opposing the separation. In a 1906 pamphlet, he rebutted the arguments presented by O’Donnell and the Bihari advocates of separation, cautioning against the danger of “living under the second rate administration of a Chief Commissioner.” In particular, he denied the activists’ claims that Bihar was a coherent unit, and suggested that their elite affinities had distorted both their sympathies and their knowledge. He doubted O’Donnell’s awareness that low-caste Biharis, “who are true born

\(^{141}\) *The Behar Herald*, November 13, 1909.

\(^ {142}\) *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, March 15, 1906.


\(^ {144}\) *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, February 21, 1906.

\(^ {145}\) *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, February 21, 1906, and February 3, 1908. See also the issue of February 3, 1906.
Biharees as any of Mr. O'Donnell’s enlightened Biharee friends... differ in point of marriage customs more widely from one another than from the Bengalees.”

The separation

Notwithstanding such criticisms, the advocates of separation ultimately succeeded. By 1911, their years of effort resulted in the announcement that Bihar and Orissa would become a separate province, headquartered at Patna and fully outfitted with a Lieutenant-Governor, a Legislative Council, and prospects for a High Court and a University. Fifteen years after the proposal had been laughed off as the product of a “silly season,” it had become imperial policy. The development that had made this transformation possible was, of course, the Bengal partition and the vociferous opposition it had sparked in Bengal. Colonial officials, seeing their preconceptions of Bengalis as rebellious agitators confirmed in the Swadeshi movement, turned for comfort and loyalism to the Bihar activists, who seemed to offer a way to end the partition without admitting defeat.

At the time of the Bengal partition, officials were already considering alternatives to dividing the Presidency down the center of Bengal. In their letter to India Secretary St John Brodrick, Curzon and his Council weighed the victorious proposal against the leading challenger, which called for creating a Chief Commissionership of Bihar, while transferring Orissa to the Central Provinces and Chittagong to Assam. While noting that “the cry of Behar for the Beharis has frequently been raised in Bengal in connection with appointments,” they also concluded that Biharis were uncommitted to separation, since while the partition question had been debated in the press over the past year, “not a single representation of any kind has reached us from a single individual or body in Behar.” In the absence of the petitions that would be generated in the following years due to the efforts of Narayan and Sinha and their allies in the Behar Provincial Conference, the government decided against these proposals. They justified this decision partly on administrative grounds—citing fears about the efficiency of the new provinces and the undesirability of service in a Bengal shorn of “all of its best districts”—but the clinching argument against the plan was that “it would tend still further to consolidate the influence of Calcutta over the Bengali speaking population. This would be an unhealthy rather than a healthy symptom.”

This intention, of dividing the province in order to reduce the sway exerted by Congress politicians in Calcutta, was widely alleged by nationalists at the time but never publicly acknowledged by the government. Always skeptical of these politicians’ claims to speak for anyone besides themselves—claims they regarded as “calculated to stifle and retard genuine national development”—the officials summarized their arguments by saying, “it is alleged that the division of the Bengali nation into separate units and the disruption of its historical, social, and linguistic ties will seriously interfere with the intellectual, social, and material progress of the people.... Bengal united is a power, Bengal divided will pull several different ways.”

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147 Curzon et al. to Brodrick, February 2, 1905, in BL APAC, IOR L/P&J/6/709, Home Department, Public Branch, 3 of 1905. On the administrative rationales for the partition, see also John McLane, “The Decision to Partition Bengal in 1905,” Indian Economic and Social History Review 2, no. 3 (1964): 221–37.
148 Curzon et al. to Brodrick, February 2, 1905, in BL APAC, IOR L/P&J/6/709, Home Department, Public Branch, 3 of 1905.
149 Ibid.
The officials’ objection to these allegations was not that they were false but that they were “narrow.”150 On the one hand, as Peter Robb has noted, colonial administrators sought to undermine any attempt to link nationality and territory by asserting that such a sentiment was not a true, organic expression of nationalism.151 As Curzon’s letter said,

in so far as the idea of national unity... is a genuine growth rooted in the common bond of race, religion, and language, and not the artificial product of professional agitation, universal experience teaches that the mere adjustment of administrative boundaries will present no obstacle to its development. If national sentiment is animated by any real vitality of its own, it ought to be independent of the boundaries of provinces.152

On the other hand, the same administrators worked to mold the formation of political sensibilities precisely through the manipulation of territorial boundaries. After all, the claim that “Bengal divided will pull several different ways” could just as easily be a summary of the views of Curzon and his Council rather than of “the professional politician’s objections” to the partition. Indeed, H.H. Risley had used identical language the previous year to characterize the Congress view, and commented that “their apprehensions are perfectly correct and they form one of the great merits of the scheme.”153 Dreaming of the creation of new territorial loyalties, administrators looked eagerly forward to the day when “the eastern province [that is, Eastern Bengal and Assam], having by that time developed a provincial spirit, may demand an appellate tribunal of its own,” weakening the political power of the Calcutta lawyers.154

With their customary combination of paternalism and strategic maneuvering, the administrators hoped to offset Calcutta’s influence by promoting secondary nuclei of public culture. As one official pointed out in response to Curzon’s insistence that the Bengali agitation was mere “wire-pulling,” the reciprocal relationship between Calcutta and provincial Bengal was real. Calcutta might be a new city and a colonial one, but by this point it was integral to its region. By contrast, a city like Dhaka, moribund and impoverished after many years in Calcutta’s shadow, would command less respect and devotion:

If Calcutta resents having the districts which enrich and fertilise it intellectually, and go to increase its influence politically, torn away from it; still more do the districts resent being divorced from the centre to which they look for all that goes to make up civilisation for them. If Calcutta is the centre of political agitation for them, it is also the centre to which they look for educational, literary, linguistic, and commercial life. It is the centre to which in legal and business matters they have powerful and material attachments as well as sentimental ones, and... they will feel a very distinct loss in having to look hereafter to Dacca instead of to Calcutta as their capital, and the change will certainly be resented. The expression of discontent is doubtless

150 Ibid.
152 Curzon et al. to Brodrick, February 2, 1905, in BL APAC, IOR L/P&J/6/709, Home Department, Public Branch, 3 of 1905.
154 Ibid.
machine-made, but the discontent itself is real and inevitable. Dacca no doubt has associations, especially for Mahomedans, as having been at one time the seat of Government of the Mogul’s Viceroy, but is at present, and for the last half century has been, a decaying town.  

In fact, Curzon and his Council did not doubt that Calcutta was a crucial hub of Bengali social, political, and economic life. It was precisely because of its dominance in all these spheres, and because of their antipathy to the Calcutta bhadralok’s mounting claims to lead and represent Bengal and India, that they hoped to take the wind out of its sails by fostering the growth of competing political units and “wholesome centres of provincial opinion.” The Bihar activists, concentrated in Patna, were in a perfect position to capitalize on this official impulse to fragment political activity by promoting the mofussil cities of the Bengal Presidency. As these cities and their regions rose in importance, the officials wrote, they would counterbalance the Bengal-wide or India-wide politics cultivated in Calcutta by helping organize “national life,” by which they meant loyalist politics based on regional identity:

From every point of view it appears to us desirable to encourage the growth of centres of independent opinion, local aspirations, local ideals, and to preserve the growing intelligence and enterprise of Bengal from being cramped and stunted by the process of forcing it prematurely into a mould of rigid and sterile uniformity. In course of time, if the subtle tendencies which determine social expansion and intellectual advancement are only given a fair field, it may be expected that such centres will arise among the Muhammadans at Dacca, among the natives of Behar at Patna, and among the Uriyas at Cuttack, and that it will no longer be possible for a small knot of persons at Calcutta to manipulate or manufacture public opinion throughout the whole of Bengal. While an opportunity will thus be given for the formation in natural ways of that local opinion which in other countries has been found to be a healthy element in national life, there is no reason to suppose that the administrative reconstruction contemplated will prove fatal to any sense of community of interests and racial sympathy that may exist among Bengalis as such.

Of course, the officials’ ideas of “intellectual advancement” and “local opinion” were strictly circumscribed; to a first approximation, they corresponded to the opposite of the “machine-made” agitation emanating from Calcutta—something closer, in other words, to the approach of the Bihar activists. While adopting idioms of loyalist reform like those that appeared earlier in Bengal, the Bihar separation activists stayed aloof from the more assertive Bengali activists as they promoted Bihari “local aspirations” over Bengali nationalism and offered Patna as a counterweight to Calcutta.

Although the Swadeshi movement had largely petered out by 1908, revolutionary terrorism continued in Bengal, much to the distress of officials. As Viceroy Hardinge said, “All the dacoities [armed robberies], murders and assassinations that have taken place during the last two years in the two provinces of Bengal are attributed by Bengali politicians directly to the partition,

156 Curzon et al. to Brodrick, February 2, 1905, BL APAC, IOR L/P&J/6/709, Home Department, Public Branch, 3 of 1905.
and there appears to be no immediate prospect of their cessation.”157 Having visited India and seen the scale of unrest in 1905-06, King George V personally suggested revoking the partition as a “boon” at the Delhi Durbar of 1911. The prospect of angering the Muslims of East Bengal, who had benefited from the partition, caused high officials some trepidation at first. But once the idea of moving the capital to Delhi and carving out a new province of Bihar and Orissa had been proposed, an escape route seemed to be open that would simultaneously maintain a Muslim demographic majority in a more manageable sized Bengal, remove the central government from the political hotspot of Calcutta, and reward regions that had stayed aloof from the anti-partition agitation. Both the Viceroy and Secretary of State came around to the idea, and the Home Member, J.L. Jenkins, despite previous opposition, endorsed it enthusiastically, remarking that, “until we get rid of the partition ulcer, we shall have no peace in Bengal.”158

While British administrators had been ruminating on the consequences of the partition, some of the elder Bihar activists had been attaining prominent positions within the government. Between 1907 and 1910, Sharfuddin and his nephew Ali Imam received appointments, while Sachchidananda Sinha and Mazharul Haque won elective office.159 When the Bengali barrister Satyendra Prasanna Sinha made it known that he wanted to leave the highly prestigious post of Law Member on the Imperial Executive Council, Sachchidananda Sinha immediately proposed Imam’s name to Viceroy Minto. Imam, an extremely successful lawyer, was reluctant at first to take a salary cut, but he yielded when Sinha pointed out to him that as Law Member he “might perchance be in a position to bring about the constitution of Bihar as an administrative unit.”160

Imam indeed proved influential in debates on the separation issue within the government, ensuring in particular that the institutions given to the new province were of the same quality as those in Bengal. In his insistence on an Executive Council, a Lieutenant-Governor rather than a Chief Commissioner, a High Court, and ultimately a University, he retained the same rhetorical strategy that had worked over the last several years, that of celebrating the loyalism of Bihari elites while cautioning against stirring up their resentment. While dismissing them as “a generation of enthusiasts” created by “the spread of the cheap stuff known as ‘English education,’” he warned, “I for one tremble to think what attitude this class will take once the humiliation of being placed under an inferior administration is inflicted upon them. The Beharis—Mahommedans and Hindus—alike are a great asset to us in the disturbed conditions of Bengal, and I think it would be nothing short of a political blunder to alienate their sympathy and strain their loyalty.”161

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158 Ibid.; Neogy, Partitions of Bengal, 289–94.
159 Sharfuddin was appointed to the High Court in 1907 and Ali Imam was made Standing Counsel to the Government of India the following year, while Sachchidananda Sinha and Mazharul Haque were elected to the Imperial Legislative Council in 1910 under the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909. Bishop, “Sachchidananda Sinha,” 194–95.
160 At Rs. 6,000 a month, the Law Member’s salary was itself quite substantial. Sinha, Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries, xxiv – xxix.
161 Imam sometimes gives away his glee at the comeuppance received by the bhadralok: “Whereas, I think before the partition he was supreme and played with the fortunes of the Beharis, the Ooryas and the Mahommedans of East Bengal, the retribution has come to him in unmeasured strength.” BL APAC, IOR Mss. Eur. E 224/18. See also NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, November 1912, 33-34 A; Neogy, Partitions of Bengal, 294–95; Sinha, Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries, xxix – xxxiii.
The arguments put forward by Imam and others were successful, and the Viceroy and his Council wrote in August 1911 to Crewe, the India Secretary, pointing out that “the Beharis are a sturdy loyal people, and... a strong belief has grown up among Beharis that Behar will never develop until it is dissociated from Bengal. That belief will, unless a remedy be found, give rise to agitation in the near future, and the present is an admirable opportunity to carry out on our own initiative a thoroughly sound and much desired change.” Additionally, they noted, Orissa and Chota Nagpur had little in common with Bengal, and Orissa’s seacoast would be valuable to the new province (although officials had previously expressed doubt that any harbor in Orissa could be turned into a port). Besides, it was important to reduce the size of Bengal if its Lieutenant-Governor was to be able to protect its Muslims and govern it effectively. Crewe agreed, and the king announced the separation, and the capital’s shift to Delhi, on December 12 at the Imperial Durbar.\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{162} BL APAC, IOR P/8705, Home Department, Delhi Branch, December 1911, 8-11 A. On Orissa’s lack of potential ports, in the context of its potential inclusion within the Central Provinces, see H.H. Risley, Secretary to the Government of India, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, December 3, 1903, BL APAC, IOR L/P&J/6/709.
The announcement was hailed by Biharis as a deliverance from provincial obscurity, a “blooming new life.”\(^{163}\) The *Beharee* jubilantly began to refer to Calcutta as a “Provincial town” and a part of the “mofassil,” while an advertisement captured the new mood by pointing to the manufacture of both European and Indian perfumes as a sign of Bihar’s arrival (Fig. 2).\(^{164}\) The Bihari activists’ pleasure was matched by efforts from those on various sides to weigh in on the exact boundaries of the new province, which institutions it would receive, and the location of its capital. Linguistic, historical, and ethnographic claims were made to demonstrate the natural belonging of this or that territory to one province or the other. The *Beharee* and the *Patrika* warred over the fate of Bhagalpur and Purnea, Manbhum, Malda, and even Darjeeling, which had been proposed as a summer capital of Bihar and Orissa.\(^{165}\) The interests and opinions of the aboriginal inhabitants of these territories were never brought up, except when, for example, the *Patrika* expressed its dismay at the inclusion of Manbhum in Chota Nagpur, when “the latter is inhabited mainly by half-savage Sonthals, while a large portion of Manbhum is the abode of civilized Bengali-speaking people.”\(^{166}\)

Orissa, accepted by the Bihar activists as an allied province but always a distinctly subordinate one, and an afterthought in their plans for separation, was a larger bone of contention. Objecting to the Viceroy’s claim that the Oriyas were being grouped with the Biharis because both had “little in common with the Bengalis,” the *Patrika* huffed, “The Ooriyas are practically a part and parcel of the Bengal nation.... Again, we are told that ‘the Beharis have hitherto been unequally yoked with the Bengalis, and have never, therefore, had a fair opportunity for development.’ But, will not this remark apply with greater force to Ooriyas and domiciled Bengalis... who are proposed to be ‘unequally yoked’ with the Beharis and deprived of a fair opportunity for development?”\(^{167}\) Tellingly, even when protesting against claims of ethnic belonging, the *Patrika* never abandoned such claims itself, preferring instead to contest the lines on which boundaries of identity were drawn.

The Oriyas themselves were cautiously optimistic. While they had their own tensions with the Bengalis, they were wary of trading the Bengalis for the Biharis as an “intermediary ruling


\(^{164}\) *The Beharee*, June 7 and 14, 1912.

\(^{165}\) See, for instance, *The Beharee*, January 19, 1912. Residents of various villages and towns also petitioned the government directly for the transfer of certain districts to the new province. See, for example, BL APAC, IOR P/8949, Home Department, Delhi Branch, January 1912, 49-53 B.

\(^{166}\) *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, January 29, 1912.

\(^{167}\) *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, January 29, 1912. The *Patrika*, not known for its fondness for Viceroy Curzon when he was in power, printed his critical comments on the new arrangements under the title, “Lord Curzon’s Powerful Indictment Against Delhi Changes in the Lords,” March 12, 1912.
race.”

As I discuss in the next chapter, the replacement of Calcutta with Patna was ultimately a lesser boon to distant Oriyas than it was to Biharis. For the time being, though, the salient political issue was whether Oriya-speaking people would be united under one administration. The fates of the Ganjam district and the Vizagapatam Hill Tracts Agency, both in Madras Presidency, were of special concern: the Secretary of the Uriya Samaj in Ganjam pointed out that “the principle involved in the [Royal] Boons is the desirability and equity of bringing together tracts speaking a particular language into one Administrative whole.” The real worry, he wrote, was that, “being placed in the background in the huge provincial area of the Madras Presidency,” the Oriyas would “lose their identity and interests as a distinct community.”

Though the Samaj’s appeal was unsuccessful—partly because official figures held Oriya speakers to be slightly in the minority in both places—the attempt illustrates the growing sway of linguistic conceptions of politics and territoriality. At the same time, as Pritipuspa Mishra has noted, ambivalence about strictly equating Oriya identity with language recurred throughout the early twentieth century. As in Bihar and elsewhere, pragmatic concerns often tempered exclusionary impulses as politicians looked for terms on which they could base robust claims to representation.

**Balancing acts**

The advocates of Bihar’s separation had to balance two contradictory impulses. On the one hand, their demands were undeniably particularistic and divisive, since they rested on an assertion of Bihar’s essential difference from Bengal. This invocation of particularity lent itself to a language of imperial subjecthood, in which Biharis appealed to the colonial state for protection from their Bengali fellow-subjects—an administrative form of protection, moreover, that only the government could provide. At the same time, though, many of the activists saw themselves as nationalists, and their vision for Bihar’s future shared much with the ways that their contemporaries in other regions imagined the nation. Their task was to find a place for the region within the nation and within the empire, and if possible to reconcile these two positions. Strategically, however, the colonial rulers’ pique with Bengali nationalists meant that the activists could make quicker practical gains by emphasizing their loyalty to the empire. Willing to temper but not to relinquish their attachment to nationalism, the activists settled on the formula of “subordinate patriotism,” which asserted Bihar’s unity and its essential difference from Bengal, while also claiming its place at the center of the Indian nation.

Sachchidananda Sinha’s memories, of his humiliation in London and of his distress at seeing a Bihari wearing the uniform of the Bengal Police, stand as foundational parables for this movement, linking the lawyer with the rustic and suggesting that Bihar’s biggest obstacle was a lack of official recognition. By employing the rhetoric of “backwardness,” English-educated elites could claim to represent Bihar as a whole, including its peasants, while advocating policies that were largely irrelevant to most Biharis. Invariably, these elites simply called themselves educated people or Biharis, confident in their assumption that a backward region required

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spokesmen who were advanced in the way that they were. Idioms of backwardness and progress were current all over India in this period, but here they drew in particular on colonial prejudices about Biharis’ martial masculinity and Bengalis’ loquacious effeminacy, stereotypes whose potency was enhanced by the political ferment of the Bengal partition. Because they were so capacious, though, these idioms could be adapted to any kind of social group, whether defined by region, religion, or caste; and indeed these categories often stood in for each other. There was also some ambiguity in the values attached to backwardness and progress. People as different in outlook as Gokulananda Prasada Varma and the authors and editors of *Al-Punch* could not quite decide whether to seize modernity and the values of the colonial city, or whether the mofussil had its own ways that should be defended.

As the next chapter shows, these doubts and debates were not settled by the separation. Hostility between Bengalis and Biharis continued, but in a new political framework. Not everyone agreed on the role Patna should play in the new province, or even on whether it should be the capital. Nor did all of Patna’s people, or even all its elites, benefit equally: the city’s new centrality hastened the decline of Patna City relative to Bankipur, even as Bihari professionals in Bankipur faced challenges in their efforts to harness the blessings of provincehood. Becoming a capital brought Patna new prominence, but it also reshaped the city’s public life around the state and its hierarchies, weakening the outward-facing networks that a paper like *Al-Punch* relied on.
5 Patna Capitalized

The New Capital is the modern charm of Patna.... Where there were once the shacks and sheds of the poor, where there were farmers’ verdant fields, where there were green meadows for cows to graze in, today the gleaming autos of babus steeped in the intoxication of wealth are racing on glistening asphalt streets sparkling under electric lights, and glorious buildings adorned with the beautiful trappings of debauchery are standing there smiling!

—Girindranarayan Singh1

When the separation was announced, Patna was named as the capital of the new province. To many, it was the obvious choice, and in any case its selection seemed to be a fait accompli. To others, though, the separation offered an opportunity to maneuver for power and to try to rearrange spatial politics within the new province. Rather than representing any fundamental rupture, becoming a capital solidified many of the trends shaping Patna during the preceding years, from professionals’ mounting influence to the rise of Bankipur at the expense of Patna City.

To be sure, these developments were bound up with a myriad of changes that reached far beyond this nine-mile stretch along the Ganges: elsewhere, too, Urdu was being replaced with Hindi, people were looking away from local society and toward larger collectivities, and middle-class activists were becoming more politically assertive. But much was also new and distinctive in Patna’s transformation into a capital. Emerging from decades of deepening obscurity at the same time as Calcutta lost its political primacy, Patna seemed to have become a modern metropolis, ready to lead Bihar into progress and modernity. The decade following the separation brought new money, new people, new institutions, new political prominence, and an entirely new quarter of the city. It also brought novel political challenges, like the incorporation of the previously unfamiliar people of Orissa into Bihari political life. But in many other ways, the promise of separation remained unfulfilled. Even as some in Bankipur and the freshly constructed New Capital on its southwestern edge reaped its rewards, other Patnaites felt little benefit. The existing city remained cramped and poorly maintained as its social and political authority dwindled, and even the white-collar Biharis who had championed the separation found themselves disappointed when the new era brought more competition from Bengalis rather than less.

Patna’s selection as capital

Patna’s selection as the capital of Bihar and Orissa extended the existing arrangement. The city had long been considered the capital of Bihar, despite the fact that there was officially no province of that name.2 Thus, when the Bengal government decided in 1905 that Bihar should receive more attention, especially since Biharis would soon be in the majority in divided Bengal, Patna was the obvious location for a new permanent establishment. The Lieutenant-Governor, Andrew Fraser, had stayed during the previous year in the Chhajjubagh house in Bankipur, a

1 Girindranarayan Singh, “Paṭnā” (Patna), Gangā, July 1931, 850.
2 BL APAC, IOR/P/163, Bengal, Education Department, March 1872, 63 A; Bihār Bandhu, September 15, 1901.
compound with a long association with politics. Even before his arrival, there had been rumors that Patna would become the capital of Bengal, and though these turned out to be exaggerated, his presence was satisfying to Patna elites hoping to attract the notice of the government. Their appreciative response supported the view within the Bengal government that the Lieutenant-Governor “cannot be known or accessible to the people of Bihar if they have to come to Calcutta to see him. He must settle down among them for several weeks from time to time.” Thus, the Chhajjubagh compound was acquired as a supplemental Government House. Before long, activists were proudly declaring Patna “the second capital of Bengal,” and asking the Lieutenant-Governor to spend three months of every year there—a request that was met with polite demur.

The stakes were suddenly higher in 1911, now that Patna was offered an ascent from the status of second capital of Bengal to that of first capital of Bihar and Orissa. Appreciative as organizations like the Bihar Hindu Association and the Bihar Moslem League had been of the Lieutenant-Governor’s more frequent presence, the Chhajjubagh house had essentially been a glorified circuit house, leaving Patna and its place in the world largely unchanged. The prospect of becoming a genuine provincial capital was something quite different. Though Patna already claimed political importance and historical prestige, its candidacy encountered opposition, in the public sphere as well as within the government.

Ranchi, a hill resort and center of missionary activity lying 2,100 feet above sea level in the Chota Nagpur plateau, was preferred as healthier and more pleasant than Patna by many in the government, including the new Lieutenant-Governor, Charles Bayley. Except for periods during the cold season when the government shifted to Patna, Ranchi was used as the temporary capital until late 1917 while facilities were being built in Patna. While various people suggested other sites—residents of Gaya and Bihar Sharif advanced their towns’ names, to the Beharee’s amusement, and Bayley’s successor, Edward Gait, advocated the Chota Nagpur village of Netarhat, about a thousand feet higher than Ranchi—Ranchi’s candidacy was the most serious. Its appeal, like that of Netarhat, clearly lay in its congenial mountain climate, rather than in any political influence exerted by Chota Nagpur. Far from being a disadvantage, its remoteness was integral to its appeal. As Dane Kennedy has shown, after 1857 the hill stations catered to “the desire to carry out official duties in an environment secure from the perils that had arisen with such dramatic force on the plains”—perils that now included not only insurrection and disease,

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3 Before the government bought it, the Chhajjubagh compound was occupied by the Maharaja of Darbhanga, who hosted meetings of the Bihar Landholders Association and other organizations there. Half a century before, it had been the home of William Tayler, the Commissioner of Patna, and it was here that he arrested the “Wahhabis” in 1857. Bihar Bandhu, September 15, 1901; L.S.S. O’Malley, Gazetteer of the Patna District (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907), 37.

4 Al-Punch, December 19, 1903, and October 1, 1904.

5 NAI, Public Works Department, Civil Works Branch (Buildings), October 1905, 1-4 A.

6 However, unlike Lucknow, which was officially recognized as the second capital of the United Provinces, Patna was given no such formal status. BL APAC, IOR/P/8140, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, February 1909, 4-9 A; NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1908, 15-17 A.


but also political criticism in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{10} Though Mahesh Narayan and Sachchidananda Sinha had hoped Darjeeling would be awarded to Bihar as a summer capital, their wish was not granted, and Ranchi emerged as the new province’s most desirable hill location.\textsuperscript{11}

Seizing on evidence of the government’s willingness to change its plans in other instances, the \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika} began to agitate for Ranchi’s selection over Patna, on grounds of health, cost, accessibility, and scope for urban expansion.\textsuperscript{12} To the \textit{Patrika}’s satisfaction, the \textit{Bihar Herald} took a similar stance, complaining of sops to “Beharee sentiments.”\textsuperscript{13} Irritated, Bihari politicians responded by shutting the Bengalis out of the preparations for the 1912 Indian National Congress meeting in Patna.\textsuperscript{14} Though one argument in favor of Ranchi was that it was closer than Patna to Orissa, it is indicative of Orissa’s secondary role within the new province that its main city, Cuttack, was never proposed as a capital—instead, the \textit{Beharee} patronizingly assured the Oriyas that since “they occupy the same position of tutelage with regard to Behar as Behar occupied in regard to Bengal, ... Behar would [always] extend its hand of fellowship and comradeship to them,” and would support an annual visit by the Lieutenant-Governor to Orissa.\textsuperscript{15} Nor were the smaller Bihari towns of Gaya and Bihar Sharif very serious contenders. Although Gaya’s name was tossed around alongside Ranchi’s, including by the \textit{Times} of London, the official file containing the petition on Gaya’s behalf was relegated to the less important “B” series, and simply recorded as a matter requiring “no orders.”\textsuperscript{16}

The real choice, as the \textit{Beharee} pointed out, was between two towns representing two political models. A capital at Patna embodied the spoils of the campaign waged by Bihari activists over the previous two decades, while Ranchi’s selection would leave the politicians of Patna and the other towns of the Bihar plains at a disadvantage. Worried that Ranchi’s early role as temporary capital might augur its political ascendance over Patna, the \textit{Beharee} complained of the “open secret” that members of the Indian Civil Service preferred the former for its “fine climate and natural scenery” and for the opportunity to work “unhampered by the pernicious influence of the so-called public opinion.” Ranchi’s substantial Bengali population was also cited as the main reason it appealed to Bengalis.\textsuperscript{17} Locating the capital at Ranchi would be a disaster, the paper argued, quoting the view of Bhupendranath Basu (a Bengali Congressman otherwise unfriendly to the new province) that such a decision “‘will not conduce to the strength or popularity of the Government..., which will come to be regarded as a secret conclave working in a new sextine chapel screened by long-stretching partitions of time and space and issuing its

\textsuperscript{11} BSA Library, Mahesh Narayan and Sachchidananda Sinha, “The Partition of Bengal or the Separation of Behar? An Ideally Perfect Scheme,” typescript, 1906, 42–43.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{The Amrita Bazar Patrika}, May 1, 1912, and July 11, 1912. The paper also printed various rumors about other sites being chosen, including one alleging that Orissa would be returned to Bengal and Bihar combined with eastern U.P., with Benares as its capital. \textit{The Amrita Bazar Patrika}, August 23, 1912.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{The Amrita Bazar Patrika}, May 28 and November 13, 1912; \textit{The Bihar Herald}, November 15, 1913.
\textsuperscript{14} BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Branch, 25 of 1914.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{The Beharee}, January 19, 1912.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Times}, January 13, 1912; \textit{India}, January 19, 1912; BL APAC, IOR P/8949, Home Department, Delhi Branch, January 1912, 72 B. Unlike “A” series files, those in the “B” series were not reprinted for circulation among officials.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{The Beharee}, January 12 and 19, and April 19, 1912.
edicts through the cold pages of lifeless official publications.” In its indignation at the threat to Patna’s political future, the Beharee turned to mockery. After claiming that Patna had “never lost its importance” since the reign of Ajatashatru in the fifth century B.C.E., one piece sarcastically emphasized the supposedly savage virtues of Ranchi or, better yet, “the wilds of Rajagriha or the Baraber Hills. With the contemplative Jogies [yogis] all around, the officials are sure to catch the contagion and, undisturbed by the hustle and turmoil of the puny mortals in the plains below they are sure to evolve out of their brains, much that will benefit the whole world and not Behar alone, off [to] the Hills, therefore, Laymen and experts!”

These public debates after the announcement of separation mirrored earlier discussions within the government. In the original discussions of Bihar’s separation and the transfer of the capital to Delhi, Ali Imam had drawn on the same historical and political rhetoric that appeared in the Beharee: as the “heart of Behar” and its capital under both “Hindu” and “Moghul” rule, Patna was personified as “the exponent and the representative of the views and sentiments of the country” under British rule. Though Ranchi or other hill locations might provide accommodation during hot weather, Imam exclaimed, “I cannot imagine how any other place can be selected as the capital of Behar.... To locate the capital of Behar in the wilds of these mountainous tracts is to throw the administration out of touch forever with the natural leaders of the people and such parts of the province as are inhabited by those who count for much in the social and political forces of the country.” As for Orissa, he said, Ranchi would be even less accessible to it than Patna would be. In print and in government circles, Patna’s advocates insisted that its centrality in the province’s affairs could not be matched, and that for reasons both historical and contemporary, it alone could represent the province as a whole. Though their claims of historical destiny were secondary to the political logic of locating the capital in the province’s largest and most politically important city, such notions of historical continuity had already proved their currency in the decisions to relocate India’s capital to Delhi and to reverse the Bengal partition.

An incomplete transformation

In the end, the challenges from Patna’s rivals were unsuccessful, and Patna became the province’s capital, with Ranchi as its summer capital. Whatever the civil servants may have wished, political officials persisted both publicly and privately with their stated plan of building a capital in Bankipur. According to Fowler Hall, who had been an engineer in the Public Works Department, “outside pressure was brought to bear[,] for Ali Imam... bought land outside Bankipur and used his influence with the Government of India to have this site acquired. The cost would have been stupendous had not [the Bankipur Collector] taken the case to Court. Anyhow, Bankipur was selected and a popular snipe ground was levelled and drained and is now

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18 The Beharee, January 12 and April 19, 1912.
21 As Crewe wrote to Hardinge, “historical reasons will thus prove to be political reasons of deep importance and of real value in favour of the proposed change.” Lord Crewe, Secretary of State to India, to Lord Hardinge, Governor-General of India in Council, November 1, 1911, reprinted in Mushirul Hasan and Dinyar Patel, eds., From Ghalib’s Dilli to Lutyens’ New Delhi: A Documentary Record (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.
22 “Government Buildings at Bankipore,” The Amrita Bazar Patrika, August 24, 1912; NAI, Home Department, Delhi Branch, July 1912, 5 Deposit.
known as the New Capital, Patna.” While Imam’s personal interests may have influenced the particulars of the site chosen, the Patna’s selection represented a continuation of the city’s existing role within Bihar. The specific choice of Bankipur, despite protests that as a new settlement it was no match for Patna City and its ancient heritage, likewise merely extended the established westward movement of wealth and power. These continuities make any insistence on 1912 as a temporal boundary somewhat artificial. Nonetheless, becoming a capital changed Patna in important ways, as new institutions arose, new people arrived, and the city itself took on new relationships with the surrounding region.

The first task in making Patna a capital was a physical one. The government began the acquisition of about 2.7 square miles west of Bankipur, and appointed J.F. Munnings, a New Zealander who had been working in the government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, to design the New Capital and supervise its construction. Influenced by the City Beautiful movement and its predilection for impressive, geometric vistas, Munnings built the central buildings—the Secretariat, the Government House, and the High Court—in neoclassical and Renaissance styles and set them amid gardens and radial avenues in a sprawling oblong area. Munnings commented that “the fundamental feature underlying the planning of this city was zoning... to give accommodation for the different classes to be housed.” Accordingly, sharp distinctions were made among the various zones, with railroads and waterways separating the densely packed clerks’ and servants’ quarters from the main buildings and the houses of judges and administrators (see Fig. 1).

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24 NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1912, 171-172 A. For a brief sketch of Munnings’s life, see “Obituary: Mr. J.F. Munnings,” The Sydney Morning Herald, October 1, 1937.
In scale and style, the New Capital was a modest sibling to its monumental contemporary, New Delhi. While Lutyens’s designs for New Delhi’s buildings grafted ornaments inspired by various Indian antecedents onto predominantly European bases, the New Capital’s buildings more resolutely followed European models. In part, perhaps, this reflected the government’s greater sense of security in Bihar as opposed to Delhi, the center of the 1857 rebellion and the site of its retreat from Bengali agitations. However, the New Capital’s design was also a product of budget concerns. Not only were the buildings closer together and more frugally appointed than they might have been, but existing models were used not only for minor structures, but even for the High Court, which recycled the plans for the Allahabad High Court.\(^2\) While the ambitious plans for New Delhi were eventually curtailed by financial circumstances, the New Capital was planned inexpensively from the start. Though its architecture aimed for a kind of rote imperial monumentality, functionality and the comfort of its European occupants were more important considerations than any attempt to impress the Indian subjects who had so loudly insisted on

\(^{26}\) BSA, Drawing No. 3516, Sanitary Engineer to Govt., August 30, 1913. See also the map labelled “Plan of New Capital Site,” prepared by the Eastern Circle P.W.D., B&O, and dated June 23, 1918, held at the Patna Municipal Corporation office in the Maurya Lok complex.

\(^{27}\) Munnings, “The City Beautiful,” 162–63. Since Munnings was busy with the other plans for the New Capital and additional architects had not yet arrived from England, the High Court was adapted from the Allahabad plans by J.F. Blakiston. NAI, Education Department, Archaeology and Epigraphy Branch, October 1913, 11-12 B.
their “sturdy loyalty.” Neither did the New Capital’s design make any invitation or concession to Indian residents of Patna.

The New Capital also resembled New Delhi in being cordoned off from the city to which it ostensibly belonged—administratively, being governed by the new Patna Administration Committee rather than the Patna City Municipality (which included Bankipur), and socially, as it only shared a short border with Bankipur and was located as far as possible from Patna City.28 Like New Delhi, the New Capital was “an annexe, an official suburb,” dependent on the historic city yet sharply separated from it.29 It would remain isolated into the 1960s, surrounded on three sides by countryside.30 It would also continue to be entirely dominated by official occupants: though its environs have now become urbanized, the New Capital area remains a sequestered office district, scarcely navigable on foot and largely bereft of ordinary shops and amenities.

Separate and together

Though the New Capital was new, many of the impulses that guided its construction were old. In particular, as I have shown in chapter 2, colonial administrators had long worried about the threat that insanitary cities posed to civil stations. As Will Glover has argued for Lahore, however, efforts to intervene in dense cities often proved half-hearted before ending in redoubled imperial self-segregation.31 The New Capital offered a way for Europeans, and some elite Indians, to continue to isolate themselves, at the same time as parts of Bankipur became less distinct from Patna City. While the New Capital itself was minimally connected to the larger urban environment, however, its influence was felt throughout the city.

Regardless of Patna’s heightened profile, the Patna City Municipality continued to be a weak and poorly funded body. It became marginally more autonomous in relation to the district administration, but both members and others continued to complain that it functioned primarily as a mechanism for dispensing patronage to the members’ muhallas, and that colonial officials immediately quashed any movement toward democracy or independent functioning.32 As the

28 Although the P.A.C. was meant to cede control to the P.C.M. once the New Capital was completed, this transfer of power did not take place. BSA, B&O, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, July 1919, 191-95 B.
29 The Times of London, quoted in Todd Kuchta, “Suburbia, Ressentiment, and the End of Empire in A Passage to India,” Novel: A Forum on Fiction 36, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 310. This model of elite urban growth was current far beyond the British Empire; on a coeval “ideal city... developed apart from the rest of the city,” see Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, “1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the Centenario,” Journal of Latin American Studies 28, no. 1 (February 1996): 75–104.
30 See maps in Patna Improvement Trust, Master Plan: Patna (Patna: Patna Improvement Trust, 1962), vol. 2. It is notable that, notwithstanding all this westward movement, the cantonment at Danapur remained entirely separate, in contrast to the arrangements in other cities. When the issue was raised, the Municipal Secretary pointed out that Danapur was four miles from the nearest point in the New Capital and asserted that it was inconceivable that the government would ever wish to include the cantonment within the boundaries of Patna. NAI, Legislative Department, Legislative Branch, October 1915, 13-15 A.
31 William Glover, Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2008), chap. 2.
32 The Behar Herald, June 3, 1916; Sayyid Muhammad Ismail, Brief Account of the Family and of the Life of Late Lamented Nawab Bahadur Nawab Al Haj Syed Wellayet Ali Khan Saheb, C.I.E. by His Dutiful Great-Grand-Son Khan Bahadur S.M. Ismail, M.L.C. (Patna City: Ismail Manzil, 1938), 15; Anugrah Nārāyan Sinha, Mere Sansmaran (My Memoirs) (Patna City: Ismail Manzil, 1938), 66–67, 76. This condition was widespread throughout India. See C.A. Bayly, The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880-1920 (Oxford:
lawyer and Congressman Braj Kishore Prasad told the Behar Provincial Conference in 1914, “if [an Indian member of a local or district board] has the courage to speak out his thoughts he is considered disloyal—though he be by race a sturdy loyal Beharee. I do not think there is any necessity of keeping these empty shows if the people are to have no voice on them.” Some critics, like the editors of the Behar Herald, blamed the municipal commissioners’ self-interest on the size of the electorate, claiming that the property restriction (under which voters had to have paid Rs. 1/8/- in taxes) was too low and thus the voters too poorly educated; others, like Prasad, argued that a certain amount of corruption was unavoidable, especially “in the beginnings of civil life,” and should not serve as an excuse for decreasing democratic participation.

Whatever the political constraints on the municipal government, it was under pressure to maintain certain standards befitting Patna’s status as a capital. At the same time, it sought to use Patna’s new role as a justification for lightening its financial burdens, and asked the provincial government for support for roads and sanitation. Institutions like the Khuda Bakhsh Library, the Bankipur General Hospital, and the Bihar School of Engineering, were also cited as “not purely Municipal concerns,” but rather “places in which the whole Province is interested.” The provincial government, for its part, reassessed the need for “local contribution, both public and private,” if the “ancient capital” was to “revive its prosperity.”

Despite agreement on the need for concerted renewal efforts, the New Capital tended to absorb provincial funds that might otherwise have been used elsewhere. Politicians in other parts of Bihar complained that the “disproportionate share” of provincial support given to the Patna Administration Committee (that is, the New Capital) reduced the amount available to ordinary municipalities. In 1924-25, for instance, well after the construction of the New Capital was complete, the P.A.C.’s per capita expenditures were double those of its counterpart in Gaya, and more than eleven times those in Bihar Sharif. Within Patna itself—where the per capita expenditures of the P.A.C. were about 3½ times those of the Patna City Municipality (and 30% as high in absolute terms)—the relationship was even more contentious. One Municipal Commissioner, Ayodhya Prasad, wrote at length to the Searchlight (the Beharee’s successor) to rebut, as unfair and perverse, the provincial government’s recent letter attacking the municipal


33 Braj Kishore Prasad, presidential address to Behar Provincial Conference; BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 168 of 1914.

34 The Behar Herald, December 11, 1915; BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 168 of 1914.

35 A.L. Inglis, Chairman of Patna Municipality, to District Magistrate, May 17, 1913, in BSA, B&O, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, July 1913, 1-11 A.

36 G. Rainy, officiating Secretary to the Municipal Department of the Government of Bihar and Orissa, in Municipal Department, Resolution Reviewing the Reports on the Working of the Municipalities in Bihar and Orissa During the Year 1912-1913 (Patna: Bihar and Orissa Government Press, 1913), 1–2.

37 BSA, B&O, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, August 1919, 303-14 B.

38 Population figures were approximate, since the census was only conducted once per decade. But the disparity tended to increase: five years later, the P.A.C. was spending 43% as much as the Patna Municipality. Local Self-Government Department, Resolution Reviewing the Reports on the Working of the Municipalities in Bihar and Orissa During the Year 1924-25 (Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1926), xxiv; Local Self-Government Department, Resolution Reviewing the Reports on the Working of the Municipalities in Bihar and Orissa During the Year 1929-30 (Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1931), xxx.
commissioners as “not alive to their duties” because they were resistant to raising taxes. He argued that, to the contrary, Patna’s 9.5% tax on holdings and total tax rate of nearly 22% were exorbitant—possibly as high as those in Calcutta and Bombay, and much higher than those in the New Capital. Moreover, said Prasad and his allies at the Searchlight, the taxes and government grants belonging to the P.C.M. were being spent, under duress, on waterworks and lighting that almost exclusively benefited the “official town” in the New Capital and western Bankipur, “the portion inhabited by the influential and stylish class of the citizens and the European quarter.” With nearly twelve times the population of the New Capital, and almost eight times its population density, Patna City and Bankipur seemed to residents to deserve a larger share of the city’s resources.

**Infrastructural imbalance**

Indignant over the new era’s failure to do away with Patna’s problems, Patnaites continued to voice the same complaints as always, especially around sanitation and the lack of open space for recreation. Al-Punch had lamented in 1906 that in such a crowded city as Patna, there was only one place for relaxation, namely Mangal Talab, and even it was in a deplorable state, filthy and without anywhere to sit. Drawing attention to the continued, but often neglected, presence of white-collar workers and students in Patna City, the paper argued that “it is really very necessary for students and other mental laborers to be able, after reading all day, to be able to get an hour or so of relaxation from Mangal Talab’s clean and gentle breezes.” A decade later, the Behar Herald was beating the same drum, complaining that Mangal Talab was the only tank in tolerable condition, that sanitation throughout the city was appalling, and that “for watering the roads the Municipal Commissioners have entered into a contract with the rainy season and for lighting the roads with the moon and stars.” The same poor conditions prevailed in Bankipur and Patna City alike, despite the promise of capitalhood:

The rate-payers do not hope for any ‘improvement’ or new ‘construction,’ though the mass cry is—‘now it is Calcutta.’ That may be true in one sense viz more than enough of taxation and of the rise of the wages of artizans [sic] and menial servants and hire of hackneys.... Hitherto no work conducive to the health comfort or convenience of the inhabitants has been visible. The mass of the people do not know how the affairs of the Municipality are conducted. With the establishment of the High Court here they have been expecting that this town will be a second Calcutta, but in vain.

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39 These tax rates were significantly higher than they had been in the 1890s; see chapter 2.
40 *The Searchlight*, August 22, October 27, and October 31, 1918.
41 P.C. Tallents, *Census of India, 1921: Bihar and Orissa (Tables)*, vol. 7, bk. 2 (Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1923), 2. Although the disparity in population had diminished somewhat by 1931, Patna City and Bankipur still had over ten times the population of the New Capital, in an area only half again as large. W.G. Lacey, *Census of India, 1931: Bihar and Orissa (Tables)*, vol. 7, bk. 2 (Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, 1932), 166.
42 Al-Punch, September 6, 1906. Recalling the same era, Waris Ismail says, “at that time, there was no cinema or anything like that in Patna. There were two places to stroll: one was Patna Lawn and the other was Mangal Talab.” KBOPL, Mss. Acc. 2698 (Warīs Ismā‘īl, “Azīmābād-Paṭna kā Māzī-o-Hāl” [“The Past and Present of Azīmābād-Patna”]).
43 *The Behar Herald*, June 3, 1916. The paper used the English name for Mangal Talab, Mangle’s Tank [sic]. The tank and the surrounding gardens had been laid out by a district Collector named Mangles in the 1870s.
Journalists called attention to the irony of Patna’s continued poor condition, emphasizing the disparity between the benefits that the separation had brought political elites—for whom Patna might have overtaken Calcutta as the epitome of urban might—and the continued problems of the middle classes and the poor. Another article in the Herald, for instance, needled Biharis for “singing to the chorus ‘Calcutta now is as much a provincial town as Patna,’” and complained that the impoverished municipality was unable to maintain the roads and drains adequately. Moreover, the author pointed out, urban expansion enriched a few at the expense of the rural masses: “the villagers whose lands have been acquired and whose home[s] have been demolished are undoubtedly reflecting after Oliver Goldsmith;— Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey, / Where wealth accumulates, and men decay. / ... / But a bold peasantry, their country’s pride, / When once destroyed can never be supplied.”44 Ordinarily, the Herald was not a particularly staunch defender of peasants’ rights, but in this case its pique at the Biharis’ gloating seems to have moved it to compassion. Its criticism was, however, well-founded. As in other cities, those who were evicted were required to buy new plots rather than receiving them in exchange for their old homes.45

Some saw the city’s problems as inevitable, given that it was “a length without breadth,” or in the more colorful words of Pataliputra, that “the long loincloth of the Patna Municipality has only nominal width.” But the seemingly unavoidable difficulty of the city’s narrow geography seemed an insufficient excuse to critics who complained that the municipal sanitation workers were stretched too thin and that an “army of mosquitos” was allowed to spread disease, even as ratepayers were gouged. The appurtenances of political and technological progress had their virtues, but seemed superfluous given the realities of cholera and other diseases: “High Courts, Council Chambers, electric lights are all inestimable blessings and in their own way, they might be greater acquisitions to the town than a scheme of waterworks. But one trifling fact to be urged for the waterworks is that they might mean the saving of the lives of a thousand poor citizens, whose sturdy loyalty is as unquestioned as that of the rest.”46 The Herald linked official fecklessness with the Bihar activists’ rhetoric of “sturdy loyalty” to point out the irrelevance of these “blessings” in comparison with the well-being of poor Patnaites.

These complaints, offered by a harried white-collar public, irritated at taxation and disgusted by filth, were indeed based in truth. The New Capital was largely isolated from the rest of the city, with its own infrastructure and its own unelected administration.47 At the same time, though, the provincial government set aside some money for sanitation in the Patna Municipality,

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45 NAI, Finance Department, Accounts and Finance Branch, February 1918, 106 B.
46 “The New Capital at Patna,” The Bihar Herald, November 22, 1913; “Waterworks for Patna,” The Bihar Herald, December 20, 1913; Pataliputra, October 1, 1914.
47 While Patna City and Bankipur were governed by the Patna Municipality, the New Capital was overseen by the Patna Administration Committee, all of whose members were officials, serving either under appointments or in an ex officio capacity. By way of comparison, in 1924-25 nearly all of Bihar’s municipalities had elected chairmen and majorities of elected Indian members. In Patna District, four of the five other municipal boards, including that of Patna Municipality, were entirely composed of Indians (who made up seven of ten members of the P.A.C.), and all had a substantial majority of elected, non-official members. Local Self-Government Department, Working of the Municipalities in Bihar and Orissa, 1924-25, 2.
and both the New Capital and the existing city were to be served by a single water system.\textsuperscript{48} To the annoyance of local commentators, sanitary improvements were extremely slow to arrive, and when they did, they appeared inadequate and unfairly distributed.\textsuperscript{49} The Patna Municipality’s “combined water scheme,” for instance, did not incorporate the older parts of the city: the pumps at Digha, near Danapur, served the area from the New Capital to the middle of Sultanganj, but the area east of there, where most Patnaites lived, was left alone.\textsuperscript{50}

The government also put substantial resources into endowing the New Capital with good amenities for recreation, while doing little for Patna City. High officials were provided with the South Bihar Gymkhana Club (now the Patna Golf Club), on 165 acres behind the Government House that were made available at a nominal rent.\textsuperscript{51} The head of the Board of Revenue identified the club as one element within the city’s ecosystem of parks and open spaces: non-gazetted government officers should be given land for tennis courts and the like near the new Amlatola quarter (a proposal that was fulfilled by the Gait Public Library and Institute, which paid a single rupee’s rent); officers of the High Court and the Bankipur public would prefer the Hardinge Park as being closer; and others in Bankipur, including students, could use the Bankipur Maidan, which was also more convenient to them. Satisfied, he concluded that “it will thus be seen that all classes of the community will be fully provided for.”\textsuperscript{52} This left a lopsided geographic arrangement of open space: the entire area east of Bankipur Maidan, home to the vast majority of Patnaites, was entirely ignored. The facilities featured predictable disparities in their appointments, as well, with investments of land and capital closely matching the status of the intended users.

The differences among these places reflect the new uses of space allowed by the New Capital. The hectic activity on the streets of the old city affronted bourgeois sensibilities. As one cantankerous Patna College student wrote,

\begin{quote}
this is the place for gossip-mongers and street criers imparting to the world their own profound knowledge. It is the root of all rowdysim, hubbub and hooliganism. That’s what a street of Patna is, full of all shouting, and of quarrelling, and of higgling ...... the money-lender with the poor debtor, the stylish sub-inspector with the absolute villager—clear-cut and adamant, the bulky, asthmatic grocer with the cautious customer. Ribaldry, buffoonery, and vulgar mirth stench the air with their noxious din, and the \textit{Bara-Sahib} [“great master,” i.e., a powerful Englishman] in his streamlined car... now longs to be away from a hell of a place like this.... The numberless noises on the streets of Patna have annoyed me almost to wrath.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}
Like the streets, open spaces like Mangal Talab, or even Bankipur Maidan, were constantly appropriated for activities ranging from Holi celebrations to, eventually, mass political rallies.54 In the cloistered new town, by contrast, seemingly public spaces were carefully defended from politics, religion, commerce, and other uses that diverged from narrow standards of rationality and propriety. When establishing the Hardinge Park, for instance, the government avoided dedicating the park to “the public,” in favor of retaining proprietary rights that could be resumed if the park was used in any way other than “use and enjoyment... for the purposes of recreation at all reasonable times.”55 Although, as Stephen Legg points out for New Delhi, the dream of total isolation was never fulfillable, the New Capital nonetheless represented an effort to separate the new provincial government, both geographically and socially, from the city that hosted it.56

Map 1. Western Patna, circa 1925.

Changes in the landscape

The high levels of government investment in the New Capital are unsurprising in themselves, but they are more noteworthy as part of a broader set of phenomena shaping the larger city and its relationship with the new province. The contradictory financial pressures guiding local politics tended to reinforce the existing trends of disinvestment in the old city and elite flight toward the west.57 This shift, especially the migration of white-collar workers, was reflected in the changing geography of education: though male literacy (always higher than female literacy) was growing in Patna City, it was positively shooting up in western Patna (see Chart 1). While the city’s restructuring around Bankipur was the product of a number of

54 Al-Punch, June 21, 1902, and June 13, 1903; BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 491 (I) of 1939.
55 BSA, B&O, Revenue Department, Land Revenue Branch, July 1915, 32-35 A.
57 Sinha, Mere Sansmaran, 67; Local Self-Government Department, Working of the Municipalities in Bihar and Orissa, 1924-25, 6.
mutually reinforcing developments, it was catalyzed in particular by the new institutions that arrived in the 1910s.

![Chart 1. Male literacy in Patna wards.](image)

One of these new sites was the Patna University. Originally planned as a massive residential campus in the New Capital, the University was finally built on a smaller scale near Patna College after Patnaites protested the expense and isolation of the initial design. Nearly as important in reshaping the city’s intellectual culture was the Patna High Court, built in the eastern part of the New Capital. When the High Court was established in 1916, in accordance with the hopes of Bihari lawyers and politicians, nearly all the Bihari lawyers at the Calcutta High Court—in other words, most of Calcutta’s elite Biharis—came to practice in Patna. With them, too, came numerous Bengali lawyers eager to cater to Bihari clients and to take advantage of a new and lucrative field of action. They settled, naturally, in Bankipur and Pirbahore, within a comfortable distance of the High Court; A.N. Sinha and his friend Shambhu Saran, for

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instance, took a house in Muradpur, near Patna College. Richer men like Sachchidananda Sinha, K.P. Jayaswal, Muhammad Yunus, and Sultan Ahmad started building mansions near the High Court; Hasan Imam invested particularly heavily in real estate in this area, building several houses nearby each other. The Beharee, too, quickly built a large office with new Linotype equipment on a site “facing the new capital,” and its successor, the Searchlight, was similarly situated on Dak Bungalow Road, near the High Court. As time went on, more and more individuals and organizations seeking close ties with the state gathered near the governmental quarter—even as those ties became more contentious as many became involved with nationalist politics.

As professional elites were drawn toward Bankipur and the New Capital, existing disparities of wealth were magnified. The Herald complained that rents for “suitable houses” were shooting up astronomically, first because of government land acquisitions, then because “the ministerial officers of some of the Government offices accelerated it,” and finally because the High Court lawyers had arrived. Even to those who had sought the new situation, it was unclear whether it would be an improvement on the old. Looking forward to the changes that were bound to come with pleasure mixed with concern, the Beharee pointed out that “the civil station of Bankipore... has been growing. Houses have been built in places which 15 years ago, or even less, were cultivated fields, and the process is still going on. Now that Bankipore is the seat of the Government of the new province it is bound still further to grow.” If this growth was allowed to be haphazard, the article continued, “it will detract from the beauty of the city and interfere with... the introduction of measures of sanitation and the equipment of the city with the paraphernalia of civilised life, such as the telephone, the electric light, & so on.” The identification of civilization with these technologies is a telling reflection of the Beharee’s vision of progress, which celebrated the civil station’s tidy modernity over the society of Patna City.

Industry and urbanization

The reorientation of Patna’s society around Bankipur was compounded by the continued moribund state of manufacturing and commerce. Surprisingly, the population of the city as a whole shrank despite the separation (see Chart 1 in chapter 2); but the population decline was much more pronounced in the eastern wards. Even while the New Capital attracted migrants and the populations of Bankipur and Pirbahore remained roughly constant, Patna City’s population slumped as its economic basis eroded. Malsalami ward, which in 1891 was the most densely populated in the city with about 47,000 people per square mile, had lost two thirds of its inhabitants by 1921, while Pirbahore lost only one sixth (see Map 2).

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62 Jha, *New Dawn*, 65ff; for images and short descriptions of these and other houses, see Vivek Kumar Singh, ed., *Patna: A Monumental History* (Patna: Department of Art, Culture and Youth, 2008).
63 *The Beharee*, April 12, 1914, quoted in the *Bihar Herald*, April 18, 1914; *The Searchlight*, July 18, 1918.
64 *The Behar Herald*, June 17, 1916. Similarly, a correspondent signing himself “Public Sympathiser” claimed in a letter to the Beharee that land prices in Bankipur had risen by 75% since the announcement of separation. *The Beharee*, January 19, 1912.
65 *The Beharee*, April 26, 1912.
Map 2. Population density in Patna’s wards, 1891-1931.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{66} Population figures are from the census reports; ward boundaries are approximate, being based on BSA, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, November 1914, 1-9 A. The fact that the settlement area
The 1921 census report acknowledged that its data were unreliable, owing to difficulties stemming from the Non-Cooperation Movement, but stated that if anything, the real trend of population decline was even more pronounced. The author predicted that Patna’s demographic decline would remain permanent, because “the occupation of Patna as a manufacturing and trading centre is in fact gone or at least according to present appearances going, and the substitution of the new occupation of being capital of a province is not going to restore the lost population.”

In fact, the population picked up substantially by 1931, which the census enumerators attributed to the growth of the New Capital (home to nearly 10,000 people by 1921 and another 5,000 a decade later), the expansion of Patna University, and, especially, the “return to the city of persons... attracted back to their native city by its improved healthiness and restored prosperity.” Very little of this growth, however, came from industrialization, which grew little in this period. Only fifteen “industrial establishments” employed more than ten people in 1921, and among them they had fewer than a thousand employees; the situation had changed little by 1931. As the members of the Patna College Chanakya Society reported, there was still some artisanal production for local consumption in Patna City, of goods like thread and coarse cloth, as well as of luxury goods like embroidery and gold and silver leaf; but other industries, like carpet weaving, were in a “stagnant state.”

Undeterred by the industrial stagnation of Patna and of Bihar, indeed propelled by it, a growing number of Patnaites were becoming interested in understanding and improving manufacturing. The student members of the Society, in particular, enthusiastically pursued empirical research into Bihar’s village economies, industrial activities, and the budgets of families and individuals (including their fellow students). The Society exemplified the era’s intellectual projects in its efforts to bridge disciplinary boundaries as well as temporal ones. Its name encapsulated these efforts, expressing a conviction that Patna’s intellectual and political pasts could be turned to the service of its present. In his obituary for Charles Russell, who as the College’s officiating principal had founded the Society in 1909, the mathematics professor E.A. Horne noted that Russell’s “study of Sanskrit literature had introduced him to Chanakya in


whose work, the *Artha Shastra*, are to be found many shrewd reflections on the social and economic life of his time. What more appropriate than to call the Society after the name of one famous in the annals of ancient India, and one so closely associated, as the prime minister of King Chandra Gupta, with Pataliputra, the ancient Patna!”72 The Society carried its historical interests beyond its name, heading each report with a quote from the *Arthashastra*, in Sanskrit and English, referring to the value of studying “agriculture, cattle-tending, and trade.” In addition to research on contemporary economics, the members of the society also embarked on a project to translate Kamaṇḍaka’s ethical and political text, the *Nītisāra*, from Sanskrit.73

For the most part, though, the Chanakya Society’s student members—16 at first, growing to 106 by 1915 and 200 by 1924—were fired with the desire to, in the words of the club’s constitution, “promote the introduction of improvements” to Bihar’s economic life.74 In this connection, they travelled all over Bihar, and occasionally to Orissa, to visit factories and learn about various aspects of production. In this respect, they embodied the concern with Bihar’s industrial “backwardness” that some modernist white-collar Biharis had begun to express in the 1900s, often praising the Oriya lawyer-politician Madhusudan Das, who had started a tannery in Cuttack in 1905.75 Over time, the Society’s members turned their interest from artisanal production to large-scale industry of the kind that was beginning to develop in the mineral-rich Chota Nagpur plateau, especially at the new steel town of Jamshedpur (founded in 1907 and entirely owned and administered by the Tata Iron and Steel Company).76 Thus, by the early 1920s they preferred “to study power industries rather than cottage industries,” despite the influence of Gandhi’s Non-Cooperation Movement.77

This fascination with the large-scale industry had to be sated outside of Patna. The city itself, and the Bihar plains in general, saw relatively little industrialization, and urban growth continued to be driven by government and education, as well as the service economy that developed around these nuclei. True, a few mechanized outfits—including an ice factory and a mill and attached foundry—were beginning to appear in Patna City.78 The Bihar Knitting Factory, which in 1907 had advertised free knitting lessons for businessmen, still dealt in machines as

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well as goods into the 1920s. More factories, however, were located in the cantonment town of Danapur, where they catered to local markets (primarily in Bankipur and Danapur itself) and also sent goods as far as East Bengal and Punjab. A number of Danapur’s factories, though established earlier, were first mechanized in 1912, presumably in anticipation of a growth in business stemming from provincehood. The industrial presence in Patna remained relatively small, however—16.5% of Patna’s male primary wage earners were in manufacturing in 1931, about the same as in Gaya and fewer than in Bhagalpur.

A sense of decline

With time, some began to regret aspects of Patna’s transformation, and associated the new political situation with the decay of old landscapes and values. The lawyer Sayyid Badrul Hasan mourned the decline of Patna City’s markets, which he attributed to the increased presence of Marwari merchants in both Patna City and Bankipur. These traders, migrants from Jaipur state and other parts of Rajputana (present-day Rajasthan), do seem to have started arriving in greater numbers in the late nineteenth century, although a few families had been present for much longer. They were involved above all in the wholesale grain and cloth business in Chowk, but many had branch offices in Bankipur and Danapur, as well as in Calcutta and elsewhere. As Patna City faded as a wholesale center, the Marwaris branched into other businesses, including retail and banking, which were increasingly concentrated in Bankipur. By the time of Hasan’s writing in the 1920s, for instance, one marketplace (kaṭra) in Sadr Gali had become “a three-rupee kaṭra,” where once it had sold goods in the sixteen- and twenty-rupee ranges.

Hasan was one of many who recognized by the 1920s and ’30s that Patna City was no longer the center of prestige and authority that it had once been, that, as Shad Azimabadi said, “this city was once a city by the standards of an earlier time, but now it’s more desolate than a village; now the excellent buildings and activity are in the western part of the city.” A 1931 Hindi magazine article by Girindranarayan Singh on Patna’s past and present contrasts the fates of the old and new areas since “the long-sulking Patna” had awakened “after dozing for fifty or sixty years,” and its “dirt- and dust-filled alleys [had begun] to sparkle with hubbub.” Singh writes that “Patna City has now become old. Its trade and commerce have also become

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79 The Beharee, August 2, 1907; The Searchlight, July 25, 1918; Patna College Chanakya Society, Third Report, 10; Thacker’s Indian Directory, 1920 (Calcutta: Thacker’s Directories, Ltd., 1920), 415.
81 Lacey, 1931 Census (Bihar and Orissa Tables), vol. 7, bk. 2:63, 70.
83 Shād Azimabādī, Naqsh-e Pāïdār, 211.
sluggish... it is a settlement of extinct [nām-shesh, i.e., those who remain in name only] nawabs. The city’s wealth and dynamism have moved westward:

The New Capital is the modern charm of Patna.... Where there were once the shacks and sheds of the poor, where there were farmers’ verdant fields, where there were green meadows for cows to graze in, today the gleaming autos of babus steeped in the intoxication of wealth are racing on glistening asphalt streets sparkling under electric lights, and glorious buildings adorned with the beautiful trappings of debauchery are standing there smiling! Apart from government buildings, there are so many lovely mansions of Lakshmi’s darlings, built in the new style, and many more are under construction. The streets are neat and clean—the green trees planted on either side are very attractive indeed.

Singh is clearly deeply ambivalent about the New Capital and what it represents. On the one hand, it is certainly a lovely, glimmering contrast to the depressed and obsolescent Patna City. Its flourishing state, though, seems to reveal the same kind of corruption that the Herald had once evoked with Goldsmith’s lines, in which Patna’s expansion and political revival benefited the undeserving rich at the expense of pastoral virtue and the meager dwellings of the poor. If the nawabs of the old city were decadent and archaic, the babus of the new city were equally corrupted by artificiality and narcissism, and oblivious to their own privilege.

Memories like Singh’s and Hasan’s, looking back on the 1910s from a later time, give some hint of how the invisible map of comings and goings, and of the textures of everyday life, was changing alongside the visible transformations in infrastructure and population. In a similar vein, Jamil Mazhari wrote in 1970 that people still spoke of the glories of Azimabad, “where the slap of the tabla [drum] and the alāps [preludes] of songs used to echo, where there was the smoky conversation of friends around smoldering Russian samovars, and sometimes the wineglasses jingled amidst the crowded, drunken camaraderie, and sometimes the cups of coffee and the Iranian teacups would dance.” But already by the time of his youth in the 1910s and ’20s, “neither did those parlors [dīwān-khāne] exist, nor those hot samovars, nor those warm gatherings around them.”

The narrative that emerges from the reminiscences of Patna City elites, mostly belonging to the Muslim aristocracy, is not simply one of Patna City’s decline in wealth and magnificence (though some new elites would continue to settle there, among them the Marwari banker Radha Krishna Jalan, who bought and renovated Sher Shah Suri’s old fort in 1919). Rather, it is one in which architecture, leisure, social intercourse, and forms of authority were all shifting, in a set of related processes. As the “official town” more decisively became the city’s political center, the bungalows and clubs of Bankipur and the New Capital took the place of Patna City’s mansions and dālāns.

87 Ibid., 850. Lakshmi is the Hindu goddess of wealth.
In the new Patna, political acumen and legal expertise often mattered more than access to trading networks, and relations with administrators (and increasingly, ties to the Congress) were more valuable to men seeking influence than were the rituals and everyday bonds of the muhalla. This shift did not entail a wholesale erosion of the old elite families, although many could no longer maintain the levels of luxury previously afforded by their interests in banking, trading, and landholding; rather, many bankers and landholders remade themselves, or their sons, into lawyers and other kinds of professionals. As Jyoti Hosagrahar has shown for Delhi, middle-class Indians, whose status was often tied to their acquisition of English education and their employment in legal and administrative occupations, increasingly left old-city muhallas—which brought disparate social and economic groups into close proximity and, despite continuous change, still fostered dense relationships of kinship and patronage—for the more isolated bungalows and mansions of the civil station. Patna City, too, was changing at the same time, and as Will Glover has pointed out, even when buildings and neighborhoods outwardly resembled older antecedents, neither physical structures nor social forms remained static, but often reflected new distinctions, for instance between the public and the private.

These rearrangements of power and money were tracked by shifts in everyday habits. Thus, as the old families either lost wealth or shifted their attentions to colonial institutions and Bankipur society, the daily gatherings described in chapter 2, where “the poor and rich of the entire muhalla would gather,” slowly dwindled and were replaced by places like the New Patna Club, founded in 1918 as a racially integrated alternative to the Bankipore Club. The Bankipur middle classes also had distinctive forms of leisure. To the young Iqbal Hussain (born 1905), who as a child was regularly taken on visits to Patna from his *qasba* of Neora (also home to the Imam brothers), the Bankipur of the 1900s was entirely uninteresting, possessing “neither good houses nor good stores; neither good streets nor any hustle and bustle. By contrast, Patna City had more splendor, and the houses of the merchants and nawabs there were wonderful.” As he grew older and the city changed, though, his interests shifted from Patna City to Bankipur, as

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90 For examples, see Rampratap Pandey, “A Short History of the Chaudhary Family, Patna City,” in *Select Writings and Speeches of Babu Ramgopal Singh Chowdhary, B.A., B.L. (with a Short History of his Fymily)*, by Ram Gopal Singh Chowdhary (Bankipore: Bishun Prasad Sinha, 1920); Ismail, *Brief Account*. For an account of the gradual impoverishment of a family of more moderate wealth, see the entry on Ishri Prasad, a deputy of Muhammad Ismail of the Guzri family, in Hasan, *Yādgār-e Rozgār*, 428–30. According to Hasan, after Ishri Prasad’s death, his sons’ own fates were adversely affected by the Guzri family’s ongoing material decline.


they did for many others. Rather than visit Patna City during their time as students at Patna College, he and his classmates spent their free time nearby, at the Bihar Young Men’s Institute and Jahangir’s Theatre, and at the Elphinstone Cinema, next to the Lawn. Though students and lawyers might occasionally visit Patna City, the modern pastimes that attracted them were almost entirely concentrated in the western part of the city.

Within Patna City itself, too, social routines were changing. In his memoirs, recorded in the 1980s, Waris Ismail writes that among the wealthy people of Patna City, there was historically a sharp distinction between the sharif descendants of migrants from Delhi, Lucknow, and Jaunpur, originating in “Arabia, Iran, Kabul, and Punjab,” and the indigenous Patnaites who had come to Azimabad from the surrounding villages: “from birth to death, all their customs and traditions remained separate.” After Patna became a capital, though, these groups began increasingly to mingle, if not to merge. Women, in particular, began to visit across religious boundaries (although it is not always clear that religious rather than ethno-geographic community is paramount for Ismail); for their part, the members of Ismail’s own family socialized frequently with the families of Sadar Gali and Lodi Katra. Recollections like this one suggest that the older elites of post-Mughal Patna City sensed their commonality in contrast with the new arrivals in Bankipur and the New Capital. The newcomers might have just as much property and sophistication as themselves, but crucially lacked their long familiarity with Patna and with each other, even if that familiarity had previously been at some remove.

Greater Bengal

These immigrants were now arriving quickly from various parts, making Patna a much more diverse city (see Chart 2). The proportion of Patnaites born outside Patna district doubled during the 1910s and continued to grow afterward. Most of the new migrants were from other districts in Bihar, especially from neighboring Gaya, Muzaffarpur, Saran, and Shahabad, while the number of migrants from Chota Nagpur and Orissa remained minuscule. The most marked growth, however, was in Bengal’s contribution, which increased by 165% during the 1910s. This fact is somewhat surprising at first, given the separation activists’ hopes of minimizing the Bengali presence in Bihar. Far from evicting Bengalis from white-collar jobs, though, the new capital attracted them in far greater numbers than before.

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95 Ibid., 143–44; Annada Sankar Ray, “My Student Days in Bihar,” in Behar Herald: Centenary Number, ed. S.N. Chakravorty (Patna: Bengalee Association, 1975), 34. The Bihar Young Men’s Institute, founded in 1900, charged only Rs. 2 per year, and offered indoor and outdoor games, a library, and intellectual and social discussions, as well as prizes for achievement by “bonafide Bihari students.” The Searchlight, August 22, 1918; BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 64 of 1915; B.C.M., “Patna,” Modern Review, December 1912, 632–33; Biman Behari Majumdar, “Bihar Young Men’s Institute, Patna,” in Patna University Silver Jubilee Souvenir Volume, ed. Gorakh Nath Sinha et al. (Patna: Sitaram Prasad, Assistant Registrar, Patna University, 1944), 181–82.

96 KBOPL, Mss. Acc. 2698 (Wāris Ismāīl, “Azīmābād kī Qadīm Tāhzhīb aur Ahl-e Pāṭnā kī Zindāgī” [“The Ancient Culture of Azimabad and the Life of the People of Patna”]). Ismail uses the term dār-e saltanat for “capital,” more regal in its connotations than the generic term dār ul-hukūmat.

97 Ibid.

98 Lacey, 1931 Census (Bihar and Orissa Report), vol. 7, bk. 1:32–33.

99 Although the contingents from Orissa and Chota Nagpur increased at a greater rate, their overall numbers remained quite small.
The main reason for the arrival of so many Bengalis was that they were needed to fill all the government jobs that had been created with the new province. As even the Beharee acknowledged, at the time of the separation there were not enough Bihari and Oriya government employees to fill all the needed positions. The paper also conceded that, for reasons of both fairness and fiscal responsibility, it would be best “to provide for men already in employment in Calcutta and Dacca, many of whom had done good work.” It is unclear whether, as two historians have claimed, the entire staff of the Dhaka Secretariat was transferred wholesale to Patna when the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was dissolved and Bihar and Orissa created, but the claim seems to be substantially correct. A few months before the separation, the Amrita Bazar Patrika wrote that such an order had been given and subsequently cancelled on the grounds that the Dhaka employees were unfamiliar with the work that would be required in Patna. The paper argued that such a transfer should take place after all, because for those currently in Dhaka, “it is practically the same whether they are in Calcutta or at Bankipore or Ranchi.”

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100 E.A. Gait, Census of India, 1901: The Lower Provinces of Bengal and Their Feudatories (Imperial Tables), vol. 6-A, bk. 2 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902), 182–83; L.S.S. O’Malley, Census of India, 1911: Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Sikkim (Bihar and Orissa Tables), vol. 5, bk. 3 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1913), 78–83; Tallents, 1921 Census (Bihar and Orissa and Sikkim Tables), vol. 7, bk. 2:86–88; Lacey, 1931 Census (Bihar and Orissa Tables), vol. 7, bk. 2:26–27. The city’s sex ratio grew more male during this period, presumably because many of the new arrivals were male laborers; however, this tendency should not be exaggerated, since many women also immigrated, and of course most of the emigrants were also men. The usual caveats regarding census reliability apply; nonetheless, the trends seem fairly clear.

101 The Beharee, June 7, 1912.

102 Cletus James Bishop, “Sachchidananda Sinha and the Making of Modern Bihar: A Study in Constitutional Agitation at the Provincial Level, 1905-1919” (Ph.D., University of Virginia, 1972), 221–22; Arvind N. Das, The Republic of Bihar (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992), 30. Neither Bishop nor Das provides a citation to confirm this assertion, but the Amrita Bazar Patrika supported it when it complained that the entire Secretariat staff “was transferred bodily to Patna.” “Bengalees in Behar,” The Amrita Bazar Patrika, April 11, 1922.

Having succeeded in its demand for a separate province, the Beharee was inclined to be expansive when it came to immediate practicalities, as long as it was understood that in the long term the province belonged to white-collar Biharis. In the glow of its victory, the paper was optimistic that the government would fulfill its promise of preferring provincial natives for future employment, including those from Bengal and elsewhere who were “domiciled” in Bihar. But the problem—from the point of view of Bihari professionals—of the Bengali presence was not destined to disappear quickly. The clerks transferred from Dhaka settled mainly in Mithapur, Amlatola, and other new areas near the New Capital, joining a substantial Bengali community already settled in Langartoli, Chauhatta and other areas near the district courts.

Bihari and Bengali professionals attacked each other almost ceaselessly in the following years, in both local and provincial fora. Biharis protested that Bengalis were taking all the good jobs and being coddled by Lieutenant-Governor Charles Bayley’s administration, while Bengalis complained that even domiciled Bengalis—that is, those who had lived in Bihar for a long time or who lived in Bengali-majority areas near the border with Bengal—were victimized by a Bihar “determined to feed fat its ancient grudge.” Bengalis concerned for their fate started a Bengalee Settlers’ Association, centered at Patna but with branches around the province, which organized conferences and tried to voice their grievances to the government. On both sides, the conflict took on communal overtones. As in the past, the apparently neutral terms “Bihari” and, especially, “Bengali” referred primarily to upper-caste Hindus, who were assumed to have the best claims to belonging: Bengalis complained that U.P. Muslims were passing as Biharis, and Biharis countered that both Bengalis and Muslims were robbing Bihari Hindus of government posts.

The Bengalis’ arguments took three forms. The first claimed that domiciled Bengalis had become authentic Biharis through enduring commitment, while the second asserted that nationalism required the suppression of provincial differences, and that in any case Bengalis were premier among nationalists and could thus instruct the Biharis profitably. The third and most confrontational tack, however, was to assert the existence of a “greater Bengal.” As some Bengali scholars argued for a historical greater Bengal encompassing Assam, Orissa, and parts of Bihar, Bengali journalists argued that, “though politically divided from the mother country by the recent administrative arrangements, the domiciled Bengalis must attain self-realisation as an integral part of the whole Bengalee race.... Like Greater Britain we have a greater Bengal and there must be racial solidarity between the parent stock and its ramifications, the chief of which has spread out to Behar.” This irredentist language clearly borrowed much from contemporary

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107 *The Behar Herald*, August 1, 14, 22, and 29, 1914.
109 The Bengalee, quoted in the Behar Herald, February 28, 1914. Among these scholars was the archaeologist and historian Rakhaladas Banerjee (Bandyopadhyay), who was in Patna in the 1910s and who contributed to the newspaper *Pataliputra*, which was edited by K.P. Jayaswal and published as the Hindi edition of the *Express*. 
European models, as both supporters and critics acknowledged. Warning Pataliputra readers of an imminent Bengali reconquest through the loophole of “domicile,” K.P. Jayaswal wrote that “the Bengalis already call themselves ‘settlers’; in other words, they have come and settled among us just as the Europeans have settled in other countries. They call Bihar ‘Greater Bengal’ as if they have conquered Bihar and established their rule.” Such a critique, while it called attention to the aggressive Bengali rhetoric—seemingly incompatible with nationalism—also drew on an older image of Bengalis as wily “adventurers” exploiting innocent Biharis.

The conflict continued to flare up periodically, over questions of representation, commercial policy, recruitment to government employment, and eventually over the proper balance to be struck between provincial and national identities within the Indian National Congress. Rajendra Prasad ultimately wrote a report for the Congress in 1938 that attempted to lay the conflict to rest by clarifying the criteria for domiciled Bengalis to be considered Biharis. By allowing a residential exception, a strictly ethnic form of discrimination was converted into an ambiguously territorial one. Prasad’s report, whose recommendations were adopted by the Congress, acknowledged the tension between regional discrimination and nationalist ideals, concluding that “while the Congress stands for an Indian nationality it also recognises linguistic and cultural distinctions among residents in different parts of the country.... The desire of Provincials to seek employment in their own locality is natural and not reprehensible and rules providing for such employment to them are not inconsistent with the high ideals of the Congress, particularly when they exist in all the Provinces.” The later career of “sons of the soil” movements is beyond the scope of this work, but contemporary events, including the decision to bifurcate Andhra Pradesh, make it clear that demands for statehood and employment protections continue to be compelling political issues.

New neighbors

The quickly swelling Bengali presence undoubtedly produced more controversy than other changes after 1912, but it represented only one part of the city’s shifting relationship with the surrounding region. Though it never became a major commercial or industrial center, Patna was forging other kinds of links with the outside world, as people throughout the province looked to Patna for education, medical treatment, and legal representation, as well as for political leadership. Patna’s primacy in the province’s public affairs, as defined for an English-speaking audience, is reflected in a 1934 book entitled Who is Who in Bihar & Orissa. Doctors, educators, aristocrats, lawyers, and politicians were listed with brief notes on their families, their achievements, and their recreational interests. Leaving aside a few who lived in Calcutta or elsewhere, there were 413 subjects living in the province. Of these, just over half lived in Patna (mostly in Bankipur), and another 5% in Patna district; even those notables who lived elsewhere

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Both papers were underwritten by the Hathwa estate. On Banerjee and other scholars invested in the idea of a greater Bengal, Sraman Mukherjee, “Unearthing the Pasts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa: Archaeology, Museums and History Writing in the Making of Ancient Eastern India, 1862-1936” (Ph.D., Calcutta University, 2009), chap. 4; Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), chap. 4, as well as p. 345n40. On the Pataliputra, see BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 178 of 1914.

Kāśīprasād Jayaswal, “Bihār meñ Bangālī” (Bengalis in Bihar), Pataliputra, August 22, 1914.

See, for example, “Adventurers White and Black,” The Behar Times, August 26, 1898.

often had connections with Patna, having attended T.K. Ghosh’s Academy, Patna College, or other schools in the city.113

One group for whom Patna’s rise was particularly aggravating was the Oriya professional elite. Not only did Calcutta’s replacement by Patna mean that they had to travel farther to access educational and political institutions, but Patna’s elevation seemed to confirm Orissa’s junior role in the new province. To give one rough measure of this relationship, in Who is Who the 10% of the provincial population living in Orissa accounted for a mere 6% of the entries, about half of which were in Cuttack. Chota Nagpur, unsurprisingly, was even more neglected: with 34% of the provincial population, its Bihari and Bengali residents (almost all in either Hazaribagh or Ranchi) received 14% of the entries, while its “tribal” residents were ignored entirely.114 Many politically active middle-class Oriyas saw their fears realized and concluded that separation amounted to little more than the substitution of one internal colonizer for another. A few institutions in Patna did gesture to Bihar’s partnership with Orissa. One of these was the Bankipur Hari Sabha, where Bengalis gathered to sing Hindu devotional songs and discuss politics; the Sabha’s name was inscribed three times, with the Bengali above the central arch flanked by Oriya and Hindi to either side (see Fig. 2).115 By and large, though, as Chart 2 suggests, Oriyas were scarcely visible in Patna.

![Fig. 2. The Bankipur Hari Sabha in Sabzi Bagh, with its name carved in (from left to right) Oriya, Bengali, and Hindi. The inset shows the Oriya inscription.](image)

114 These population figures refer to the “natural divisions” recognized by the census, which included princely states as well as British territory; see Map 1 in chapter 4. Ibid.; Lacey, 1931 Census (Bihar and Orissa Report), vol. 7, bk. 1:6.
115 BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Branch, 248 of 1914.
116 Photo by author, 2011. The building has since been demolished.
Despite gestures of amity by Biharis like Braj Kishore Prasad, who acknowledged that the Biharis and the Oriyas were “practically strangers to each other,” Oriya politicians remained dissatisfied with their role in the new province.117 After all, the two groups had historically had fairly little contact, and the two regions’ middle-class political bodies, most prominently the Bihar Provincial Association and the Utkal Sammilani, had different origins and divergent ideas on political and social reform. While Biharis rejoiced in their achievement of separation, the Oriya activists had only taken one step toward their own goal of a unified Orissa. Thus, at the end of 1912, the Oriya delegation withdrew from the Patna session of the Indian National Congress (organized by Hasan Imam as a celebration of the separation), in order to protest Sachchidananda Sinha’s dominance within provincial politics as well as the transformation of the Bihari Provincial Conference and Association into the province’s Congress apparatus. The immediate crisis was settled by Sinha’s withdrawal in favor of Madhusudan Das in the contest for a non-official seat in the Viceroy’s Legislature, but the resentments that fueled it persisted.118

Middle-class Oriyas saw the growing concentration of institutions in Patna—as a gift to Biharis that came at their own expense. In order to reach Patna, they would have to travel first to Calcutta, and then take an even longer journey onward to Patna.119 Besides, complained the Cuttack Oriya, the High Court were bound to be dominated by Biharis and Bengalis; it seemed as if the High Court would serve little purpose but “to decorate the capital town by its magnificent and palatial buildings irrespective of the disadvantages which the people of Orissa are reasonably supposed to undergo.”120 In response to such complaints, Bihari partisans assured their new compatriots that plans were under way to bind the province together more tightly. Parmeshwar Lal rebutted criticisms of the Patna High Court by asserting that “through Railway’ communication will soon be established between the different parts of the Province and the drawback will disappear.”121

Perhaps more tellingly, Lal also remarked that “in any case the convenience of thirty millions of Beharee[s] should not be allowed to be sacrificed for the seven millions of Orissa.”122 Biharis were happy to support Oriya demands for a unified Oriya-speaking territory; the Searchlight, for instance, reassured Oriyas that they did not want “to help in the perpetration of any injustice to them,” and that they would happily “stand a trial not on mere professions of sympathy, but actual deeds.” But when it came to political representation and other issues of

117 Braj Kishore Prasad’s presidential address at the Behar Provincial Conference, Bankipur, 1914, in BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 168 of 1914.
119 See the Oriissa Association’s complaint against the establishment of the Patna High Court in BL APAC, IOR P/8949, Government of India, Home Department, Delhi Branch, February 1912, 13-14 B; B. Foley, Commissioner of Orissa, to Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, January 12, 1916, in BSA, B&O, Education Department, Education Branch, January 1917, 1-44 A.
120 “The Proposed High Court of the New Province,” The Oriya, August 20, 1913, clipping in BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 248 of 1914.
which it was harder to claim that a solution would “cause no practical inconvenience to any section of the people,” they were less forthcoming with their support.123

Bengali critics of Bihari separatism harped on the dissimilarity of the new province’s constituent parts, in contrast with the commonalities between Orissa and Bengal. The Herald argued, for instance, that “Bihar had and has little or no connection in language, manners and customs with Orissa,” while “Orissa and Bengal have always been intimately connected.”124 But most Oriya politicians were loath to rejoin Bengal, and preferred instead to aim for autonomy, either as a recognized subprovince or, ideally, as an entirely separate province combining all the Oriya-speaking territories.125

Madhusudan Das criticized the Montagu-Chelmsford (“Montford”) Reforms of 1918-19 as a half-measure, on the grounds that by assigning greater autonomy to provincial governments they threatened to disenfranchise minorities in each province, which to him were primarily linguistic minorities. As he said, “Orissa will not yield to the Biharees the position of an intermediary ruling race.”126 Rumors of the imminent dissolution of Bihar and Orissa as a consequence of the Montford Reforms led the Englishman to comment that “ever since its inception the new Province has been most unhappy situated and it is widely felt, that some change is inevitable.”127 Such a change did ultimately occur. The Utkal Sammilani allied with the Congress in 1920, adopting a nationalist politics oriented toward peasant concerns at the same time as the Congress committed itself to the reorganization of India’s provinces on linguistic lines.128 Pressure on the colonial government to create the linguistically defined provinces of Sindh and Orissa eventually bore fruit when they were established as part of the 1935 Government of India Act.129 These are often cited as India’s first linguistically organized provinces, but as I have argued in chapter 4, the campaign for separation had anticipated many elements of later regionalist campaigns, including an emphasis on language as a key to identity.130

The terms of provincial politics in the 1910s were reflected in these negotiations among Bihari, Bengali, and Oriya activists, in which political demands were primarily shaped by competition for access to government institutions among white-collar elites, sometimes called “educated classes” and at other times simply identified by region or religion. Although various parties had periodically raised questions of peasant livelihoods, subaltern concerns received little attention from these urban elites until the 1917 satyagraha in Champaran, in northern Bihar, in

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123 The Searchlight, October 3, 1918; see also the issue of August 28, 1919.
124 “The Behar High Court,” The Bihar Herald, December 27, 1913.
126 Madhusudan Das’s presidential address to the Utkal Sammilani, August 1918, quoted in Pritipuspa Mishra, “Divided Loyalties: Citizenship, Regional Identity and Nationalism in Eastern India (1866-1931)” (Ph.D., University of Minnesota, 2008), 206.
127 The Englishman, quoted in “Some Interesting Rumours,” The Searchlight, July 25, 1918.
129 Mishra, “Divided Loyalties,” 210ff; Mohanty, Oriya Nationalism, chap. 6, 8.
130 For examples of such claims, see Mishra, “Divided Loyalties,” 17; Lisa Mitchell, Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 210n16; Mohanty, Oriya Nationalism, 18.
which Rajendra Prasad and other important figures were introduced to rural mass politics.\textsuperscript{131} Even then, Congress leaders made efforts to discipline poorer peasants and to avoid disturbing local elites—although, as a large body of scholarship has established, peasant and ādivāśī or “tribal” groups refused to accept this silencing.\textsuperscript{132}

Nonetheless, provincial politics \textit{qua} provincial politics continued to encourage claims on behalf of linguistic, regional, and religious bodies. This last category would, of course, become increasingly salient after the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements.\textsuperscript{133} But a place remained for assertions of regional particularity and contestations over the right to speak on behalf of the region. Thus, adivasis were drafted into a putative unified Orissa, their difference acknowledged even as their exclusion was hidden.\textsuperscript{134} Similarly, journalists speaking for Bihar assimilated Chota Nagpur into Bihar itself. Ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic characteristics, so important when Biharis sought to differentiate themselves from Bengalis, were entirely ignored when the subject of Chota Nagpur arose. Because the majority of its people were “tribal,” they were invisible to elite political discourse, and only Bihari and Bengali residents were taken into account.

Thus, the \textit{Searchlight} reacted in outrage when Purnendu Narayan Sinha, a prominent domiciled Bengali, signed a document inviting “all Behar, Chhota Nagpur and Orissa” to the 1919 Behar and Orissa Exhibition: “we confess we rubbed our eyes [since we thought that Sinha], as a scholar, knew that Chhota Nagpur was an integral part of Behar.... We are surprised that the Rai Bahadur should have lent his name to any such preposterous claim.”\textsuperscript{135} Given the humiliation felt years earlier by Sachchidananda Sinha—a director of the \textit{Searchlight} and its second-largest shareholder—at the refusal of his fellow Indians in London to acknowledge the existence of a place called Bihar, this expression of indignation represented something of a double standard.\textsuperscript{136} In the intervening years, though, Sinha and his allies had taken the reins of the provincial establishment, and Bihar had taken the place of Bengal and Patna that of Calcutta. No longer were Bengalis the universal targets of white-collar envy; no more was Calcutta the only site of aspiration and resentment.

**Politics in the new Patna**

Patna was not only a center of constitutionalist politics of the kind favored by Sachchidananda Sinha; it was also becoming a stronghold of more radical nationalist activism.


\textsuperscript{135} The \textit{Searchlight}, October 23, 1919.

Men who had been student leaders during the campaign for Bihari separation, including Rajendra Prasad, A.N. Sinha, and Muhammad Yunus, were now in their thirties and beginning to pursue more confrontational forms of politics than those favored by the likes of Sachchidananda Sinha and Ali Imam. Meanwhile, bodies like the Bihari Students’ Conference were becoming venues for more radical organizing, even as the older generation tried to enforce earlier norms of decorum and apoliticality.

Both officials and the representatives of the old guard at the Beharee were worrying as early as 1913 that the Conference might transform into a more openly political organization, but the president of the 1914 session, Mazharul Haque, surprised them by telling the attendees that, although politics was vitally important, “student life is not the proper time for taking active part in politics.”137 That horse, however, was already bolting. Networks of Bengali radical students had grown out of the Anushilan Samitis and other nationalist youth organizations formed during the Swadeshi movement.138 Through these networks, students at T.K. Ghosh’s Academy, Bihar National College, and Patna College were in contact with others in Benares, Khulna, and Calcutta. Though faculty and administrators at these schools were not always sympathetic, some became allies to the student activists. Whether or not these students were guided by Jadunath Sarkar, as one historian has argued, he and other professors were certainly friendly with nationalist students, including some of the members of these networks.139 Although most of the activists were Bengali, they made efforts to include Bihari students; finding that Biharis could not understand the Bengali songs sung at the Bankipur Hari Sabha, one of the Bengali student leaders founded a Hindu Boys’ Association, in which both Biharis and Bengalis discussed the works of Vivekananda in English.140

Through these linkages, two leaflets were posted publicly and sent to prominent people in Patna in 1914 and 1915. One of these was in Bengali and titled “Swādhiṅ Bhārat” (“Independent India”), but the other, in English and titled “Liberty,” garnered more attention, calling as it did for “rivers of blood” and for “thousands and thousands” to “face death calmly and steadily,” filling the “cup of sacrifice” to the brim.141 Students in Patna apparently responded

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137 The Beharee, October 1, 3, and 7, 1913, clippings in BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 80 of 1913 (labelled 1912); Mazharul Haque’s presidential address to the Bihari Students’ Conference, September 23, 1914, BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 56 of 1914.
139 The Behar Herald, February 24, 1914; BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 130 and 248 of 1914; N.M.P. Srivastava, Rise of Militant Nationalism in Bihar: Sir Jadunath Sarkar with Bihar Revolutionaries (Patna: NMPS, 2004), chap. 2.
140 BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 248 of 1914 and 1419 of 1916. It is unclear if the Association ever became a reality, or if this was merely its founder’s intention. It is also uncertain what its relationship was to the Patna Hindu Boys’ Association founded in 1894 by a Col. Olcott and revived periodically after that, at one point with the participation of the prominent Bengali lawyer Purnendu Narayan Sinha. See Ātma-Vidyā, October 1911, 29.
141 BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 248 of 1914 and 993 of 1915. For a dismissive response to the Liberty leaflet, see Ram Gopal Singh Chowdhary, “Our Duty to Government and Society,” The Express, September 19, 1915, reprinted in Chowdhary, Select Writings, 25–28. The text of the leaflet is available in BSA,
enthusiastically to the Liberty leaflet, with pupils at the Muhammadan Anglo-Arabic High School being ordered to hand in their copies of the leaflet and to avoid associating with student radicals in Bankipur. Although the supposed leader of these activities, Bankim Chandra Mitra, was arrested, government spies identified several members of a “secret gang” who remained active in “the local branch of the conspiracy,” and student unrest continued in other forms as well. In 1916, several hundred Patna College students went on strike over restrictions on both Hindu and Muslim observances on the college’s grounds. The strike became a matter for mobilization both inside and outside Patna, thanks to publicity in nationalist papers in Calcutta, Pune, and Bombay, as well as through the Students’ Conference, whose members celebrated the strike and made what officials termed “objectionable speeches.”

Politics in the Patna of the 1910s and ’20s was increasingly interwoven with events outside of the city and the province. Of course, earlier political mobilizations had never been limited to any one scale, and the increasingly national outlook matched the tenor of the times. With their authority to speak for an entire province fairly well assured by the achievement of separation, though, Patna’s politicians enjoyed new stature. While retaining Patna as their base, men like Sachchidananda Sinha, Rajendra Prasad, Hasan Imam, and Mazharul Haque were becoming more active in Congress and Muslim League campaigns with an all-India scope. This heightened prominence made some moderate politicians, like Sinha, seem largely irrelevant to politics in Bihar, while Gandhi’s arrival on the scene with the Champaran satyagraha brought greater fame and influence to more assertive politicians like Hasan Imam, Haque, and especially Prasad.

In the mid-1910s, it was still possible to distinguish provincial from national politics, in rhetoric if not in practice. Thus, the Bihar Advocate defended Mazharul Haque’s presidency of the 1914 Bihari Students’ Conference from charges of “political propaganda” by arguing that his “activities in the public life of the province, rather than that of [the] country, are so very patent that no one can doubt them.” To the irritation of local officials, constitutionalist politicians adhered to the technique of vigorously criticizing the local administration while praising the imperial regime with equal enthusiasm. They even went to the extent of establishing Hardinge Park and adorning it, at the expense of a lakh of rupees, with a life-size statue of the former Viceroy, the first statue erected in Patna. It was becoming harder, though, for either officials or politically minded Indians to see local matters in isolation. After the Congress had expanded its base during the Non-Cooperation movement, and then refused to enter elected bodies, the

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143 BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 1419 of 1916.
145 BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 165 of 1918; Watchman, Higher Education and Popular Control, 24.
147 “The Forth Coming Students’ Conference,” The Bihar Advocate, September 7, 1914, clipping in BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 56 of 1914. The Advocate was published in Gaya and catered to a small readership of orthodox Kayasthas. Bishop, “Sachchidananda Sinha,” 139.
Swarajya Party (a breakaway faction of Congressmen in favor of council entry) began to contest local elections in the early 1920s. In 1924, Rajendra Prasad was elected chairman of the Patna Municipal Committee and A.N. Sinha his Vice-Chairman; in response, the previous Chairman, Muhammad Ismail of the Guzri family, resigned his membership of the Committee. Although this event carried little intrinsic significance, it encapsulates the eclipse of the old elites: faced with the inexorable rise of professionals and politicians, those of Azimabad’s inheritors who could not remake themselves in the new mold chose instead to retreat.

**An ambiguous victory**

Congress influence over municipal politics was to be short-lived in Patna, a result that Prasad and Sinha attributed to venality and factionalism. But the underlying form of politics had more permanently moved from a primarily local frame of reference to one that routinely invoked distant events and large collectivities, and one in which local notables were supplanted by lawyers and other professionals without longstanding ties to Patna. The same applied to the press. The *Beharee* had been replaced by the *Searchlight* after its editor’s forced replacement by an Englishman had degraded its quality; as the change in name signaled, the new paper was dedicated to a broader and less locally centered outlook than the old, and it courted official anger with its nationalist politics. Whatever the particular ideologies and allegiances deployed by political actors in Patna, and whether they sought to influence the British or replace them, their contestations increasingly revolved around the colonial state.

As Patna had come into its own as a provincial capital, at least formally on a par with Calcutta, much of what had made its public culture vibrant and distinctive had been eroded or sidelined. As Rajendra Prasad said, “only Government officers and lawyers live here because it is the capital of the province.” This takeover by people whose lives revolved around the state, many of them newcomers to the city, did not make Patna less important, but it did mean that as it became a “centre of provincial opinion,” its internal dynamics were tamped down and its idiosyncrasies easier to overlook.

The legacy of the separation was thus not the straightforward renaissance that its advocates had hoped for and that some have retrospectively wished it to have been. Neither professional elites nor poorer Patnaites saw any sudden transformation in their fortunes. The parts of Patna where most people lived were still dirtier and more crowded than the elite quarters in the west. Nonetheless, the separation also occasioned a reworking of politics and public culture within the city. Patna was more diverse than ever and more closely invested in national affairs, but in some

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154 The phrase comes from Curzon et al. to Brodrick, February 2, 1905, in BL APAC, IOR L/P&J/6/709, Home Department, Public Branch, 3 of 1905.

ways the new cosmopolitanism came at the expense of the old. The close-knit but trans-regional elite culture of *Al-Punch*, poetry gatherings, and *darbārs* in the courtyards of Sadr Gali, gradually gave way to new conventions, new alliances, and new imaginations of the nation and the region. In the final chapter, I return from the political domain to the cultural and intellectual sphere, to explore how Patna’s intellectuals sought to understand and shape their city and their selves as they built intellectual institutions and pursued their own work. This is not, of course, to suggest that politics can ever be ignored. Indeed, political questions, from the local and personal to the abstract and global, are central to much of what follows, whether they appear in debates about literature and history or in contestations over expertise and discipline.
6  “As Though in a Shrine”

In the Oriental Public Library at Bankipore, where under one roof are collected, as though in a shrine, the literary remains of the great savants of Islam, [Khuda Bakhsh] has built for himself a monument which will last so long at least as the destiny of India is linked with that of Great Britain, if, perchance, no longer. There, in course of time, as the mists of ignorance lift, will rise a school of Oriental learning; and thence will radiate beams of culture which will illumine the whole of the Indian Peninsula.

—Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh

Patna had few impressive monuments of the kind visible in Delhi or Benares. There were a handful of old temples and mosques, the crumbling remains of Sher Shah’s fort wall, and remnants of many old structures; but easily identifiable relics were hard to find, except for those who knew where to look. Nonetheless, Patnaites were constantly thinking and speaking about the past. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, narratives of the city’s past circulated in poems, newspaper articles, and speeches. Some Patnaites spoke of the distant past, of ancient emperors like Ashoka and Chandragupta and mythic kings like Janak. Others looked to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which seemed to many the golden era of Patna’s literary culture. By the 1920s and ’30s, even the very recent past was fodder for analysis and nostalgia. The person at the center of this chapter, a local lawyer named Khuda Bakhsh, took none of these local histories as his focus, but the fascination and sense of obligation to history that he shared with his contemporaries firmly put its mark on the library that he founded and that bears his name. A brief sketch of the social life of history in Patna will therefore help situate the man and the library in their intellectual world.

As I have argued in chapter 3, provincial cities like Patna were sites of vigorous intellectual activity by a wide range of people. The relationships that Patnaites constructed with the past were never confined to neat categories of genre or discipline. History took turns with memoir, poetry with prose, and piety with scholarship. Neither were professional boundaries particularly visible. By the early twentieth century, there were a few people in Patna whom we might recognize as professional scholars. The most notable among these was the medieval historian Jadunath Sarkar, who taught at Patna College for many years and, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has recently argued, was influential in shaping the ethical and methodological outlines of historical research in India. Most of those who wrote about the past or engaged in other intellectual pursuits, however, earned their livings in other ways—frequently in the law—and studied or wrote in their free time.

Although the prominence of lawyers in nationalist politics has been widely recognized, less has been written on their frequent involvement with the world of scholarship. The studies that they pursued by avocation were sometimes tied, in one way or another, to their professional

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1 Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh, My Father: His Life and Reminiscences (Calcutta, 1909), 3.
careers. For instance, the Sanskrit expertise of the iconoclastic nationalist Kashi Prasad Jayaswal was integral both to his research on ancient Bihar’s self-governing republics and to his specialization in Hindu law. In other cases, it is more difficult to draw a clear link between scholarship and employment, but the facility with textual evidence and argumentation that were so essential to a career in the law were also invaluable in scholarly inquiry. Even those who did not undertake their own original research, like Sachchidananda Sinha and Ali Imam, were often very well read and took serious interest in history and other fields.

History was also a constant presence in the public sphere. Petitions to the government invariably cited Patna’s magnificent past, while popular periodicals sought to promote history as a valuable modern discipline and to mobilize its lessons in the service of political arguments. Thus, an article in the Bihar Bandhu by a local Sanskrit professor assailed both Buddhists and Muslim rulers for undermining national unity and high-caste prerogatives. Al-Punch printed didactic essays recounting the history of clothing (beginning with animal skins) and arguing for the reformist benefits of studying the history of Indian Muslims. And Pataliputra, named after ancient Patna and edited by K.P. Jayaswal, sought to inculcate a love for history with fantastical pieces where the Bengali archaeologist Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay narrated the full sweep of Indian history from a first-person perspective.

The subjects of these investigations and invocations varied. Not all were particularly local in perspective. Many Patnaites, however, did choose Patna and Bihar as their subjects, seizing on the contrast between Patna’s apparent decay and the variety of glorious pasts that the city could claim. Although scholars had long speculated that Patna lay on the site of Pataliputra, the capital of the vast Mauryan empire, this theory was conclusively substantiated with excavations by L.A. Waddell and P.C. Mukharji in the 1890s. The discovery buttressed locals’ declarations of “the ancient greatness of Patna,” which a skeptical European observer had earlier called “a favourite theme with Hindus” that he suspected to be “fanciful [or] almost entirely pre-historic.” Others rejoiced to remember the late Mughal period, when poets and scholars streamed in from a

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5 For examples of such petitions, see BL APAC, IOR/P/8140, Bengal, Municipal Department, Municipal Branch, February 1909, 4–9 A.
6 Shivnandan Tripathi, “Prāchīn Itihās Chintan” (Reflections on Ancient History), Bihar Bandhu, May 20, 1901. An interesting peculiarity in this article is that Tripathi reverses the historic tendency to refer to Muslims as Greeks (Yāvanas) and instead refers to the Greeks of the fourth century BCE as Muslims.
7 “Libās” (Attire), Al-Punch, July 6, 1905; “Ṭārīkh” (History), Al-Punch, May 24, 1902.
tumultuous Delhi and “Patna’s literary fame spread far and wide.”¹¹ And some turned to the recent past, recording the events and people of their own times.¹²

The Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library was founded by a proud Patnaite and steadfastly dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of historical objects, but it was quite different in its orientation from most of the projects mentioned above. Where they were framed around the city, the region, or the nation, the library was organized around the far broader contours of Muslim civilization. The founder, Khuda Bakhsh, was a prominent citizen of the city and a vocal participant in its public culture. But in amassing his collection, he was guided by concern not for any territory but for the history of Muslims and of Islamicate cultures. For Khuda Bakhsh as for many Muslims, these were embodied in Arabic, the first language of Islam, and in Persian, for centuries the language of high culture from Iran to India and beyond.

Khuda Bakhsh’s lack of concern with local history did not keep the library from becoming an icon of Patna. Since it opened to the public in 1891, the Khuda Bakhsh Library has been celebrated as Patna’s most exceptional institution (see Fig. 1). Within the city, it was an important forebear to a number of institutions established after Bihar’s separation from Bengal. The most important among these were the Patna Museum and the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, which, like the library, owed most of their energy to Indian scholars but also benefited from careful coordination with colonial officials. Moreover, the library was and is one of the preeminent libraries in South Asia, particularly in its area of specialty, namely Arabic and Persian manuscripts. Although countless scholars have used its rich collections, it has never itself been the subject of historical study. This is partly a consequence of the library’s provincial location, but it is also true that there has been little historical scholarship on Indian libraries in general.¹⁴


Despite this record of scholarly indifference, the library represents a remarkable confluence of middle-class philanthropy, Islamic intellectual reform projects, hometown loyalty, and one man’s visceral passion for books. I begin with a biography of Khuda Bakhsh and a description of how and why he founded his library. I then assess the library’s relationship with the people of Patna and with other collectivities, and explore the roles it came to play in the intellectual transformations of the early twentieth century. Finally, I show how the Khuda Bakhsh library, as well as other libraries inside and outside Patna, were situated within a host of debates on knowledge, ethics, and history.

Khuda Bakhsh

Khuda Bakhsh Khan (the hereditary title Khan was often omitted) was born in 1842 in the town of Chhapra, about thirty miles northwest of Patna, and moved to Bankipur in his early childhood. His father, Muhammad Bakhsh, was a vakil (pleader or lawyer), who educated his son first at home and later, at the suggestion of the District Judge, at the Patna High School in Bankipur. When this school was closed in 1859 following the Rebellion, Khuda Bakhsh continued his education, in both Islamic and European disciplines, in Calcutta. Here he was under the care of Nawab Amir Ali Khan, a successful Bihari lawyer who had recently risen to prominence as the outspokenly loyalist special assistant to the Patna Commissioner during the Rebellion. Although Khuda Bakhsh gained admission to Calcutta University, he soon returned home, in part because of his father’s failing health. Over the next several years, he would struggle to find work, but finally he entered the Patna Bar in 1868 and quickly established a successful practice.

In his own and others’ tellings, Khuda Bakhsh was deeply influenced by his father, following him in the twin callings of law and bibliophilia. By all accounts, Muhammad Bakhsh (born in Chhapra in 1810) was a talented pleader and a passionate collector of Arabic and Persian books, who turned the three hundred books and manuscripts he had inherited into a library of fourteen hundred, first by laboriously copying books out and later by buying them. Thanks in


Khudā Bakhsh, “Iftitāh kī Muqāṣ par Bānī-e Kitāb-Khāna kī Pehlī Report, October 1891” (First Report of the
part to his book-buying habit, he left little money to his son, but he did bequeath his books to Khuda Bakhsh and and charge him with turning the collection into a library open to the public.\(^{19}\)

The source of much of what is known about Khuda Bakhsh’s personality and views, as well as of many factual details about his life, is an essay that his eldest son, Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh, wrote for a readership of English-speaking Orientalists.\(^{20}\)\(^{20}\) An Oxford-trained barrister and scholar, Salahuddin is clearly mindful of guarding his father’s legacy and reputation. He is also careful, however, to ground his account empirically by citing and reprinting evidence, much of it in untranslated Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. Invoking both family lore and a manuscript by his grandfather, he says that his family, which originally came to Bihar from Delhi, lacked any particularly rarefied ancestry. “Unlike most of our countrymen, we do not trace our descent either from the Prophet of Arabia or from some great hero of Islam, or from some spoliating despot of a by-gone age. Nor do we need such meretricious trappings. The Province of Behar (I may be permitted to say without vanity) can scarcely point to another Mohamedan family which can count three generations of learned men. I mean men who enjoy not merely local but Indian, if not European, fame.”\(^{21}\)

The combination of a fairly ordinary sharif genealogy and a tradition of distinguished scholarship, as well as close ties with several elders of both intellectual and social distinction, seems to have disposed Khuda Bakhsh simultaneously to celebrate individual achievement and to lament the decline of the aristocracy under the new, apparently meritocratic, dispensation. Salahuddin says that his father “never set much value on unauthenticated traditions, and believed more in personal distinction and individual merit than in proud pedigrees or fanciful descent,” which he saw as “the last refuge of the unworthy and the incompetent.”\(^{22}\) On the other hand, Khuda Bakhsh deplored the examination system for entry into government service, which he believed had elevated “the sons of weavers, petty tradesmen and the like,” but “left the cream and flower of the Indians to wither away unprotected and unprovided for.”\(^{23}\)

This delicate negotiation between respect for sharif inheritance and esteem for individual merit was consonant with the affinity Khuda Bakhsh had for Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s efforts to reevaluate elite Muslim heritage. As David Lelyveld has argued, Sayyid Ahmad sought to counter the perceived causes of sharif decline, among them the campaign to introduce Hindi into

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\(^{20}\) Throughout this chapter, I use the word “Orientalism” in the sense of “knowledge produced by Orientalists, scholars who know Oriental languages,” which Thomas Trautmann labels Orientalism\(^1\), in contrast to Orientalism\(^2\), the structure of knowledge described by Edward Said. Thomas Trautmann, \textit{Aryans and British India} (Delhi: Yoda Press, 2004), 23.

\(^{21}\) Khuda Bakhsh, \textit{My Father}, 6. Admiring accounts of Khuda Bakhsh and his library name as an ancestor Qazi Hibatullah, a scholar in Aurangzeb’s court, but Salahuddin says that he regards such a claim skeptically. Fatehpūrī, “Bānkīpūr kī Library,” 185; Khuda Bakhsh, \textit{My Father}, 6n.

\(^{22}\) Khuda Bakhsh, \textit{My Father}, 6–7, 42.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 29.
the courts and the introduction of exams and English educational requirements for government employment. These, he saw by 1870, were hastening the day “when the established forms of a sharif upbringing would no longer qualify a man for participation in the life and benefits of kacahri society,” that is, the *ashrāf*-dominated milieu surrounding the lower courts.24 Through his Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College and its attached school, and in publications like the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* and *Tehzib al-Akhlāq*, Sayyid Ahmad redefined the genealogical concept of the *qaum* as the ethnic collectivity of Indian Muslims. For the *qaum* to progress, he argued, it must reinterpret Islam in the light of modern science and engage with current European scholarship. After all, he said, “ignorance is the mother of poverty.”25

Sayyid Ahmad’s ideas found ready takers wherever Urdu was spoken—especially from the area around Delhi and Aligarh, but also from farther-off places where Sayyid Ahmad had personal connections.26 In Patna, these connections included what Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh calls the “noble trio,” which his father formed with his dear friends Sayyid Muhammad Hasan and Qazi Sayyid Riza Husain.27 Riza Husain, in particular, gained local fame as one of the most enthusiastic proponents of Sayyid Ahmad’s ideas in Bihar.28 One of the group’s educational projects was the Mohammedan Anglo-Arabic School, which Muhammad Hasan and Riza Husain founded in Patna City in 1884 with the support of Khuda Bakhsh and other local notables, “on the principles of the Aligarh Collegiate School.”29 With such initiatives, Salahuddin says, these three men followed Sayyid Ahmad’s example: “it was they who first lighted the lamp of learning in Behar,” and “combated that unreasoning and unreasonable Orthodoxy which regarded with distrust and suspicion the spread of English education.”30

Khuda Bakhsh’s commitments to scholarship and education were underwritten, both philosophically and pragmatically, by his occupation as a lawyer. Building on his father’s reputation, he had met with success immediately upon his entry to the bar in 1868; according to

25 Ibid., 143–45.
26 Ibid., 182–84.
30 Khuda Bakhsh, *My Father*, 2, 7–8, 27.
his friend, the famous historian Jadunath Sarkar, he set a record by registering 101 clients on his first day on the job.\(^{31}\) By the early 1870s, when Khuda Bakhsh was still in his twenties, officials were soliciting his opinions on education and Muslim law and recommending him for legal professorships.\(^{32}\) He continued to progress rapidly, and within the next decade he had received a Certificate of Honour at the 1877 Delhi Durbar, been made the Patna Government Pleader (the government's lawyer in the district) and the first vice-chairman of the Patna Municipality and the Patna District Board, and been granted the title of Khan Bahadur for his assistance during the "Wahabi troubles."\(^{33}\)

In his fast-paced social and professional ascent, Khuda Bakhsh benefited not only from his own energy and capabilities, but from habits and views—no doubt sincerely held—that endeared him to colonial officials. At a time when fluency in English was rare in Patna, especially among Muslims, Khuda Bakhsh also stood out by speaking the language "perfectly."\(^{34}\) As Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh represents it, his father seems to have read as avidly in English as in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic; he especially appreciated Byron's poetry, Gibbon's history, and autobiographies including those of Cellini, Goethe, and John Stuart Mill.\(^{35}\) He donated to worthy causes; worked for Hindu-Muslim amity in times of crisis like the 1893 battle over cow slaughter; and ardently defended imperial rule, while at the same time lamenting its excesses and disdaining sycophancy.\(^{36}\) For instance, in a gathering at the Anjuman-e Islamia in Bankipur, he joined with allies including Muhammad Hasan, Abdul Ghani, Riza Husain, and Sayyid Rahimuddin, the editor of *Al-Punch*, to denounce the nascent Congress as injurious to Muslims and to Islam.\(^{37}\)

Khuda Bakhsh was, in short, a model subject, one who combined all the traits that officials treasured but which they feared might be incompatible. He was devout, but liberal-minded and eager to learn from Europe; committed to Muslim welfare, but on excellent terms with both

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\(^{31}\) Ibid., 4; Sarkar, "Indian Bodley," 246.

\(^{32}\) BL APAC, IOR, P/163, Bengal, Education Department, May 1872, 91-94 A; BSA, Bengal, unfiled letter from Syed Ziauddin and Khuda Bakhsh to S.C. Bayley, Commissioner of Patna, probably 1873; Khuda Bukhsh, *My Father*, 4.

\(^{33}\) NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, February 1883, 35-47 A; Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A; Sarkar, “Indian Bodley,” 246.


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 22–31.

\(^{37}\) *The Seditious Character of the Indian National Congress and the Opinions Held by Eminent Natives of India Who Are Opposed to the Movement* (Allahabad: United Indian Patriotic Association, 1888), xviii – xix. Khuda Bakhsh was an important supporter, and at least once the President, of the Anjuman-e Islamia, which hosted many public meetings as well as gatherings of the Muslim students of Patna College and the Patna Collegiate School. The Anjuman also received enthusiastic support from *Al-Punch*. See, among others, *Al-Punch*, March 29, 1902, October 4, 1902, and November 8, 1902; Khuda Bukhsh, *My Father*, 17. The Patriotic Association was an initiative led by Sayyid Ahmad Khan and supported primarily by the rulers of Hyderabad and other princely states. See *Seditious Character*, viii – xiv; Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 309–12. The Congress leaders Behramji Malabari and Dadabhai Naoroji were alarmed, at least initially, at the emergence of the well-funded Association, which threatened to divide Muslims from the Congress. Malabari to Naoroji, August 13, 1888, NAI, Dadabhai Naoroji Papers, M-32 (183); Naoroji to Malabari, September 7, 1888, untraceable letter in R.P. Patwardhan papers; Naoroji to Malabari, November 2, 1888, NAI, Dadabhai Naoroji Papers, N-1 (1263). I am grateful to Dinyar Patel for showing me these letters.
Hindus and Englishmen; well educated in English, but committed to the maintenance of empire unlike many in Bengal. Khuda Bakhsh’s library, his greatest undertaking, was likewise conservative: indeed, it was nothing but an immense venture in conservation. When his library was ready, he turned it over to the colonial state, which in turn rewarded him for his efforts. But as he collected the books, articulated their value, and erected institutions for their preservation and use, he followed his own intellectual agenda, one that acknowledged the utility of European learning but celebrated, above all, the “beautiful romance” of “those elders in whom not merely their country, but their nation [qaum], exulted,” and whose scholarly legacy would “remain forever established in the world of learning.”

In an article in a London magazine, Khuda Bakhsh explained the origins of his library. “The idea of founding a public library long floated before the vision of my father.... On his deathbed he entrusted these manuscripts to me, and asked me to convert his library into a public library for the use of the community, whenever I should find myself in a position to do so. I inherited to the fullest extent my father’s passion for collecting books, and since his death I have been making large additions to it.” This story, which Khuda Bakhsh had already told more than once, and which reappears in nearly every subsequent description of his library, poignantly mingles themes of filial love, public duty, and personal zeal.

Although he was the inheritor of a substantial collection of fourteen hundred rare books and manuscripts, which he showed to visitors on request, Khuda Bakhsh had higher ambitions than simply maintaining it in its present state, which he says he considered unworthy of a public library. After his father’s death in 1876, he spent more than a decade doggedly acquiring books, traveling as far as Toledo in search of Andalusian manuscripts. He also bought a number of whole libraries from residents of Patna, Lucknow, Delhi, and Bombay, and those formerly belonging to the European Orientalists Heinrich Blochmann, the principal of the Calcutta Madrasa, and Gore Ouseley, the Georgian-era scholar-diplomat. Throughout this frenzy of acquisition, Khuda Bakhsh had competition. The rulers of the princely state of Rampur, 110 miles east of Delhi, had been assembling their library since the late eighteenth century. After the 1857 Rebellion, when the Mughal libraries and other royal and aristocratic libraries had been looted and destroyed, the nawab of Rampur, Muhammad Yusuf Ali Khan (r. 1855-1865), set about collecting their scattered remains. The nawab having allied with the English, according to Jadunath Sarkar, he “got the best of the loot, as he had proclaimed among the victorious loyal sepoys that he would pay one rupee for every MS. brought to him.” Although the state-sponsored history of the Rampur Raza Library does not mention this

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44 Sarkar, “Indian Bodley,” 249.
approach to acquisitions, it observes that in this era, “people often presented books as offerings and were richly rewarded.”45 Yusuf Ali Khan’s successor, Muhammad Kalb Ali Khan (r. 1865-1887), was even more enthusiastic about collecting books. Under him, the official history says, “the method of book-buying was not that a book would fail to be bought because it was already in the library; rather, no book that arrived was refused.”46 By the time of Kalb Ali Khan’s death in 1887, the Rampur Library contained 8,821 books (154 of them in English), significantly more than the number of manuscripts in Khuda Baksh’s library at its opening four years later.47

At the opening of his library, Khuda Baksh noted that, although “the late Kalb Ali Khan put together a good library after the Rebellion, I can’t say what the arrangement is in that library now.”48 His reticence seems to have been something of a façade, however, given that “there was the greatest rivalry between him and the Nawab.”49 Khuda Baksh had poached from the Nawab’s employ an Arab named Muhammad Maqi—who Sarkar calls “that jewel of a book hunter”—and kept him on a monthly retainer of Rs. 50 to scour the Middle East, particularly Beirut and Cairo, for rare manuscripts.50

Khuda Baksh earned a reputation throughout India for paying top rupee. As a well-known lawyer, he was able to command very high fees of the kind that “staggered” Gandhi during the Champaran satyagraha: “‘We gave Rs. 10,000 to so and so for his opinion,’” Gandhi reports being told—“nothing less than four figures in any case.”51 Supplied with suitable funds, Khuda Baksh famously paid any bookseller double the train fare to Patna, even if none of the wares on offer interested him. Salahuddin Khuda Baksh and Jadunath Sarkar tell a series of anecdotes to illustrate Khuda Baksh’s renowned liberality and discernment, as well as his good fortune. In one story, a grocer in Hyderabad demanded Rs. 20 for a pile of books heaped on a sack of flour, saying, “‘To any other man I should have sold these old and rotten papers for Rs. 3. But as your Lordship is interested in them they must contain something of value.’” Indeed, they included an Arabic manuscript on bibliography, which the Nizam of Hyderabad tried and failed to buy from Khuda Baksh for Rs. 400.52 Shibli Numani, too, wrote in 1891 that he had grown intrigued with Khuda Baksh and his library after finding that rare-book dealers in Delhi and Lucknow

46 Ibid., 168. On average, the library spent about Rs. 2,075 annually on books in this period, an increase of Rs. 900 over Yusuf Ali Khan’s reign. Ibid., 157, 169.
47 Shauq Rámpúrít, Tartkh-e Kítáb-Khána-e Rizá, 170. Numbers given by Khuda Baksh range from 3,000 (in 1890, before the library was fully open to the public) to “nearly 7,000.” The latter number seems, however, to include printed books. There were about 3,000 or 4,000 printed Arabic and Persian books in 1903, and 2,500 to 3,000 English books. Salahuddin Khuda Baksh gives the number of manuscripts as 4,000 in 1891 and 5,000 in 1909, in addition to 2,500 English books. NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A; Baksh, “Pehlí Report,” 10; Bukhsh, “Islamic Libraries,” 137; Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 34.
49 Sarkar, “Indian Bodley,” 249.
50 Ibid. Salahuddin Khuda Baksh repeats these anecdotes; see Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 32–33.
invariably refused to part with valuable books without first offering them to Khuda Bakhsh, knowing that his prices would be unmatched.\textsuperscript{53}

**The establishment of the library**

By 1886, Khuda Bakhsh’s collection had outgrown his house, and he began to construct a dedicated building for it in Chauhatta, near Patna College.\textsuperscript{54} Once construction was underway, he mobilized his social connections with officials by asking his “dear friend,” William Kemble, the Bihar Opium Agent, to bring his library to the government’s attention.\textsuperscript{55} Thanks to Kemble’s efforts, the civil servant and Arabic scholar Charles Lyall visited the library and was duly impressed, and from then onward supported the library as well as Khuda Bakhsh personally.\textsuperscript{56} Bolstered by this support, August 1890, Khuda Bakhsh approached the Government of Bengal, through the Patna District Magistrate, to propose that, since an “important place like Patna” should have a public library, and since “it was and is my heart-felt desire to preserve these manuscripts and to carry out the wishes of my father,” the government should take over the library from him. His only requirements, he said, were that the government should supply Rs. 15,000 to match funds to be raised from the public of Patna, that he and his family be entrusted with the library’s management, and “that this library be declared public and be wholly and solely dedicated to God.”\textsuperscript{57}

Within a few weeks, Khuda Bakhsh’s offer had been accepted by Kemble, as Officiating Commissioner of Patna, and by Steuart Bayley, the Bengal Lieutenant-Governor. Bayley authorized an annual grant of Rs. 600 for the library’s maintenance, contingent upon raising Rs. 15,000 from “the wealthy and patriotic Muhammadans of the Patna City.”\textsuperscript{58} The deed of trust signed by Khuda Bakhsh specified that the library and its contents were “to be always held by the said Government of Bengal as trustees for the use and benefit of the said Public of the District of Patna,” and that the library was to be the permanent home of its collections.\textsuperscript{59} His gift included the library building, itself valued at Rs. 35,000; thousands of Arabic and Persian books and manuscripts, whose value Khuda Bakhsh appraised at Rs. 200,000 (revised to Rs. 300,000 by the scholar Edward Denison Ross); and finally, several hundred English books, worth “many thousands of rupees,” to “meet the want of those who are not familiar with the Persian and Arabic languages.”\textsuperscript{60}

With great fanfare, a public meeting was held at the library in late 1890, with 150 people in attendance. According to *Al-Punch*, the District Magistrate informed the audience, composed mostly of elite Muslims, that it would be shameful if their qaum did not contribute to the library, a proposition to which both Khuda Bakhsh and the *Al-Punch* reporter assented.\textsuperscript{61} Although Khuda Bakhsh had called his library simply the Oriental Public Library, the assembled notables,

\textsuperscript{53} Numānī, “Maulvi Khudā Bakhsh,” 15.

\textsuperscript{54} Khuda Bakhsh, *My Father*, 33.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh incorrectly gives his name as Campbell.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 33–34; BSA, Bengal, General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, November 1908, 69–72 A.

\textsuperscript{57} NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A. Italics in original. Khuda Bakhsh suggested that some of the funds could come from the collections raised by George Grierson, the linguist and civil servant, in his failed attempt to open a public library in Patna as a branch of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.; Bakhsh, “Pehlī Report,” 12.

\textsuperscript{59} NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. Some sources give the value of the building as Rs. 80,000, but this appears to be a mistake.

\textsuperscript{61} Bakhsh, “Bānī-e Kitāb-Khāna kī Taqrīr,” 1, 6.
including Guru Prashad Sen, Sayyid Sharfuddin, Sayyid Ali Imam, Gajadhar Prasad, and other well-known Patnaites, voted to rename the library in his honor.\footnote{NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A. The government records document this meeting as taking place in November of 1890, rather than October.} A number of wealthy men and women donated funds, meeting the Rs. 15,000 goal, and Fazl Imam, the vice-chairman of the Patna Municipality and a member of the famous Imam family of qasba Neora, gave his entire library.\footnote{Bakhsh, “Bānt-e Kitāb-Khānā kī Taqrīr,” 1; Bakhsh, “Pehlī Report,” 12–14.} Funds also materialized from several other sources in the following years. Apart from sporadic isolated gifts, these included Rs. 240 annually from the Patna Municipality and (from 1893) Rs. 600 annually from the Nizam of Hyderabad.\footnote{BSA, Annual General Administration Report of the Patna Division for 1892-93; Waliuddin Khuda Bakhsh to H.R. Bhateja, Director of Public Instruction, Government of Bihar, August 29, 1938, in KBOPL, Prog. No. 1755 (“Reports of the Library 1938-1944”).}

Thanks to these and other sources of money, the library was easily the best-funded in Bihar. Nonetheless, according to a 1938 letter by Khuda Bakhsh’s youngest son Waliuddin, who was then serving as Secretary and Librarian, the library’s total annual income of Rs. 2,124 “was barely enough to meet the establishment and minor contingent expenses of the Library.”\footnote{BSA, Annual General Administration Report of the Patna Division for 1892-93; Waliuddin Khuda Bakhsh to H.R. Bhateja, Director of Public Instruction, Government of Bihar, August 29, 1938, in KBOPL, Prog. No. 1755 (“Reports of the Library 1938-1944”).} At the 1890 public meeting, too, Khuda Bakhsh had estimated the library’s upkeep at Rs. 100 monthly.\footnote{Bakhsh, “Bānt-e Kitāb-Khānā kī Taqrīr,” 6.} Thanks to preservation costs and, later, the high expense involved in preparing catalogues, the library was still in financial need throughout the early twentieth century.\footnote{Ibid.; BSA, Quinquennial Report of the Patna Division for the Period from 1900-01 to 1904-05, 54. Waliuddin Khuda Bakhsh’s figures are lower than those appearing in government records, which indicate that the library’s income was Rs. 5,240 in the mid-1900s and over Rs. 8,000 a decade later, but this is probably the result of his excluding the amounts paid directly by the government, among them the librarian’s salary and other expenses, including most of the costs of cataloguing. In any case, the library was richer than any other in Bihar. BSA, Bengal, General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, November 1908, 69-72 A; B&O, Education Department, Education Branch, April 1917, 45-47 A.}

At the 1890 public meeting, Khuda Bakhsh had said, “No worldly glory is desired from this [bequest]; there is no intent to acquire the esteem of administrators.”\footnote{Bakhsh, “Bānt-e Kitāb-Khānā kī Taqrīr,” 6.} Willingly or not, though, he and his heirs received both respect and rewards from government officials, a number of whom were themselves scholars. Support came from local administrators like William Kemble and J.G. Cumming, the Patna District Magistrate, but also—thanks to the efforts of Charles Lyall and E. Denison Ross—from officials at the pinnacle of power, including the Bengal Lieutenants-Governor, Steuart Bayley and Antony MacDonell, and the Viceroy, George Curzon.\footnote{Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 33–34, 38–39.}

Khuda Bakhsh was also able to muster support from Hyderabad, the largest princely state, through a combination of reputation and personal connections. Not only did the government of the Hyderabad Nizam help fund the library, but it also supported Khuda Bakhsh himself. Soon after opening the library, Khuda Bakhsh’s legal practice began to suffer, perhaps because the library was monopolizing his time. Fearing for his finances, he began to think of applying for the vacancy that had opened on the Nizam’s High Court. The scholar Sayyid Ali Bilgrami, who had
both studied and taught at Patna College, was a friend and frequent visitor of Khuda Bakhsh’s. He and his brother, Sayyid Husain Bilgrami, were both highly placed in the Nizam’s government, and they strongly endorsed Khuda Bakhsh’s application. At the same time, Khuda Bakhsh was recommended for the job by the justices of the Calcutta High Court, notwithstanding the fact that he practiced in Patna rather than before the Calcutta bench. These networks continued to help Khuda Bakhsh’s library even after his death. The Nizam’s annual grant to the library had actually been given to Khuda Bakhsh in his private capacity, and consequently it was withdrawn following his death. Four years later, the librarian, Khuda Bakhsh’s younger brother Abul Hasan Khan, was able to negotiate the renewal of the grant by approaching Husain Bilgrami, with whom he and his late brother were friendly.

Khuda Bakhsh was appointed the Chief Justice of the Nizam’s Court in 1894, and served in that post for three years. When he returned to Patna, he was in poor health and suffered from paralysis. The combination of illness and the erosion of his professional connections undermined his ability to earn a living. He was awarded the title of Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire (C.I.E.) at Edward VII’s coronation in January 1903, but this distinction belied his straitened circumstances: with one of his sons still in school and another in college, his debts had mounted to Rs. 10,000, five times his assets, while his income had dwindled to Rs. 800 annually. Consultations were made among officials, extending to Curzon himself, and they agreed that “it would not be the wish of Government that one who has conferred such benefits on the public should spend his declining years in penury and anxiety.” Accordingly, Khuda Bakhsh was given a monthly stipend of Rs. 200 in his capacity as librarian, together with a grant of Rs. 8,000 to pay off his debts. The Behar Herald rejoiced, observing that such a “literary pension” was a welcome innovation, since “the Oriental Library to which he has devoted his life-long labour and earnings is the best of its kind in India and has attracted to this town many a tourist and traveller from distant lands.”

Khuda Bakhsh died in 1908, after several years of declining mental and physical health. He was survived by his wife Jamila (a talented poet who took correction in poetry from Shad Azimabadi), by several children, and by his brother Abul Hasan, the Registrar of the Small Causes Court in Calcutta and the founder of the Calcutta Muslim Orphanage. Respectful obituaries followed in a number of papers, expressing gratitude for Khuda Bakhsh’s dedication to

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70 This account comes from the autobiography of Humayun Mirza, whose father, Shah Ulfat Husain “Faryad,” was a mentor of Khuda Bakhsh’s in his young days at Presidency College in Calcutta, as well as the teacher of Shad Azimabadi. Quoted in Atāullah Pālvi, “Khudā Bakhsh Khānī” (Khuda Bakhsh Khan), in Maulvī Khudā Bakhsh Khānī: Hayāt aur Kārnāme (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 2001 [1985]), 132–34.

71 Waliuddin Khuda Bakhsh to H.R. Bhave, Director of Public Instruction, Government of Bihar, August 29, 1938, in KBOPL, Prog. No. 1755 (“Reports of the Library 1938-1944”).

72 Some sources say his appointment took place in 1891 or 1895, but 1894 appears to be the correct date.

73 NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A; Khuda Bakhsh, My Father, 5, 43.

74 The Behar Herald, May 23, 1903.

75 Sarkar, “Indian Bodley,” 246–47, 248; Khuda Bakhsh, My Father, 43.

76 See “Ghazal-e Jamila” (Jamila’s Ghazal), Al-Punch, September 17, 1904; Jamila Khudā Bakhsh, Naghma-e Dil-Resh (The Song of the Wounded Heart), ed. Shafī Mashhadi, 7 vols. (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 2003). Jamila was Khuda Bakhsh’s third wife and the mother of Waliuddin; Khuda Bakhsh’s sons Salahuddin, Shahabuddin, and Muinuddin, as well as another son and daughter, were born to his first wife, Tahira, and another son was also born to his second wife, Khadija. “Shajra-e Khudā Bakhsh Khānī” (Family Tree of Khuda Bakhsh Khan), in Maulvī Khudā Bakhsh Khānī: Hayāt aur Kārnāme (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 2001), 180–81. On Abul Hasan Khan, see Hasan, Yādgār-e Rozgār, 1056.
scholarship and to the public good. Referring approvingly to the Rs. 200 salary, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta expressed concern for Khuda Bakhsh’s survivors, asking, “May we hope Lord Minto would not stop the allowance but make it hereditary in his family?”

The library was also a favored target of official approbation. In 1903, for instance, the District Judge wrote to certify the munificence of Sayyid Khurshaid Nawab of the Guzri family, saying that “he has recently added to the many obligations he has placed the Patna public under, by his generous and enlightened support of the Oriental Public Library,” which had enabled the library “to acquire more than one treasure which might otherwise have been lost.”

The principal beneficiaries of administrators’ gratitude, though, were Khuda Bakhsh’s heirs who, as one civil servant said of Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh, had “strong claims on account of the services rendered to the library by his father.” In accordance with the founder’s wishes, the library was headed until 1950 by his sons, brother, and nephew. His two eldest sons, Salahuddin and Shahabuddin, made their primary careers outside of the library, although they remained involved with its activities. But they, too, benefited from the goodwill accrued by Khuda Bakhsh—even if such advantages were at odds with their father’s pride that the honors he had received “were the fruit, not of favour or inheritance, but of personal industry and ability.” For instance, when Shahabuddin, the second oldest, was made Deputy Superintendent of Police in 1906, *Al-Punch* celebrated the appointment as a reflection, not on his own worthiness but on that of his father: “It is difficult to measure the greatness of the work the Khan Bahadur has done. Anything the government can do to reward him, however little, is a cause for public gratitude. We raise our hands in prayer for the success of our young friend.”

The highest prominence and worldly success, though, was achieved by Salahuddin, Khuda Bakhsh’s firstborn and in many ways his chosen successor. As he says, quoting Goethe’s autobiography, his father shared “the pious wish of all fathers to see what they have themselves failed to attain, realised in their sons, as if in this way they could live their lives over again, and at last make a proper use of their early experience.” Father and son discussed Indian and European literature together, and when Salahuddin was setting out for university in England, Khuda Bakhsh advised him to study French and German in order “to write a history of Islam from the standpoint of a Muslim,” which would correct the misconceptions perpetuated by “the inability of the Western writers to understand that strange and complex quantity—Oriental character.”

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79 BSA, Bengal, General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, November 1908, 69-72 A.


82 *Al-Punch*, May 31, 1906. The *Bihar Herald* also celebrated Shahabuddin’s appointment in similar terms; see the item reprinted in “A Congratulation,” *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, May 16, 1906.


84 Ibid., 18–19.
Salahuddin did not disappoint his father’s hopes. After earning the degrees of M.A. and B.C.L. (Bachelor of Civil Law) at Oxford, he entered the Calcutta bar and, in 1910, was appointed Vice-Principal of the Dhaka Law College. His appointment relieved officials who had worried about being able to entice him to the post, given his high qualifications. Indian observers were satisfied, too; identical items appeared in the Lahore Tribune and the Calcutta Amrita Bazar Patrika reminding their readers of Khuda Bakhsh’s merits and stating that his son’s appointment was “much appreciated.”

Even more than his professional success in the law, though, Salahuddin owed his scholarly path, which earned him K.P. Jayaswal’s appraisal as “one of the most cultured” Muslims, to his father’s example. His feeling of intellectual debt is clearly conveyed in his biographical essay on his father, which vigorously establishes Khuda Bakhsh’s command of both English and Persian, and his “extreme religious tolerance,” in addition to establishing the scholarly legacy of his library. To both men, as for modernist allies like Chiragh Ali and Amir Ali, it was imperative to adopt the scholarly apparatus and methodologies of the European Orientalists. This was needed, first, in order to refute the Orientalists’ unacceptably functionalist and materialist understandings of Islam and Muslims, but also to convince Muslims that “it is perfectly idle to contend either that Islamic law is inflexible, or the Islamic social system is inelastic.” As Peter Hardy says of both Chiragh Ali and Amir Ali, the resulting interpretations of Islam “were more likely to appeal to Muslims who had already opted for a modern education.” However, Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh perceptively noted that this education was “affecting all classes and conditions of men,” so that in Shibli Numani, who spoke little English, “we have the triumph of modern historical method.”

Salahuddin himself, though, wrote exclusively in English. In articles like “Is Islam Hostile to Progress?” and “The Spirit of Islam,” he used his familiarity with scholarship in French and German, as well as in English, Arabic, and Persian, to argue cogently for a liberal understanding of Islam, in terms calculated to convince European, and European-educated, readers. His approach, which combined a rationalist methodology with a classically Orientalist emphasis on textual origins and on “our unquenchable religious ardour, which ever shines in undimmed

85 NAI, Home Department, Education Branch, June 1910, 95-97 A.
86 Amrita Bazar Patrika, November 17, 1910; The Tribune, November 20, 1910.
88 Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 20.
89 Khuda Bukhsh, “Is Islam Hostile to Progress?,” The Modern Review 4, no. 6 (December 1908): 452.
splendour,” found its mark. The Behar Herald praised him as “an educationist of European reputation,” while the American journal The Moslem World praised his “breadth of vision and true scholarship” and the Baptist missionary Lewis Bevan Jones compared him to Muhammad Iqbal in candor and fearlessness. Despite their generational differences in education and outlook, father and son shared much a commitment to encouraging Muslims to look outward to other groups and backward to their own past, and to convincing Europeans of the tolerance and cosmopolitanism of Islam. Salahuddin worked for these goals by writing essays; although Khuda Bakhsh also wrote about Islamic history (as well as about the early history of Patna), his real efforts were concentrated in his library.

Motivations

Even as he gathered a reputation as a self-effacing bookworm, Khuda Bakhsh was shrewdly building an institution that would continue to thrive long after his death. A central element of his strategy was the pursuit of alliances with European officials and scholars, like E. Denison Ross and George Curzon, as well as Indian intellectuals and notables from Sachchidananda Sinha to Shibli Numani. While these relationships were ultimately based on his concrete achievements as a collector and librarian (and as a lawyer), he developed and consolidated them by methodically articulating a role for himself and his library within a splendid tradition of Muslim learning. In both public and private, he portrayed his library as a means of reviving the intellectual openness of early Islam. By putting Muslims in touch with their forefathers’ glorious achievements as well as with the thought of modern Europe, he argued, the library would galvanize them to new achievements and reacquaint them with the learning that should have been their birthright. He rarely referred at any length to his own role in this project, and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his modesty. Nonetheless, he meticulously positioned himself as a model of philanthropy and community reform, in ways that appealed to both European and Indian observers.

In crafting this exemplary reputation, Khuda Bakhsh employed anecdotes—what Salahuddin calls “romantic incidents”—as much as historical narrative. Some of these tales have been discussed above; two others, which became part of the standard telling of the library’s founding, suggest that Khuda Bakhsh’s endeavors are divinely inspired. Both of these stories concern dreams of the Prophet Muhammad, for whom Khuda Bakhsh “entertained the most devout reverence.” The versions here are presented by Jadunath Sarkar, in Khuda Bakhsh’s own words, under the heading, “His Devotion to the Library.” One dream pertains directly to Khuda Bakhsh’s efforts to establish his library:

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At first MSS. came in very slowly. But one night a stranger came to me in my dream and said, ‘If you want books come with me.’ I followed him to a grand building like the Lucknow Imambara, and waited at the gate, while my guide entered it. After a while he came out and took me inside to a vast hall in which a veiled being sat surrounded by his friends. My guide said, ‘This man has come for the manuscripts.’ The veiled one replied ‘Let them be given to him.’ Shortly after this, MSS. began to pour into my library from various places.

In the other dream, the library’s significance is dramatically underscored:

One night I dreamt that the lane near the library was filled with a dense crowd of people. When I came out of my house, they cried out, ‘The Prophet is on a visit to your Library, and you are not here to show him round!’ I hastened to the manuscript-room, and found him gone; but there were two manuscripts of the Hadis (Traditions) lying open on the table. These, the people said, had been read by the Prophet.98

Drawing on Islamic mystical traditions, these stories suggest that Khuda Bakhsh himself is exceptional—not just anyone can have a dream of the Prophet—and that the foundation of his library fulfills a divine plan.99 Indeed, they imply that the library’s manuscripts have been assembled by divine will and are worthy of the most exalted visitors. The reference to the Lucknow imambara, the immense Shiite shrine built by Nawab Asaf ud-Daula, further evokes the supersession of the royal and aristocratic order by a new middle class. The old Muslim rulers had fallen before the colonial state, but their piety and patronage of learning could be resurrected by public-minded professionals like Khuda Bakhsh.

It is not always easy to prise apart Khuda Bakhsh’s own intentions and interpretations from those of later narrators. These two dream accounts originated with Khuda Bakhsh himself, but relied for their currency on retellings by Sarkar and other sympathetic chroniclers. Doubtless traded among friends and family during his life, these and other stories gained wider circulation in the descriptions of his life and work that began to appear soon after his death, and the narrators seem to feel that these retellings honor their protagonist. Most of the stories appear first in Sarkar’s article in the Modern Review, but Salahuddin, so attentive to his father’s reputation, reprints them and endorses their accuracy.100

A substantial number of these anecdotes center on themes of ownership and justice. In one, rare manuscripts were stolen from the library by a former book-binder and sent to Lahore, only to be sold back to Khuda Bakhsh: “so in the end the honest man came by his own, and the thief was punished.”101 Another story tells of the mysterious return, by “divine justice,” of a rare manuscript Muhammad Bakhsh had lent to an English scholar. The Englishman refused to return the volume, but in the end, whether “by the irony of fate or the hand of God,” Muhammad Bakhsh wound up in possession of “not only the extorted volume of Odes but some other rare MSS.”102

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98 Sarkar, “Indian Bodley,” 249. According to Sarkar, Khuda Bakhsh inserted notes into these two manuscripts with instructions that they should never leave the reading room, but without any explanation for this injunction.


100 Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 32–33.


New anecdotes continued to enter circulation for quite some time. The civil servant V.C. Scott O’Connor, in his 1920 volume *An Eastern Library*, gives a hint of the way in which some of the juicier stories about Khuda Bakhsh and his library came into circulation: “The Founder’s sons relate with a dash of pride not unmingled with humour, that many of the manuscripts in this Library were stolen. The love of letters, it is said, carried both the Founder of the Library and his emissaries with an impetus that was stayed by no scruples, over the fine—and shall we say the trivial?—line that divides one man’s property from that of another.” Scott O’Connor goes on to relate some reminiscences of Sayyid Ali Imam, a frequent visitor to the library, that return to the themes of love and theft. Speaking of Khuda Bakhsh, Imam says:

Upon one occasion, when I referred with some hesitation to the sources from which he had obtained his collection, he smiled at me, and there was a merry twinkle in his eyes. “The Art of Collection,” he said, “is one that soars above and defies the provisions of the Penal Code.” He capped this observation by adding that there were three classes of blind men, viz., those who were bereft of sight; those who lent valuable books even to a friend; and those who returned such volumes, once they had passed into their possession.

All’s fair, in other words, in bibliophilia and war. In Scott O’Connor’s telling, Khuda Bakhsh, as well as his sons and friend, gesture playfully toward a certain gulf between the morality of the lawyer and that of the book collector. Providence and distinction appear likewise in tales of curious happenstance and in pious testimonies, but in each case, narrator and subject are in agreement about the heroism of the collector and the transcendence of the collection.

Khuda Bakhsh also spoke on his own behalf in more formal settings, carefully locating his library within a particular historical trajectory. One of these venues was the London monthly *The Nineteenth Century and After*, where his 1902 English-language article, “The Islamic Libraries,” ran alongside pieces by distinguished authors on topics like the Bodleian library in Oxford, the Persian poet Hafiz, the folklore of horseshoes, and Turkish rule east of Jordan. In this article, which gained the notice of officials in India, he repeated much of what he had said over a decade earlier in Urdu, in his speech at the 1890 public meeting and again in the library’s first annual report. In both Urdu and English, he presented similar narratives situating himself in a particularly Muslim history of learning and librarianship, but in each language he stressed different aspects of this history. To his Urdu-speaking countrymen, he offered an exhortation to revive a glorious past and recognize its relevance to the present. When addressing English readers, by contrast, he was most concerned to emphasize aspects of the history of knowledge that they, as Europeans and as Christians, might have forgotten.

In both languages, Khuda Bakhsh takes as his topic neither libraries in general, nor libraries in India, but the history of “the Islamic libraries.” The thrust of the narrative is that once their initial warfare had concluded, the caliphs and other Muslim rulers had the leisure to patronize translations and original compositions, and to collect them in libraries. The most extraordinary of these were those in Andalusia and Baghdad, until the former were destroyed by Ferdinand and the latter by the Mongol raider Hulagu Khan (whom Khuda Bakhsh, like others,
calls Halaku, meaning “destroyer” or “murderer”). In India, excellent libraries were assembled by the Mughals and others, but the last of these, the library of Asaf ud-Daula in Lucknow, was destroyed in the Rebellion of 1857. In the aftermath of that conflict, many books were scattered across India, “sold at miserably low prices owing to poverty no less than want of education.”

There were no longer any significant libraries in Delhi or Lucknow—none, in fact, in all of India apart from the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. It was in this context that he had expanded his father’s collection by acquiring many volumes formerly held by the great libraries of the past, and finally opened it to the public.

For both Urdu- and English-speaking audiences, as well, Khuda Bakhsh placed himself within a long lineage of Muslim scholars and book collectors, who had persisted despite recurring tragic depredations. Not only were the Muslims of old open to outside influences, he argued, but when Europe plunged into ignorance, they remained as the guardians and explorers of knowledge: “For many centuries Europe surrendered its claims of being an encourager and supporter of letters to a nation which had come into being, so to speak, at the sound of the voice of the Prophet of Arabia.” In particular, he said, “Moslem Spain stands out in the history of the Middle Ages in unfading splendour. To it Europe owes perhaps the largest debt, for it was Spain which handed the lamp of learning to the Aryans of the West when they were able to receive it.”

One of his favorite texts in this connection—tellingly, not one of the volumes that Orientalists singled out as among the library’s greatest rarities—was a medical text by the late twelfth-century Andalusian physician Zahrawi (Albucasis). This manuscript contained detailed drawings of numerous surgical tools still in use, from which “it emerges clearly that these instruments were used by the Muslims of the fifth century [Hijri] in Andalusia and Baghdad.”

In his article in *The Nineteenth Century*, Khuda Bakhsh addressed himself directly to European Orientalists and sought to draw their attention to the long and honorable history of Muslim scholarship and librarianship. Taking for granted their interest in Islamic intellectual
history, he cited Muslim authors—including past authorities and his contemporary Shibli Numani—side by side with European historians. His repeated citations of German scholarship, including Alfred von Kremer’s *Culturgeschichte des Orients unter den Chalifen* (Cultural History of the Orient under the Caliphs, 1875-77), later translated by Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh, suggest that this article was the result of a collaboration between father and son. The article took an elegiac tone when it looked toward the past: “The history of the literary activity of the Moslems reads like a beautiful romance when we look around and see the weltering chaos in which they are now engulfed.” Nonetheless, Khuda Bakhsh said, he was optimistic when it came to the future, and hopeful “that the Moslem community... will win laurels alike in the field, the forum, and the closet [i.e., the council chamber].” By recognizing the proof of their former curiosity and acumen, he suggested, Muslims could spur themselves to mastery of “modern culture and civilisation.”

In Urdu, Khuda Bakhsh’s arguments had a more urgent tenor. Perceiving his fellow Muslims as degraded and narrow-minded in comparison with their ancestors, he forcefully encouraged them to embrace learning, from whatever source. Thinking, no doubt, of his campaigns to encourage Muslims to adopt English education and European learning, he told of the cosmopolitanism of the Abbasid caliphs, and of their eager sponsorship of translations from the Greek, with the help of Jewish and Christian scholars. Perhaps because he hoped to focus Muslims’ attention on self-reform, the attitudes he expressed toward Europeans and Christians were more deferential in Urdu than in English. In Urdu, he said that scholars of all countries were still furious at Ferdinand for burning the libraries of Andalusia, but only in English did he say bluntly that “the fanaticism of the Christians obliterated countless books.” Seemingly anxious that his mainly Muslim audience might discount Muslim authorities, he repeatedly cited European observers, both historical and contemporary, on the greatness of Muslims’ intellectual achievements. The twelfth-century Peter the Venerable had witnessed English and European students studying astronomy in Muslim-ruled Spain; in the eighteenth century, Gibbon cited a botanical text translated from Greek under the caliph Mamun; just a few years prior, the American polymath John William Draper had cited an Arabic text on medicine.

Khuda Bakhsh emphasized the critical role his library could play in reviving learning among Muslims. He was particularly importuning at the public meeting in 1890, when the Patna public had not yet matched the government’s contribution. Again and again, Khuda Bakhsh rhetorically asked his listeners how they could possibly resist the tantalizing texts held in his library, the very same ones that had so impressed these European scholars: “Don’t educated

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115 Bukhsh, “Islamic Libraries,” 139.

116 Bakhsh, “Bànt-e Kitáb-Khána kí Taqrír,” 2; Bakhsh, “Pehlî Report,” 7. This was a theme also close to Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh’s heart. Addressing (in English) fellow Muslims who challenged his orthodoxy, he said that “the glory of the Muslim civilization is the glory of the doubting, reasoning, challenging Islam, the Islam steeped in Hellenistic culture. That Islam shunned no enquiry—stood for the right of freedom of thought and fought for freedom of expression.” Khuda Bukhsh, “My Critics,” 75.


nations wish in their hearts to know what Muslims scholars have written that banished the darkness of Europe's ignorance?"119

For Khuda Bakhsh, manuscripts were repositories of knowledge, whose preservation was necessary so that they could be consulted, commented upon, and reproduced and disseminated through printing. At the same time, though, he celebrated them as beautiful artifacts imbued with their own charisma, or what Walter Benjamin would call their aura.120 Before both Urdu- and English-speaking audiences, Khuda Bakhsh dwelled on the books written by famous scribes, or with marginal notes written by Jahangir, or otherwise distinguished by their histories of production and ownership.121 He reserved his greatest passion on this subject, though, for his Urdu-speaking listeners, whom he presumed to be insufficiently respectful of books as mystical objects. By way of contrast, he raised the praiseworthy example of the English, who were fascinated by the relics of their writers. For instance, “an autograph draft, from among the published novels of Wilkie Collins, was auctioned in England at the beginning of this year, and was sold for £300 simply because it was written in Wilkie Collins’s own hand.”122 How much more important than this piece of ephemera, then, were the Patna library’s many rare and delicate manuscripts. Preserving many of them was in fact a spiritual necessity, since they could be consulted in matters of religious interpretation. Khuda Bakhsh plaintively asked his listeners, “Is it not incumbent on you to be concerned with protecting your honored scholars’ autograph manuscripts from the plunder of the ages?”123

This argument struck a chord with Shibli Numani, who visited the library soon after its opening.124 Writing about his visit for the Rampur newspaper Dabdaba-e Sikandari, he divided the library’s holdings into three categories. There were some that were rare in India and important for their contents; others that were very ancient; and finally, those that were written by a famous scribe or by the author himself, or that had later been used and annotated by important scholars.125 This last category of books was significant, he said, because “in our country such things are hardly valued, but in Europe they are considered mementos, and hundreds of thousands of rupees are spent in collecting them. A manuscript was recently sold in London for Rs. 14,000, purely because it was written a very long time ago. As far as I know, Maulvi Khuda

120 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 221. As How to Collect Books (a copy of which was in the library’s collection) pointed out, whereas every manuscript is unique, “it is different with the printed book, which, though perhaps scarce enough, is always in danger of becoming less so.” J. Herbert Slater, How to Collect Books (London: George Bell and Sons, 1905), 34–35; Catalogue of the Printed Books of European Languages in Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna (Upto 1918) (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1992 [1918]), 73.
122 Bakhsh, “Bānī-e Kitāb-Khāna kī Taqrīr,” 5. Khuda Bakhsh seems to have been slightly (and immaterially) misinformed. A manuscript of Collins’s play The Frozen Deep, including a note identifying Charles Dickens as the lead actor in the first performance, had been auctioned in the summer of 1890 for 300 guineas, or £315. Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins, ed. Laurence Hutton (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892), 68.
124 During his career, Shiblī wrote several essays on the history and contemporary importance of libraries. See, for instance, Shiblī Numānī, “Kutub-Khāna-e Iskandariya” (The Library of Alexandria), in Maqālāt-e Shiblī, vol. 6 (Azamgarh: Mārif Press, 1937), 113–51; Numānī, “Islamī Kutub-Khāne.”
Bakhsh is the only person in India who has challenged the bold Europeans in bidding for such things.”

Having established the significance of his collection, and alluded to his own generosity in devoting the library to the public good, Khuda Bakhsh required his audience’s commitment in return. Even were he able to provide the remaining money needed for the library’s ongoing maintenance, he said, he would refuse, because “if anyone receives something for free, he will not honor it.” Thus he insisted that his listeners contribute to the library, with the government as trustee to ensure good management. Lest they fail in their obligations, he threatened to send his books to some other place where they would be protected and appreciated, like the Khedive’s library in Cairo. “But you should all consider carefully that in that case, Patna’s Muslims would be deprived of such a collection of the impressions of their ancient forefathers.”

The goals Khuda Bakhsh articulated for his library were expressions of his conviction that Muslims were the heedless heirs to a scholarly civilization that had excelled for centuries in all branches of learning. This civilization—or nation (qaum), to use the Aligarh-inflected term that he preferred—belonged to Córdoba and Baghdad as much as to Delhi, and Indian intellectual lineages had little relevance to it. If Muslims were to return to their former magnificence, it was necessary but inadequate to become familiar with the modern knowledge that came from Europe through the English language. They further had to nurture a relationship with books that was not merely respectful but ardently devoted, like that of the Muslims of medieval Spain, among whom there was such a “universal... passion for learning” that they supported seventy public libraries. Here Khuda Bakhsh seems to betray a desire to remake his fellow Muslims, whom he disarmingly addresses as his table-companions (ham-kāsa-o-ham-āsh), in his own image. The anecdotes circulating after his death must contain elements of romantic exaggeration in their depiction of Khuda Bakhsh as a besotted collector, heedless of cost and legality in his pursuit of books. But whether he was exhorting listeners to donate to his library, or setting stories in motion that cast him as an exemplary man who received visions of the Prophet, Khuda Bakhsh sought to lead by example, and to establish an institution that would long outlive him as a source of pride and a beacon for scholars.

**Beneficiaries**

Khuda Bakhsh, administrators, patrons, and scholars expressed a variety of views on how the library should be run and used, and by whom. Some considered the library an endowment for Muslims, while others saw it as a gift for all. Some thought it belonged to Patna alone, while others felt it was the property of the nation or the empire. For some, it was an esoteric place for intellectuals, while others made it a symbol of civic pride. Sometimes these divergent ideas reflected competing intentions, but they were also expressions of the frictions inherent in an institution that was at once devoted to the past and deeply modernist in its conception.

This multivalence was apparent even in the name of the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library (the founder’s name was added at the 1890 public meeting, at the suggestion of Guru Prashad Sen). The two key words here, Oriental and Public, each carried a rich set of

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126 Ibid., 19.
128 Ibid.
131 NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A.
overtones. “Oriental” did not primarily refer to India, but to “the Arabs and Islam, which for almost a thousand years together stood for the Orient” in European eyes.\textsuperscript{132} In this conception, the Orient referred to Islam, which was self-evidently a Middle Eastern phenomenon constituted by Arabic, as well as Persian, texts. For most of the history of European Orientalism, India and other parts of Asia received much less attention than the Middle East, and when India burst into European scholarly consciousness in the eighteenth century, it was largely identified as an essentially Hindu place. The obvious presence of Muslims in India posed little problem for this view, because their beliefs and practices were generally assumed to be straightforwardly derived (if possibly deviating) from those prescribed in the Arabic and Persian texts.\textsuperscript{133}

Many historians have shown the intimacy of Orientalist scholars’ links with colonial rule in India, and demonstrated the profound influence on Indian society that they achieved, both through imposition and through dialogue.\textsuperscript{134} More germane to this particular case, however, is the trajectory that C.M. Naim has identified, which runs from Europe to India via the Middle East. The European Orientalists’ terminology was adopted by writers in Arabic, who began to use the directional term mashriq for a place called “the East.” In turn, the term and many of its accompanying ideas were taken up by Indian Muslim intellectuals like Shibli Numani and Abdul Halim Sharar.\textsuperscript{135} Thus, when the library’s name was translated into Urdu (rather than transliterated, as it often was), it was called the kutubkhāna-e mashriqī, or Oriental Library.\textsuperscript{136} To these intellectuals—as Sharar indicated in his influential book on Lucknow, Hindustân men Mashriqī Tamaddun kā Ākhrī Namūna (The Last Exemplar of Oriental Civilization in


\textsuperscript{134} These arguments have taken a variety of approaches. See, for instance, Bernard Cohn, \textit{Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Nicholas Dirks, \textit{Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India} (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002); Michael S. Dodson, \textit{Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770-1880} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Ronald Inden, \textit{Imagining India} (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Eugene Irschick, \textit{Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795-1895} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Trautmann, \textit{Aryans and British India}.


\textsuperscript{136} For instance, although the title of Sayyid Najib Ashraf Nadwi’s article on the library is given as “Kutubkhāna-e Khudā Bakhsh Khān kī Chand Nādir Kitābān,” it is listed in the table of contents in the March 1923 issue of \textit{Mārif} as “Kutubkhāna-e Mashriqī, Patna.” When V.C. Scott O’Connor’s booklet, \textit{An Eastern Library}, was translated into Urdu, it was given the title \textit{Ek Mashriqī Kutubkhāna}. V.C. Scott O’Connor, \textit{Ek Mashriqī Kutubkhāna: Kutubkhāna-e Khudā Bakhsh, Bānktpūr Patna} (An Eastern Library: The Khuda Bakhsh Library, Bankipur-Patna) (Aligarh: Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdu, 1950).
Hindustan)—although India itself was distinct from the Orient, the Islamic Orient could be present within India, in the Mughal empire and its successor states.

To Khuda Bakhsh, too, it was self-evident that his library belonged in a lineage of “Islamic Libraries,” with deeper roots in Baghdad, Cairo, and Córdoba (the last remnants of whose library he had acquired) than anywhere in India. But with the political decline of Muslim polities, so too did the true Oriental culture (for Sharar), or scholarship and literature (for Khuda Bakhsh), fade and perish. Contemplation of this linked political and cultural decline provoked nostalgia in Sharar, but for Khuda Bakhsh, it was not only a cause for lament but also a call to action. By gathering together the best exemplars of Arabic and Persian thought and expression, he could provide an impetus for the regeneration of the Orient—that is, the Muslim people—in India. Alluding to Tennyson’s 1885 poem “The Ancient Sage”—a poem whose Romanticism is fixed on the twin figures of antiquity and the Orient (albeit looking to China rather than the Islamic world)—Khuda Bakhsh urged his readers, “Let us ‘cleave to the sunnier side of doubt,’ and let us cherish the hope that the dawn of broadening culture and soaring aspiration is not far distant.”

The other critical word in the library’s name, “Public,” carried an equally substantial symbolic cargo. As a number of scholars have shown, the concept of the “public” began to appear in north Indian languages in the early 1880s. As in Europe, it carried with it ideals of reason, sobriety, and order, which were embodied even in the library’s appearance. Contemporaries admired the systematically arranged and beautifully bound books on the shelves, as well as the library’s spacious, European-style interiors with their bentwood chairs and elegant staircases (Fig. 2). The library’s adherence to European aesthetic conventions properly conveyed its fidelity to Enlightenment ideals of critique and open access.


Earlier Indian conceptions of social collectivities had invoked differentiated categories like *khās-o-ām*, or “elite and common.” By contrast, the public made room for middle-class men who claimed distinction and occupied prominent roles in reform and civic leadership while distancing themselves from both aristocrats and the poor. Sometimes, “public” was rendered in Urdu as *rifā‘-e ām*, literally the common comfort, but more often it was simply transliterated directly, in acknowledgement of the concept’s foreign origins. This conceptual novelty did not mean, however, that there was no precedent for institutions devoted to the general good. In particular, Muslim law and custom provided for trusts, known in Urdu as *auqāf* (sing. *waqf*), which were often charitable endowments providing economic, spiritual, intellectual, or other benefits.

As a public man who participated in numerous government bodies and civic associations, Khuda Bakhsh was very familiar with both Islamic endowments and the colonial rhetoric of public welfare, and freely invoked terms and concepts from both domains. For example, he referred to his gift as a waqf when speaking Urdu, even as it took the legal form of a trust in favor of the government of Bengal, with a management committee including officials alongside

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140 Sarkar, “Indian Bodley,” opposite page 249.
Muslim and Hindu notables of the city, both \textit{ex officio} and in their individual capacities.\footnote{NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A; Bakhsh, “Bānī-e Kitāb-Khāna kī Taqrīr,” 6; Bakhsh, “Pehlī Report,” 10.} In the deed of trust transferring the library’s ownership to the government, he repeatedly expressed his desire to benefit the people of Patna in general, an intention whose origin he located in Muhammad Bakhsh’s oft-expressed wish that “these Arabic books and manuscripts be always preserved for the use and benefit of the public of the district of Patna in the form of a Public Library.”\footnote{NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A.} When writing in Urdu, Khuda Bakhsh seems to have avoided the term “public” in favor of ām, common or general.\footnote{Bakhsh, “Pehlī Report,” 10.} Shibli Numani, though, writing in 1891, used both terms, referring to the 1890 public meeting as an ām jalsa, a general gathering, and contrasting the library’s opening to the “‘public’” to its former existence as a “‘private’” library.\footnote{Numānī, “Maulvī Khudā Bakhsh,” 16–17.}

Regardless of terminology, the question that arose with Khuda Bakhsh’s public donation was which particular public it was meant to serve. When he had initially approached the Patna District Magistrate about donating the library, Khuda Bakhsh had written that it was “most desirable that in an important place like Patna there should be a Public Library containing all sorts of books which would suit the taste of the various classes of the public.”\footnote{NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A.} One purpose of his gift, then, was to provide a general resource that would offer something for every section of an important city’s diverse population.

Needless to say, in a city with a male literacy rate of 14.7\% (and a mere 0.6\% female literacy), this comprehensive ambition was not borne out in practice.\footnote{C.J. O’Donnell, \textit{Census of India, 1891: Lower Provinces of Bengal (Provincial Tables)}, vol. 3, bk. 4 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893), 203.} As Ulrike Stark points out, Indian libraries of the period were universally assumed to be for the use of middle-class readers (and almost always men), in contrast to contemporary British public libraries, which were intended in part to uplift the working classes.\footnote{Stark, “Associational Culture and Civic Engagement in Colonial Lucknow,” 23–24.} Public libraries had existed in India for several decades, some of them attached to schools, or else to local clubs and literary societies.\footnote{Ohdedar, \textit{Growth of the Library}, chap. 7–8; Joshi, \textit{In Another Country}, 46–47, 269n24.} However, with few exceptions, libraries calling themselves public were generally supported by subscription and closed to non-members. The first and largest, the Calcutta Public Library, which was founded in 1835 under both Indian and European patronage, finally added a free reading room when it was taken over by the municipality in 1890.\footnote{Anis Khurshid, “Growth of Libraries in India,” \textit{International Library Review} 4, no. 1 (1972): 28; Ohdedar, \textit{Growth of the Library}, chap. 9. There had earlier been a General Library of Bombay, which Ohdedar calls “the first bonafide public library of modern India,” but little is known about its short life. Ibid., 158.} Few other Indian libraries offered free admission until the 1910s, when the princely state of Baroda opened a system of free libraries, patterned on American models, as part of its policy of mass education.\footnote{Khurshid, “Growth of Libraries in India,” 39–44; K. Ramakrishna Rao, “Library Development in India,” \textit{The Library Quarterly} 31, no. 2 (April 1961): 140–41. One exception was the Mulla Firuz Library, founded by a Parsi poet and scholar, which by 1873 (and possibly as early as 1854) was claimed to be “the first and the only gratuitous library in Bombay.” Edward Rehatsek, \textit{Catalogue Raisonné of the Arabic, Hindostani, Persian, and Turkish Mss. in the Mulla Firuz Library} (Bombay: Managing Committee of the Mulla Firuz Library, 1873), vi.}

Thus, by contemporary standards, the Khuda Bakhsh library was unusual in allowing free admission to all,
as a result of which it quickly became very popular among Patnaites. The *Bihar Herald* described it as being "freely used by the public every day," and administrators said it was "visited by all classes of the reading public, of which the Muhammadans form the majority."\(^{153}\)

The library was also, however, a particularly oriental public library; that is, one that would preserve and make available "collections of valuable manuscripts, which not only suit [the] taste of Orientalists but which are most essential for the preservation of the Muhammadan literature, science and other various branches of learning."\(^{154}\) In addition to "the public of the district of Patna," then, the library’s public also included Muslims in general, as well as scholars of the Muslim world. Elsewhere, Khuda Bakhsh included both the qaum, or Muslims, and the mulk, or India.\(^{155}\) More explicitly, he said, "This endowment is for Muslims in particular and for knowledge-loving nations in general. In this endowment, I am not concerned with divisions among people [insān-e mukhtalif al-alwān wa al-aqsām, lit. people of different colors and kinds] and my intention is merely ongoing benefit."\(^{156}\) Anyone who wanted to use the library was welcome to do so, though it was unequivocally meant principally for Muslims. Urdu-speaking Hindu elites eagerly assented to an ecumenical sense of the library’s mission. Gajadhar Prasad and Guru Prashad Sen agreed that all communities should work together for the library, because, as *Al-Punch* paraphrased Sen, “books of knowledge and the arts, regardless of what language they are in, are not for any particular nation or person, but rather they are a trust for present and future generations.”\(^{157}\)

The library’s two-story building (Fig. 3) contained, in effect, two collections, one organized around historical preservation and the other around modern knowledge. The two were physically separate: the upper floor was occupied by Arabic and Persian manuscripts, to be used by Orientalists and by primarily Muslim intellectuals, while the ground floor held English books to “meet the want of those who are not familiar with the Persian and Arabic languages,” as well as several cases where prized artifacts, like a brass globe from Jahangir’s library, were displayed.\(^{158}\) The underlying logic behind the library’s bipartite division, which identified European knowledge with modernity and non-European writings with antiquity, also emerges in the remarkable fact that sources from the period of the library’s founding never mention any holdings in Urdu, let alone Hindi or Bengali. Some number of Urdu manuscripts seem to have been present, along with a handful of books printed in Bengali. The latter were included in the catalogue of printed books in European languages that was published in 1918, but none of the library’s Urdu holdings were catalogued until a list of manuscripts was compiled in 1960.\(^{159}\)

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\(^{154}\) NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A.


\(^{157}\) Ibid., 1–2. Khuda Bakhsh also thanked a Hindu woman for a donation of Rs. 1,000, singling her out for praise on account of her religion. Bakhsh, “Pehlī Report,” 13.

\(^{158}\) NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A; Hasler, “Oriental Public Library,” 61.

\(^{159}\) The Urdu manuscript catalogue was published two years later, in 1962. See Ābid Imām Zaidī, *Fehrist-e Makhṭūtāt-e Urdu* (List of Urdu Manuscripts) (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1962); *Catalogue of the Printed Books of European Languages*. Although there were only 243 Urdu manuscripts in 1960, a few years later the library had over 10,000 printed books in Urdu, only slightly lower than the number of English printed books it held. It also held about 3,500 printed Persian books and about 3,900 printed Arabic books. It is not clear, however, when most of these were acquired. There were also about 200 printed Hindi books, as well as a modest number of manuscripts in Turkish, Sanskrit, and Hindi. Jogesh Misra, “Library Movement in Bihar,”
Although Khuda Bakhsh and his contemporaries put relatively little emphasis on the library’s collection of rare volumes in English, a number of such books did find their way into the library’s holdings. These included several books from as far back as the sixteenth century, as well as more recent volumes, including those with annotations by Byron and Coleridge, that must have appealed to Khuda Bakhsh’s penchant for books bearing the marks of notable past owners. By and large, though, the English books—many of them from a single library Khuda Bakhsh had bought at auction in England—were meant for a wide range of local visitors who wanted to consult up-to-date reference materials and recent scientific and literary works.

The library’s English holdings were popular enough that, by the 1910s, readers were complaining of their inadequacy. The *Bihar Herald* wrote in 1913 that, although the Oriental Library was so famous that only a “man... hailing from the moon” could be ignorant of its existence, still there was no true public library in Patna, because “to have a Library is one thing, and to have books in it is another.” The city’s students were being particularly let down, the paper argued, since “there are many fields of knowledge other than that of historical research, and for those who would like to traverse such grounds, the Library is practically useless.”

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160 Sarkar, “Indian Bodley,” opposite page 249.
The Herald pointed to the library’s heightened importance in the context of Bihar’s separation from Bengal the previous year. Although the library’s collection of manuscripts was no doubt admirable, its deficiency in “the latest and best works on modern science, culture and thought” was unacceptable considering it was “the only public Library in the capital of the New Province.” Since the Bengal government had been obliged to give the bulk of its support to the Imperial Library in Calcutta, its negligence in funding the Khuda Bakhsh library had been forgivable. But now that the latter was “the most important institution of its kind in the whole Province,” the Herald argued, the government of Bihar and Orissa was obliged to increase its funding. The paper suggested Rs. 3,000 annually, in addition to an initial grant of Rs. 10,000.164

The library and Patna

Aside from a few elites of the old school, like Guru Prashad Sen, and a handful of scholars, like Jadunath Sarkar, very few among the Bihar Herald’s audience of English-speaking domiciled Bengalis had any interest in Arabic or Persian, or in the history of Islamic learning. But when it argued that the Khuda Bakhsh library should expand its mission and cater to new publics, the Bihar Herald was responding as much to the ambiguities of the library’s purpose as to the preferences of its readers or the needs created by Patna’s new role as a provincial capital. As accounts of the library frequently emphasize, Khuda Bakhsh himself always insisted that his bequest was meant foremost for the people of Patna, and he specified in the deed of trust that the collection was never to be moved from the spot.165 Ali Imam was among many who admired Khuda Bakhsh’s staunchness on this point. In a recollection quoted by V.C. Scott O’Connor, Imam evokes the depths of Khuda Bakhsh’s devotion to the library and to Patna:

“The British Museum made him a magnificent offer for his collection; but he declined it. ‘I am a poor man,’ he told me, ‘and the sum they offered me was a princely fortune, but could I ever part for money with that to which my Father and I have dedicated our lives?’ and as he said this his clean-cut features betrayed a singular emotion; his large luminous eyes welled up with tears.

‘‘No,’ he said, ‘the collection is for Patna, and the gift shall be laid at the feet of the Patna public.’

“As I knew Khuda Baksh, he was heroic.”166

For Khuda Bakhsh, Imam suggests, material rewards held no allure if they came at the cost of depriving Patna of the benefit of two lifetimes’ zeal and toil. What defines the librarian’s heroism, for Imam as for others, is his utter devotion, not only to his library itself, nor even to his country or region, but to his city and its people.

This local devotion was complemented, or perhaps tested, by wider fame and increased government patronage when E. Denison Ross visited the library soon after his arrival in India in 1901 as the principal of the Calcutta Madrasa, a reformist institution founded by Warren Hastings.167 He writes in his memoirs that upon visiting the library he was “overwhelmed by its

164 Ibid.
165 NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A.
166 Scott O’Connor, Eastern Library, 8–9. The Museum’s offer may be the same one referred to in the Behar Herald of January 23, 1909, amounting to Rs. 900,000.
wealth of manuscripts,” and he “delighted to drink in [Khuda Bakhsh’s] marvellous erudition.”  

He was deeply concerned, however, by the lack of a comprehensive catalogue and by the fire danger from nearby thatched houses. Accordingly, he wrote immediately to Viceroy Curzon, and on Ross’s insistence, Curzon visited the library in 1903. He expressed his admiration for the library as well as his concern for its safety. On his orders, the land surrounding the library was acquired and cleared. The provincial government also doubled its annual contribution to Rs. 1,200 and funded the completion of the hall that was being built on the library grounds for the Anjuman-e Islamia, on the condition that it should instead be for the library’s own use. When it was finished, this hall was named the Curzon Reading Room. Finally, funds were set aside for the compilation of a catalogue under Ross’s supervision.

Ross thus helped bring the library into a closer relationship with the colonial government, with even the Viceroy solicitous of its well-being. This relationship brought both material benefits and wider recognition; however, it also tended to make it a national or imperial institution rather than one dedicated to the Patna public. Officials had already disputed whether Khuda Bakhsh’s dedication had meant the Patna Municipality or the District of Patna to be the beneficiary, or if “the public of Patna, an indeterminate body,” had been intended.

Further confusion arose among officials, and eventually among members of the Patna public, when Ross’s passionate interest in the library was mingled with his work on the Victoria Memorial Hall erected by Curzon in honor of the late empress and, many said, of himself.

Because the library’s deed of trust stipulated that its holdings were to remain in place, officials disagreed about how to respond when Khuda Bakhsh approached Curzon with an offer to send a number of manuscripts to Calcutta for display in the upcoming Victoria Memorial Hall exhibition, held at the Indian Museum while the Memorial itself was being built. Curzon, for whom the Memorial was a pet project, had put Denison Ross in charge of collecting an assortment of artistic, antiquarian, and other items, and had keenly followed his progress. Ross took up the task enthusiastically; the librarian J.A. Chapman, one of Ross’s successors in the cataloguing project, said that “for the collection of such things he had more flair in his little finger than the rest of Calcutta had in its whole body.”

Among the exhibits Ross selected were fourteen manuscripts from the Khuda Bakhsh library. Although the managing committee was willing to send them (possibly in addition to several dozen others), district-level officials argued that sending the manuscripts to Calcutta would clearly violate the terms of the deed of trust, which required “that the said books and

169 "The Viceroy in Behar," The Bihar Herald, January 24, 1903; “Acquisition of Land,” The Amrita Bazar Patrika, February 11, 1904; BSA, Quinquennial Report of the Patna Division for the Period from 1900-01 to 1904-05, 54; NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A; Ross, Both Ends of the Candle, 104.
170 NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A.
174 Quoted in Ross, Both Ends of the Candle, 150.
manuscripts are at no time to be removed except temporarily, under rules for the use of the said Public.” On the other hand, highly placed officials in the governments of Bengal and of India argued that “the Patna Library will become better known if it is represented at the Memorial Hall; and the public of the district of Patna may, not unreasonably, be considered to be honoured by the transaction.” Curzon even stepped in to testify that when he had visited the library, Khuda Bakhsh and the members of the library’s managing committee had approached him directly with the offer to lend the manuscripts, and at that time “they had all represented that the best or some of the best manuscripts would be held in higher honour and be more widely seen in Calcutta than at Patna.”

For government officials, the dispute revolved around the legal interpretation of the deed’s terms, and in turn bore on the matter of giving Khuda Bakhsh a government salary or a grant for the payment of his debts. The underlying dilemma, though, was of more than administrative interest, and ultimately concerned the library’s place in India’s intellectual landscape. Denzil Ibbetson, a member of the Viceroy’s council, gestured to this issue when he argued that the case for relieving Khuda Bakhsh of his debts would be stronger if the library were owned directly by the Government of India than if it were managed by the provincial government “on the assumption that it is principally intended for the advantage of a provincial locality.” The question raised by Ibbetson, Curzon, and others was whether there was a mismatch between the library and its location. All observers acknowledged the excellence of the library, but some doubted whether Patna was really worthy of such an extraordinary institution. During Curzon’s visit to Patna, the Bihar Herald reported, “the public of Bihar were naturally alarmed at the widespread rumour of the intended removal to Calcutta of the celebrated Oriental Library founded by our well-known townsman Moulu Khoda Bux Khan Bahadur C.I.E., late Chief Justice of Hyderabad.” Thankfully, Curzon had been pleased with the books picked out for his inspection by Denison Ross (who had made a special trip for the purpose), and had shown his satisfaction by inscribing the visitor’s book with Amir Khusrau’s famous couplet, “Agar firdaus bar rū-e zamīn ast, / Hamīn ast wa hamīn ast wa hamīn ast” (If there is heaven on earth, / It is here, it is here, and it is here). Satisfied with this indication of support, the Herald reiterated that “the Patna public are sincerely glad to learn that His Excellency has given up the idea of removing any of the volumes to the Imperial Library at Calcutta.”

There does not seem to have actually been any official intention to deprive Patna of its celebrated library, but the plan to send the cream of the library’s collection to the imperial capital for an exhibition must have given rise to the rumor reported by the Herald, despite Curzon’s confidence that “not... a single human being will ever detect the technical illegality.”

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175 It is unclear what the relationship was between the fifty manuscripts offered by the library and the fourteen chosen by Ross. BSA, Bengal, General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, April 1904, 1-5 A; NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A.
176 BSA, Bengal, General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, April 1904, 1-5 A.
177 NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A.
178 Ibid.
179 “The Viceroy and the Patna Oriental Library,” The Bihar Herald, January 24, 1903.
180 Ibid. This fact is also mentioned in Sarkar, “Indian Bodley,” 251.
181 “The Viceroy and the Patna Oriental Library,” The Bihar Herald, January 24, 1903; see also The Bihar Herald, May 23, 1903.
182 Ross disagreed with the view that the manuscripts were among the library’s best. NAI, Home Department, Public Branch, October 1903, 205-207 A.
Underneath the rumor, though, lay an anxiety over the apparent incongruity of Patna’s claim to ownership over its “magnificent Oriental Library.” Now that the library was under government control, it was also subject to the official mindset according to which, as H.H. Risley said, “the honour will be on the side of the Patna Library” if its books were sent to Calcutta. Residents of a mofussil city like Patna might well fear that such a Calcutta-centered mentality would one day lead the government to rob them of the library, or of any other treasure they might acquire. Hence, perhaps, Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh’s defensive tone when he later said that “Bankipore has been and must for ever more be the reigning Queen of Bihar. We shall not willingly let her empire over the mind [slip] out of [her] hands. She has the finest library where lie enshrined the most enduring monuments of Muslim genius. And this library, according to the deed of trust, must be at Bankipore and nowhere else—legal fiction notwithstanding.”

Making the collection known

All too conscious of Patna’s widely perceived provinciality, the library’s well-wishers wished to proclaim what Jadunath Sarkar called its “full significance in the growth of our nation.” Impatient with the slow fulfillment of a promise made by Curzon to provide the library with a printing press, Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh wrote:

> A library, such as the Bankipore Library, can only be a useful institution if the public employ it as such. The Patna society is still too intellectually backward to appreciate its value, or to make use of its treasures. But such is not the case with the educated public outside Patna, who can neither afford time nor find opportunity to visit the library.

Locals might flock to the library to read the novels of George W.M. Reynolds and Marie Corelli, but these were not the library’s “treasures.” In this view, the library’s riches demanded wider propagation, either through publishing or by bringing them to public attention through systematic cataloguing.

The first of these goals had long been an ambition of Khuda Bakhsh’s. He had written that, if his library was to reach its full potential as a center of learning, it was “incomplete without a printing press. Let us hope that ere long we shall possess a press to multiply the copies of valuable works and so bring them within the reach of the reading public.” In the same vein, Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh argued that publishing “useful works” was especially important in “the domain of Oriental learning,” which would “otherwise either completely disappear from India or in course of time be reduced to a mere mockery.”

Salahuddin thought highly of Urdu literature, in which he said “the Mohamedan intellect of India has reached its highest fruition.” He particularly singled out the modern writers Hali,

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183 The Amrita Bazar Patrika, August 13, 1908.
184 BSA, Bengal, General Department, Miscellaneous Branch, April 1904, 1-5 A.
185 “Bihar Educational Conference: President’s Address,” The Leader, October 3, 1913.
187 Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 40–41.
188 Books by both of these mid-Victorian authors were in the library’s collection, at least by 1918. Catalogue of the Printed Books of European Languages, 79, 84. On the sensational popularity of these and other sentimental novelists, see Joshi, In Another Country, chap. 2.
189 Bukhsh, “Islamic Libraries,” 137. The library had been given a printing press worth Rs. 12,000 in 1891, but it was apparently inadequate to the library’s needs. Bakhsh, “Pehlī Report,” 13.
190 Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 41.
Shibli, and Sharar for praise.191 But like his father, he gave Arabic and Persian writings pride of place in establishing ethical and religious norms for Muslims. Without “Oriental learning,” meaning access to proper Islamic scholarship in Arabic and Persian, he said, Muslims were doomed to fall prey to “a band of unreasonable fanatics who rove about the country preaching the worst gospels of fanaticism and intolerance.” Their growing familiarity with English would hardly help matters, because without knowledge of their own texts and normative traditions, Muslims would inevitably become “a class of people who are neither one thing nor another, and who will unite in themselves the vices of the two wholly opposed civilisations without the redeeming virtues of either.” With government patronage of a printing press, however, the Khuda Bakhsh library could help avert this political and spiritual catastrophe by making authoritative texts available, not to ordinary Muslims but to the clerics who guided them.192

As important as publishing was to the vision shared by Khuda Bakhsh and his son, no more than a tiny fraction of the library’s riches could ever be committed to print. It was therefore necessary to publicize the library’s collection in order to attract scholarly visitors. Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh made many efforts in this direction, writing numerous articles drawing European Orientalists’ attention to the library’s riches.193 But in order to become truly well known, the library needed a detailed catalogue. While in Hyderabad, Khuda Bakhsh had published a catalogue in Persian that listed the library’s Arabic and Persian manuscripts alphabetically by title, along with brief descriptions of their contents and authors.194 A promised second volume never came out but, at 858 pages, the first volume was sufficient to provoke scholarly interest.195

This early effort was soon joined by a much more ambitious project focused on producing detailed, classified catalogues in English. The resulting series would eventually run to more than forty volumes and fulfill Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh’s prediction that “as the catalogue comes out the Orientalists of Europe will undoubtedly discover more and more treasures and feel more and more interest in [this] depository of learning.”196 The cataloguing project was proposed and led by Denison Ross, an indefatigable scholar of wide interests and formidable language abilities who would eventually be seen as the foremost British Orientalist of his time.197 He was knighted


192 Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 41–42.


196 Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 37. In addition to the lengthy English catalogues, the first two cataloguers also produced shorter lists in Arabic and Persian. See Abd ul-Hamîd, Miftâh al-Kanzî, vol. 1 (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1918); Abd ul-Muqtadir, Mirât al-Ulam, vol. 1 (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1925).

in 1918, for his translation services in World War I as well as for his scholarly contributions, and served for twenty-one years as the first director of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.\textsuperscript{198}

Reviewing the first volume of the catalogues in 1909, the \textit{Beharee} praised Ross for having “discovered” the library. Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh claimed that without him, the library “would have remained unnoticed and unknown.”\textsuperscript{199} These accolades were exaggerated, given the enthusiastic notice given to the library by Shibli Numani and others. Nonetheless, Ross’s cataloguing efforts illustrate how he became an intellectual “ambassador of Empire,” in the words of one obituary, always in search of “a fuller measure of collaboration between Indian and European scholars.”\textsuperscript{200} Just as the library was the creation of a scholar firmly grounded in traditional forms of Islamic learning but also in the intellectual conventions of the modern West—a maulvi as well as a pleader—the cataloguing program entailed a symbiosis between Indian and European scholars. However, this symbiosis took place primarily on European intellectual terms. The achievements of Indian scholars were measured in terms of their conformity to European expectations, and even when their scholarly mastery was acknowledged, the credit was frequently assigned to their European tutors.

On his arrival at the Calcutta Madrasa in 1901, where he succeeded the famous Hungarian-British Orientalist Aurel Stein, Ross says that he “found it intensely interesting to be brought into direct contact with Muslim learning as taught by Muslims.”\textsuperscript{201} He derived “delight” from learned conversation with the \textit{ulama} there, but it seemed to him, as to many other Orientalists, that though their knowledge was admirably deep, it was also narrow. In Ross’s estimation, Islamic learning was remarkable for its continuity over the centuries, but had “no scope for original thought or initiative.”\textsuperscript{202} The blame, however, lay not only on Muslims but on the European scholars in India who had employed them “more as literary hacks than as scholars.”\textsuperscript{203}

Ross lamented Europeans’ tendency to draw on Indian scholars’ knowledge and translation skills without recognizing them as intellectual equals. While this criticism bespeaks Ross’s sympathy and respect for Indians’ capabilities, his solution was not for Europeans to incorporate new approaches to hermeneutics, but for them to share their methodologies with Indians.\textsuperscript{204} Rather than the domination of either “research” or “tradition,” he says, “what is wanted is the combination of the two.”\textsuperscript{205} However, in his conception, the geographical and civilizational origins of each approach would remain distinct. Writing in his memoir of the subsequent explosion in India of a “taste for modern research,” Ross expresses his fear that “tradition may

\textit{Royal Asiatic Society} 21, no. 3 (July 2011): 361–75.

\textsuperscript{198} From its founding in 1916 until 1938, the school was simply called the School of Oriental Studies. R.L.T., “Sir Edward Denison Ross,” 833.

\textsuperscript{199} \textit{The Beharee}, February 12, 1909; Khuda Bukhsh, \textit{My Father}, 39.


\textsuperscript{201} Ross, \textit{Both Ends of the Candle}, 98.

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{204} This sympathy had limits; Ross remarks that during his time in India, he found himself incapable of forming any intimate friendships with Indians. Ross, \textit{Both Ends of the Candle}, 147.

\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., 98–99.
eventually be lost sight of.”

This approach was in close accord with the principles of the Khuda Bakhsh library. Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh expressed a similar anxiety about Indians’ potential loss of civilizational integrity at the hands of European epistemologies. “Nothing is more desirable than to keep the Orientals as Orientals,” he said. “Western learning is, indeed, a desideratum, but not at the sacrifice of Eastern culture.”

Ross set out to buck this pattern, positioning himself as the tutor of a new breed of scholars who would combine the maulvi’s intimacy with “the most famous Arabic and Persian classics” with the Orientalist’s breadth and critical attitude. Accordingly, he decided “to combine the old curriculum with scholarly research on modern lines.” Students who had “acquired in the orthodox way a familiarity with Arabic literature such as no European can acquire in youth in the West” would also become familiar with the scholarship of European Orientalists like Theodor Nöldeke and Ignác Goldziher.

Once his new curriculum was in place at the Madrasa, Ross was prepared to train two cataloguers. He recruited as pupils two maulvis trained at the Madrasa who seemed “to possess the necessary qualifications and tastes,” Abdul Muqtadir for Persian and Kamaluddin Ahmad (who already had an M.A.) for Arabic. For six months in 1904, they studied “the principal European catalogues,” and then set to work cataloguing the Madrasa’s own collections according to European methods. In his introduction to the resulting volume, published the following year, Ross writes that it is “the first catalogue raisonné [classified and annotated catalogue] ever prepared by Indian Muhammadans and almost the first catalogue raisonné of an Indian library.” He goes on to articulate his idea of the purpose of a catalogue: any catalogue should of course serve as a guide to the contents of a collection, but what sets a good catalogue apart from a mere handlist is the provision of bibliographic and historical information, to “add to the sum total of our knowledge of literature.” If Indian libraries were well run and properly catalogued, Ross argued, then there was no reason that they could not be the equals of any in Europe.

Satisfied with Muqtadir and Ahmad’s efforts, Ross sent them from Calcutta to Bankipur to begin work on documenting the Khuda Bakhsh library’s collections. The first volume, Muqtadir’s catalogue of Persian poetry from Firdausi to Hafiz, was published in 1908. Along with a physical description of each manuscript, the catalogue offers detailed accounts of their contents and of the contexts in which they were produced and read. For instance, there is an extended entry on an early manuscript of the Dīwān-e Hāfiz, the poetic works of the famous

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206 Ibid., 99.
207 Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 41.
209 Ross, Both Ends of the Candle, 99.
211 Kamalu ‘d-Dīn Ahmad and ’Abdu ’l-Muqtadir, Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the Calcutta Madrasah (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1905), ii; Ross, Both Ends of the Candle, 104.
212 He mentions as exceptions Edward Rehatsek’s catalogue of the Mulla Firuz Library in Bombay and Aloys Sprenger’s partial catalogue of the libraries of the nawab of Awadh. Ross, “Introduction,” i.
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid., iii.
fourteenth-century poet from Shiraz, which was donated by a Gorakhpur aristocrat. Muqtadir begins by describing at length the practice of taking omens from Hafiz’s diwan, and quotes the marginal notes personally inscribed in this copy by the emperors Humayun and Jahangir, reconstructing the circumstances of each oracular consultation. Citing published works as well as manuscripts in the Khuda Bakhsh library and the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Muqtadir liberally illustrates his account with quotations from the Persian, without translation, and meticulously justifies his interpretations in cases of ambiguity or missing words. He then gives a biography of Hafiz, critically compiled from manuscript sources, and appraises his place in Persian poetry, citing authorities writing in Persian and Arabic as well as in European languages. Next comes a copious listing of commentaries, published editions, and translations into English, German, and Latin. Finally, after a description of Hafiz’s grave, Muqtadir briefly lists the contents of the manuscript’s folios, describes its appearance and provenance, and gives the seals and signatures inscribed on its flyleaf.

While most of the entries in the catalogue are far less exhaustive, they tend to display a similar combination of methodical precision and independent judgment. Muqtadir displays a formidable command of a very large number of texts, and rarely shies away from making aesthetic and analytical assertions. His readers and patrons were suitably impressed. In his preface, Ross acclaimed Abdul Muqtadir’s accomplishments, while making clear that they were due both to his exemplary character in contrast with his coreligionists, and to the training he had received in European methods:

Maulavi Muqtadir has risen to the height of his task by sheer devotion and energy. In fact, I think that the present volume with all its shortcomings represents a higher level of scholarship than has hitherto been reached in modern literary research in India, at any rate as far as concerns Islamic studies. It marks a new epoch, and I trust it may be the forerunner of much more work of the same standard of excellence.

Decades later, Ross was still depicting the catalogue as the crowning achievement of his career, “the one monument I left behind me in India.” In the first place, the catalogue itself publicized and made legible a “splendid collection” that was “almost unknown in Europe, and not nearly so well known as it deserved to be among the learned Muhammadans of India.” Moreover, it embodied a pedagogical project that Ross had begun at the Calcutta Madrasa and that had continued under the supervision of successors including E.A. Horne, a Principal of Patna College, and J.A. Chapman, the first librarian of the Imperial Library (formerly the Calcutta Public Library). The catalogues produced by Muqtadir, Ahmad, and a series of other scholars, Ross said, bore “sufficient testimony to what such men can achieve, if given a chance.” A number of cataloguers went on to study further in England and to take up teaching

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216 Ibid., 1:231–52.
218 Ibid., 1:256–59.
221 Ross, “Preface,” v.
222 Muqtadir produced all of the Persian catalogues that were published before the 1970s; the Arabic catalogues
careers in India; Ahmad, for instance, soon went to East Bengal become the Superintendent of the Chittagong Madrasa, while Muqtadīr served on a committee on Muhammadan education and later as a professor at Ravenshaw College in Cuttack. In his obituary for Ross, the scholar H.A.R. Gibb concurred with Ross’s own estimation of the pedagogical and scholarly value of the cataloguing project, and identified one of the ways that Ross had benefited in turn. Calling the project “the enterprise which most worthily commemorates his work for Oriental education in India,” Gibb noted that Ross had drawn on the “stores of bibliographical information” he had accumulated when he had built up the library at SOAS.

The release of the first volume was met with appreciative responses in newspapers as well as academic journals. The catalogue itself was universally praised, though Ross’s enthusiasm and his claims of novelty were sometimes criticized as overblown. A rare exception to this generally positive reception was the review in the Times of India, which belittled Bengal’s scholarly prowess compared to that of the Times’s hometown of Bombay. The review said (apparently misconstruing a statement made by Ross in his preface) that if the cataloguers had required several years of training, then “this also is somewhat strange and does not reflect much credit on the progress of Oriental studies in Bengal.” Even this review, however, acknowledged that Muqtadīr had done “good work no doubt.”

Both Indians and Europeans expressed appreciation for the efforts of Ross and his protegés and agreed that together, they had achieved an unprecedented collaboration. Ross made no claim to have contributed directly to the Khuda Bakhsh catalogues, and at least in the case of the trial-run catalogue prepared for the Calcutta Madrasa, explicitly stated that he “thought it best for the compilers to bear the full responsibility and share the entire credit.” Nonetheless, though most notices praised Muqtadīr’s exacting work, many reserved their most effusive praise for Ross in his capacities as guide and supervisor. A German scholar, for instance, praised Ross for his presumed fortitude in dealing with Indian scholars. He complained that “whoever has had a few experiences with the Indian maulvis, or their ‘colleagues from the other department,’ the pandits, knows how hard it is to train these learned gentlemen” to produce work that would not need to be redone by the supervising scholar.

The Persianist E.G. Browne, who had had warm personal dealings with both Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh and his father, was far more generous to Muqtadīr, and praised the three

were produced by a number of different scholars, at least some of whom were also products of the Calcutta Madrasa. Ross, Both Ends of the Candle, 99, 104.


226 “A Persian Catalogue,” The Times of India, December 2, 1908. The Times’s review, which makes much of Bombay’s superiority over Bengal, is unusual in its critical attitude, and stands in contrast to the same paper’s review of subsequent volumes two decades later, which celebrates Muqtadīr’s example as “difficult to emulate, and almost impossible to surpass.” “Manuscripts in Bankipore,” The Times of India, September 21, 1928.

227 Ross, “Introduction,” ii.

generations of the Khuda Bakhsh family for their erudition and generosity. He acclaimed the first volume of the catalogue as following “the best traditions of scholarship” and helping bring “the riches of this great library” to the attention of “all the world.” But for Browne, too, Ross deserved attention for helping the library come into its own by inspiring his pupils with scholarly zeal and instilling them with the methods of “scientific cataloguing.” Even Salahuddin himself said that the first volume “displays an amount of research and erudition which is, indeed, rare in the East, and Dr. Denison Ross may well be congratulated on the success achieved by his pupil Moulvi Muqtadir.”

To be sure, Ross was the architect of the cataloguing project and had set his stamp on the whole endeavor. It was notable, however, that in some quarters, no level of scholarly achievement seemed capable of entirely clearing Indian scholarship from suspicion and disdain. Even when Muqtadir was rewarded for his efforts with the imperial title of Khan Sahib, the compliments paid to him were distinctly backhanded. Presenting the honor, the Patna Commissioner commended Muqtadir for conducting his work

in a manner that has elicited from well-known scholars in Germany, Hungary, Russia, France, Italy, and England an expression of astonishment at the erudition and the scholarly methods that have been displayed. Indeed, an authority whose dictum is beyond question has recorded that you may fairly claim to be the first Mahomedan in any country to produce a work on modern European lines of scholarship which will rank with the work of European scholars.

In what was no doubt meant as a sincere tribute to his attainments, Muqtadir was informed that he was unique among all Muslims in the world in having reached a European standard of scholarship. The effortless condescension was remarkable: not only did European opinion figure as the sole criterion of judgment, but experts across Europe were apparently dumbfounded that an Indian was capable of such an achievement.

The catalogue’s local reception in the Beharee was slightly different. While the paper joined the chorus praising Muqtadir for his “independent conclusions” and Ross for training “young Moslems” in Western methods, it also made a more distinctive argument. Alluding to heightened communal tensions, the paper expressed the hope that the catalogue would not only publicize the library to “Indian and European scholars alike,” but that it would “also assist to some extent in reviving interest in the Moslem Classics[,] the importance and value of which are apt to be undervalued in certain quarters at the present moment.” Amid the increasingly polarized politics of the Swadeshi era—an item in the same issue criticized Muslims for having “kept aloof from the Congress”—the moderate-nationalist Beharee seized on the library, not merely as an important scholarly institution, nor even a source of local pride, but also as a valuable force for tolerance in the public sphere.

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230 Khuda Bakhsh, My Father, 39.

231 Muqtadir was later given the further title of Khan Bahadur. Nadwī Gīlānī, “Khudā Bakhsh Khān Bahādur,” 66.


233 The Beharee, February 12, 1909.

History and its publics

Although the catalogue was important to foreign scholars and as a token of the library’s virtues, it seems to have reached very few readers in India itself. One of the later cataloguers, Muinuddin Nadwi, who prepared a number of the Arabic volumes between 1927 and 1940, complained in the Gaya Urdu journal *Nadim* that the catalogues had been priced out of the reach of Indian readers. The initial volumes, printed in London, had been priced at Rs. 16, and even when they began to be printed in Calcutta, they had remained expensive at Rs. 10 each.235 Nadwi expressed doubt that a single volume of the catalogue *raisonné* had been sold in India (although the four volumes of Arabic and Persian handlists were available more cheaply, at Rs. 5 per volume), while copies were being given away to famous researchers and important libraries in Europe and America, with the perverse result that the library was better known in the West than it was among Indian scholars.236

Whether or not the catalogue *raisonné* was readily accessible in India, it played a critical role in the library’s growth from a local institution dedicated to the Patna public into an archive known and celebrated throughout India and Europe. By offering detailed evidence of the caliber of the library’s holdings, it confirmed the library’s status in public discourse as one of India’s premier libraries. As the newspaper reviews of the catalogues show, this reputation developed not only in academic circles but also among the educated general public. Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted in his recent book on Jadunath Sarkar that these domains cannot be neatly separated. Regnant narratives, generic boundaries, disciplinary norms, and material archives all took shape outside of the academy, in publications that were both read and authored primarily by people without formal training in historical scholarship.237

Sarkar, while probably the best-known of such scholars, was one of many who devoted himself wholeheartedly to collecting historical records and archiving them for the benefit of present and future researchers. Prachi Deshpande has shown how scholars scoured western India for empirical sources on Maratha history, which they edited, annotated, and reprinted in an effort to establish that history as a source of regional and nationalist pride in opposition to colonial historiography and institutions.238 Championing a dispassionate “scientific history” and a new understanding of “research” as requiring critical engagements with primary sources, Sarkar rejected many of the Marathi historians’ openly acknowledged patriotic motivations and polemical tone. Like them, though, he engaged in a relentless, self-sacrificing quest for the forgotten, moldering papers that might hold the keys to an ever more precise picture of the past, free of the distortions of later sources. For him, this insistence on original and eyewitness sources

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237 Indian historical scholarship was located almost entirely outside the universities until well into the twentieth century. This was true not only in India, but also in England, where Indian history was not taught in any university until the foundation of SOAS during World War I, and not in the established universities until after World War II. Chakrabarty, *Calling of History*, 51–56.

was one of the hallmarks of genuine research, an endeavor which he considered to be entirely new in India.\textsuperscript{239} As Chakrabarty argues, Sarkar thought carefully about what should be done with these documents, and about how private papers in family collections could be turned into public sources in historical archives—even if he did not always practice the public-minded generosity that he preached.\textsuperscript{240}

It was no surprise, then, that Sarkar was an enthusiastic supporter of the Khuda Bakhsh library, which he “thoroughly ransacked” during the two decades he spent as a professor of English and history at Patna College (1899-1917 and 1923-26).\textsuperscript{241} He wrote an effusive portrait of Khuda Bakhsh soon after the latter’s death, in which he saluted him as the “Indian Bodley,” a reference to the benefactor of the legendary Bodleian Library in Oxford.\textsuperscript{242} Sarkar made clear that the Khuda Bakhsh library was particularly valuable as a “means of keeping in India India’s literary treasures” by forming “a nucleus round which Indian manuscripts are gathering, sometimes by purchase but mainly by gift.”\textsuperscript{243} Like Khuda Bakhsh, Sarkar lamented the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century flight of rare and valuable manuscripts out of India and into the national libraries of Europe, where they were “sealed books” to Indian scholars, apart from the few rich enough to visit Europe.\textsuperscript{244} In both men’s views, this process owed as much to Indians’ carelessness as to Europeans’ eager scholarship and patriotism.\textsuperscript{245} It was a good thing, Sarkar said, that “by offering a well-known and secure home for books and ensuring their public use, [the library was] tempting private owners all over India to send their collections to it, and thus save them from being dispersed or lost to the country.”\textsuperscript{246}

After the deprivations of the previous decades, Indian libraries were starting from a disadvantage. By one scholar’s estimation, Europe already possessed more Persian manuscripts than India.\textsuperscript{247} Sarkar was vindicated in his hope that by building up archives like the Khuda

\textsuperscript{239} Chakrabarty, \textit{Calling of History}, 67–70.
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid., chap. 3.
\textsuperscript{245} Others were less forgiving of European acquisitiveness. Denison Ross, for instance, sharply criticized the “reckless pilfering” of India’s manuscript collections and argued that detailed catalogues could serve as armor against future thievery. Although he did not explicitly name Europeans as the culprits, he left little doubt about who deserved the blame for past looting. He bluntly criticized his predecessor at the Calcutta Madrasa, Aloys Sprenger, for having “added so little” to the Madrasa’s library while somehow accumulating “one of the finest collections of Arabic and Persian manuscripts ever brought together by a single man,” including more than 2,000 Arabic manuscripts deposited in the Berlin library. Ross, “Introduction,” iii – iv.
\textsuperscript{246} Sarkar, “Indian Bodley,” 248. Sarkar returned to this theme throughout his life; see Chakrabarty, \textit{Calling of History}, 71–72.
\textsuperscript{247} Beveridge, “Notes on Persian MSS.,” 84.
Bakhsh and Rampur libraries, as well as his own personal library of medieval history, Indians could form a few centers to compete with the great European collections.248 Donors from Patna and elsewhere continued to give individual manuscripts and whole collections to the Khuda Bakhsh library, which only grew in fame and scholarly value.249

Khuda Bakhsh resembled contemporaries like Sarkar in his commitment to legibility, public accessibility, and to the collection of the oldest and most accurate versions of texts, as well as in his pursuit of strategic alliances with government officials.250 He was also like any number of scholars of his time in his desire to preserve and make available a usable past by collecting and arranging old and authentic documents. But although his library itself attracted plentiful attention in the public sphere, the texts that it held were destined to remain the preserve of a relatively small number of committed scholars.

An explanation might be found in the Maharashtrian context. Deshpande remarks that, despite several factors apparently working in favor of a widespread adoption of Indology by Maharashtra’s largely Brahmin middle class, Sanskrit texts never became the focus of popular nationalist historiography. She attributes this fact to nationalists’ search for histories of military glory: for a writer like Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, the ancient Sanskritic past seemed to be the domain of culture and spirituality, whereas the more recent past, recorded in Marathi, offered thrilling stories of martial and political success.251 Popular engagements with history in other regions, too, were frequently oriented toward establishing magnificent pasts (though not always military ones) for collectivities defined by territory or caste.252

Similarly, while the pasts of Islam and of Muslims were certainly the subjects of passionate public discussion and contestation, by Muslims and others, the Arabic and Persian texts contained in the Khuda Bakhsh library were rarely called upon in these popular debates. These texts varied widely in genre, authorship, and subject matter, and were open to any number of uses. In practice, however, Khuda Bakhsh himself framed the library as an intellectual resource for the defense of Islam and Muslims from the condescension of Europeans and from the distortions of unlettered clerics. Likewise, those who wrote about the library positioned it as a repository of abstruse learning and refined culture, meant for the use of serious-minded adherents and scholars of Islam.253 Conversely, although textual evidence was of the utmost importance to the modernists, revivalists, and assorted pamphleteers who were bringing religious discussions into the public sphere, there was a broadly shared emphasis on a small group of authoritative texts—primarily the Quran and the hadith—which were increasingly consulted in


250 Chakrabarty, Calling of History, 112–24.

251 Deshpande, Creative Pasts, 110–11.


The Khuda Bakhsh library and similar institutions, however, played little role in such popular debates.

The library in intellectual society

While the library was nearly absent from popular struggles over the interpretation of history, it did not go missing from the public sphere. Notwithstanding the esoteric nature of its holdings, the library was seized upon as a malleable symbol for a wide range of agendas. It was held up as an embodiment of such varied, and contradictory, themes as the possibility of greatness in the mofussil, the thrills of antiquarian acquisitiveness, the promise of a coming Islamic intellectual renaissance, and the death of Islamic learning.

Beginning even before it opened to the public, the library was almost invariably cited, together with the Gol Ghar granary, as one of Patna’s few noteworthy places. Writers like J. Ireland Hasler and V.C. Scott O’Connor publicized it to educated publics in Europe and America, including scholars of Islam as well as travelers and nonspecialists. For some, the library called to mind the seemingly boundless antiquarian opportunities in the East. For instance, Ali Imam’s anecdote about Khuda Bakhsh’s impish admission to theft, appearing in Scott O’Connor’s booklet on the library, elicited the admiring comment from the *Times Literary Supplement* that “there are many European collectors who will envy [Khuda Bakhsh] his Oriental environment with all its possibilities. The whole is now one of the glories of the City of Patna.” Locals, meanwhile, invoked the library as an exemplary site of elite patronage; for instance, *Al-Punch* rhetorically asked how one could wonder at the poor sanitation elsewhere in the city when “dust flies even on the Public Library’s street.”

For those with scholastic leanings, like Shibli Numani, the library was particularly significant as an exemplar of Muslim learning and local honor. But they frequently insisted that one did not have to be a scholar oneself in order to glory in the library’s merits. Such writers asserted that “there is no literate man in all of India who has not heard of the Khuda Bakhsh library,” and that “the truth is that this library is a thing of great pride for Patna and Patnaites, but the ordinary Muslims of Hindustan can [also] take pride in it.” Equally, travel writers and ordinary visitors agreed that, as an article in the Hindi magazine *Ganga* put it, the library was “an incomparable storehouse of Muslim literature, the great pride of Bihar province, and a priceless gem of India.” With varying levels of tact, these visitors contrasted the splendor of the library with its unprepossessing surroundings. Describing his visit to the library in his local paper, the *Indian Daily Telegraph*, a teacher at the Colvin Taluqdar’s College in Lucknow

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257 *Al-Punch*, March 29, 1906.

258 A 1919 essay on Patna’s monuments devotes far more space to the library than to any other site apart from the archaeological excavations of Patliputra. Sinha, “Monuments of Patliputra,” 32–34.


remarked that “if there is anything of which Patna can well and truly be proud, it is the Oriental Public Library.”

By turning again and again to the language of pride, these writers underscored the perceived dissonance between the library’s provincial location and the undeniable excellence of its collections. There was also something wistful in their effort to substitute an affect of self-respect for the more concrete forms of authority—like those that had produced learned lawyers like Muhammad Bakhsh and Khuda Bakhsh—that had been eroded over the preceding decades. For observers sensitive to the twin marginalization of provincial cities like Patna and of the traditional forms of Islamic learning that had flourished there, the library represented both the somber remains of the past and the hopeful possibilities of the future.

Among those who emphasized the losses Indian scholarship had suffered was the civil servant and Orientalist Henry Beveridge, who had written about Patna, somewhat critically, in the 1880s. Surveying India’s manuscript libraries at the turn of the century, he wrote that because the great libraries had been destroyed during the 1857 Rebellion, manuscripts were neither valued nor preserved, except in a few places.

Most natives regard printed books as far preferable to hand-written ones, and cannot understand the Western desire for the latter. The study, too, of Persian in India has been declining for many years. It is melancholy to visit such places as Amroha and Bilgram, which were celebrated abodes of learned men, and to find that they now contain neither Maulvis nor manuscripts. Nearly everywhere I was told the same story, viz., that there had been libraries, but that they were now all burnt or dispersed, and that the only collection now in Upper India was that of Khudā Bakhsh in Patna.

Compounding Beveridge’s dismay was his further discovery that there were no manuscripts remaining in either Benares or Jaunpur, even though “one might have expected a harvest” in these places. The Khuda Bakhsh library was exemplary (although Beveridge thought the Rampur library still finer), but in his view, no repository in India could compare for riches with the great libraries of Europe.

For a “watchful collector” surveying the “hunting-grounds” of India, it was regrettable that, between a democratizing print culture and the nearly total erosion of the institutions supporting traditional forms of Islamic learning, India’s old manuscripts had few readers and fewer protectors. Beveridge’s attitude was typical of the Orientalist scholar: he was sympathetic and inquisitive, but ultimately concerned more with locating unknown sources and finding the best copies of famous texts than with the fate of Indian scholars and scholarship.

Edward Rehatsek had similarly observed that a library like that of Mulla Firuz, “confined chiefly to special languages, and subjects not bearing on every-day life, will... never be much frequented,” but he argued that this was of little concern since the role of such a library was primarily to preserve manuscripts and make them available to specialists.

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262 Beveridge, “City of Patna.”
264 Ibid., 84.
265 Ibid., 74, 80, 84.
266 Ibid., 80, 84.
A shrine to knowledge

Concerned as they were with the extinct and the obsolete, antiquarian scholars often resorted to funereal images. Metaphors of death and burial captured their sense that Indian and Islamic scholarship were not living traditions but themselves picturesque relics of the past. Jadunath Sarkar tells of a European scholar who, “after inspecting the library and noticing its lack of readers, remarked to Khuda Bakhsh, ‘What a fine cemetery for books have you built! In Europe such a library would have been daily thronged with a hundred students busy in research; but I see none such here.’”268 In this scholar’s view, the books are dead not because they are old but because they are not being read. The library is impressive, no doubt, but without visitors it lacks life.

For V.C. Scott O’Connor, on the other hand, it is the knowledge contained in the library’s books that has been entombed, because it is the remnant of an extinct social and political world. He strikes an elegiac tone, calling the library “happy in its environment” because, having seen Ashoka, Megasthenes, Chandragupta, and “the sorrowing Buddha,” Patna is imbued with the implacable stoicism of an eternal witness to the ravages of the ages.

The Library... enshrines the memory of vanished scholars and of vanished kings; of lost causes; of a culture that though it be dying now, or nearly dead, has in its time profoundly influenced the world, inspiring some of its great masterpieces, from Cordova to Delhi.... Here then in this ancient place, upon the edge of a storied river, there are now gathered together as into a safe harbourage at last, these remnants of a once-mighty fleet, that put forth its sails of purple and vermilion and gold to the breeze of a Sultan’s pleasure, and carried the pride of Emperors, more stately in their day than any the world has known.269

Casting about for a parallel to Khuda Bakhsh’s efforts in assembling his library, Scott O’Connor finds none better than the “saintly bones” of medieval Europe, whose capture was taken to justify any means employed. If books are essentially relics, magical artifacts of a civilization and scholarly tradition that he takes to be patently obsolete, then an ancient city is an appropriate “place of rest.”270 Enveloped in his romantic fantasy, Scott is unruffled as he rhetorically consigns Muslim scholarship and sovereignty to the grave. For him, the library’s manuscripts are thrilling in their beauty and in the serendipitous adventures by which they arrived in Khuda Bakhsh’s possession, but now that they are there, they need not be put to use. The only task that remains for the library is to preserve its books “till their cycle of repose is completed and a fresh dispersion begins.”271

By contrast with these Orientalists, writers with deeper investments in the intellectual and social fate of Indian Muslims were more castigatory in their criticisms. A beautiful tomb did not interest them. It was not enough to recognize the library and take pride in its existence; if it was to be worth anything, it had to be actively used. Citing Sarkar’s anecdote about the “cemetery for books” under the heading, “The Nation’s Heedlessness,” the cataloguer Muinuddin Nadwi said that the European visitor’s comment accorded with his own experiences at the library in the 1920s and ’30s: “Before us billows an immense ocean of knowledge and learning. People come from far away, parched for knowledge, and depart after slaking their thirst; but though our

269 Scott O’Connor, Eastern Library, 1–2.
270 Ibid., 3, 5–6.
271 Ibid., 3.
moush are dry, we are entangled in our own meaningless pursuits and concerns. In my eight years of employment, I have never seen any Bihari come to this library to conduct 'research,' alas!' Where the European visitor was bemused, Nadwi is full of bitter reproach.

An even more provocative demand for engagement with the library was made by the lawyer Sayyid Badrul Hasan, a proud Patnaite with intimate knowledge of the city but with no direct connection to Khuda Bakhsh or his library. Explaining his motivations for writing the voluminous collective biography he published in 1931, Hasan chastised his fellow citizens of Patna for neglecting the library’s treasures and ignoring their lessons about Muslims’ and Indians’ capacity for intellectual achievement. Seded by English and its promise of financial rewards, Indians were forgetting the masterpieces produced in their own languages by people like Ghalib, the Buddha, Sadi, and Socrates. Nor were the ancestors of modern-day Indians any less accomplished in scientific fields as diverse as medicine, astronomy, metaphysics, mineralogy, and botany. Hasan turns to the Khuda Bakhsh library for vivid confirmation of his claims. To illustrate his point, he cites an example of Muslim learning cherished by Khuda Bakhsh himself—Zahrawi’s medical text, with its diagrams of surgical tools—and says that there are innumerable further examples of the brilliance of former generations:

    In whichever discipline one desires research, one will surely find it in the library.... That library is like a museum; it’s incomprehensible, and yet we consider our predecessors ignorant. This is strictly a misconception. They were excellent people, who possessed tools; they achieved this with mental rather than financial strength.... We are the ignorant ones.

    Adopting a cosmopolitan view of Patnaites’ intellectual inheritance, limited neither to India nor to Islam, Hasan portrays modern disciplines as little more than pale imitations of the old learning. Anyone who doubts this, he says, should visit the Khuda Bakhsh library and gain inspiration and self-confidence. English and its forms of knowledge are distractions from the erudition richly on display at the library:

    The library is not far; it’s in the city itself. Anyone can go and see what it is, what kind of a collection it has, and what the people of the past have left behind. When modern researchers hadn’t even been born, in what learning were the people of that time deficient? What a revolting world—one can look at the writings from a thousand or two thousand years ago, and what do they lack? Even politics is present; every kind of learning is there, but who looks at it, who pays respect? Everyone you see has an English “novel” in their hand. For these reasons, we have become lazy and impoverished in our own knowledges.

Perceiving all around him the denigration and abandonment of the social structures and the kinds of learning that had been valued in his youth, Hasan argues that there has been a profound break. The patrimony of two millennia has been given up in favor of popular novels. What is even more galling, he suggests, is that the palpable evidence of this legacy is so readily available. Anyone can simply walk into the Khuda Bakhsh library and see for himself, in the display cases or by

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273 Hasan, Yādgār-e Roczār, 260–61. Though the last two were not Indian, Hasan considers their writings part of the intellectual patrimony of Indian Muslims.
274 Ibid., 261.
275 Ibid.
opening a book, the evidence of his intellectual inheritance. The fact that they do not is, to him, nothing less than a tragedy.

The library was, in fact, a tomb. Khuda Bakhsh was buried next to the main library building, “under the shadow of that literary pantheon,” where he was later to be joined by several family members. But a grave is not always so gloomy as a pessimistic observer like Nadwi might suggest; if its inhabitant is a saint, then it can also become a shrine. Nobody claimed that Khuda Bakhsh had been a saint, exactly, but those who celebrated the library often left open the question of whether it was the books or their collector that should be venerated. Writing in the *Modern Review* immediately after Khuda Bakhsh’s death, Sarkar predicted that “unborn generations of Indian scholars and readers will bless his memory and say that he was rightly named *Khuda Bakhsh*, ‘the Gift of God.’” To reinforce the point, he included a photo of the librarian’s grave adorned with the flowers and embroidered *chādar* (sheet) customarily placed on Sufi saints’ graves.

Scholars continued to treat the grave as a quasi-sacred monument. Relating an anecdote about a Muslim pilgrim to Mecca who abandoned “his ‘Islam and pilgrimage’ upon visiting a library,” K.P. Jayaswal told the attendees of a conference of Orientalists in 1930 that they too might risk falling under the library’s thrall. Their absorption in the library’s mystique would echo that of the founder: “with that intense love that makes great undertakings successful, Khan Bahadur Khudabaksh chose to be buried in the Library he built and dedicated to the public. You will undoubtedly visit his tomb and pay your scholarly homage to it.”

Even those whose relationship with the library had more to do with civic pride than with scholarly admiration saw the tomb as an appropriate site to commemorate the city’s greatest benefactor. The *Bihar Herald*, for instance, chastised the government for tolerating “the crude structure of brick and mortar over the grave of the illustrious founder,” and urged that it be immediately replaced with “a marble tombstone befitting the magnificent edifice which will keep his name alive for all time to come.”

The charismatic pull of this holy site lasted long after the deaths of Sarkar, Jayaswal, and their contemporaries. In his 1985 essay on the “Eastern Bodley,” the literary critic Ataullah Palvi records the heated competition between two elderly men for the last vacancy in Khuda Bakhsh’s family plot. Khuda Bakhsh’s second-youngest son, Abdul Ghafur Khan, asserted the claims of blood, but he was challenged by one Mahbub Hasan, who insisted on his right to the burial site based on his grandfather’s large donation to the library at the time of Partition. Finding it impossible to predict which claimant would win, or whether it would be someone else entirely, Palvi turns instead to a couplet by Shad Azimabadi:

This is a gathering of drinkers, devoid of timidity;  
The wineglass belongs to whoever seizes it.

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276 Khuda Buhksh, *My Father*, 43. Khuda Bakhsh’s wife Jamila was also buried there, as well as two sons, Waliuddin and Shahabuddin, and a nephew, Qasim Hasan Khan. Pālvī, “Khudā Bakhsh Khān,” 143.

277 Sarkar, “*Indian Bodley,*” 248.

278 Sarkar, “*Indian Bodley,*” opposite page 247.

279 Jayaswal, *Address of Welcome to the Sixth All-India Oriental Conference*, 8.

280 The *Bihar Herald*, January 23, 1909.

281 Pālvī, “Khudā Bakhsh Khān,” 144. The essay was originally titled “Mashriqī Bodle,” or “The Eastern Bodley.”

282 “Yēh bāzm-e mai hai, yāh kōtā-dastī mēn hai mehrāmī / Jo bāṛh kar khūd uṭhā le hāth mēn mīnā īst kā hāi.” Ibid.
Only the bold, thought Palvi, could hope for the boon of eternal proximity to the righteous librarian.

The trope of sanctity was articulated most richly by Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh when he argued that Khuda Bakhsh’s library could function as something akin to a place of pilgrimage, enlightening all of India through the nearly miraculous power of knowledge. The library is sanctified by its founder’s devotion as much as by its contents:

In the Oriental Public Library at Bankipore, where under one roof are collected, as though in a shrine, the literary remains of the great savants of Islam, he has built for himself a monument which will last so long at least as the destiny of India is linked with that of Great Britain, if, perchance, no longer.

Salahuddin deftly distributes his veneration between his father, whose library is his monument, and the authors whose works are almost holy relics. Moreover, he neatly stakes a claim on imperial patronage by signaling the library’s dependence on the beneficence of the colonial state.

Raising his prose to flowery heights, Salahuddin suggests that the library is destined to become the center of a renaissance in Muslim education: “There, in course of time, as the mists of ignorance lift, will rise a school of Oriental learning; and thence will radiate beams of culture which will illumine the whole of the Indian Peninsula.”

In more concrete terms, he proposes that, “with its magnificent library,” Patna would make a perfect site for a “centre of Oriental learning.” To this end, he calls on the government to appoint a professor of Arabic and Persian to teach students “to carry on Oriental researches upon European principles.” This would help correct the “deplorable” circumstances by which Indian students were more familiar with the French and American Revolutions than with their own history.

Here Salahuddin was building on Khuda Bakhsh’s intellectual legacy of celebrating the Muslim thinkers of the past while directing modern Muslims to emulate European thought. He had distinguished company in his efforts to promote the library as catalyst for scholarship focusing on Islam but following European epistemologies. Jadunath Sarkar, for example, joined him in rejoicing in the “new era of research” already begun by the library. As yet, Sarkar said, there were only a small number of Indian Orientalists, of whom few read Persian and fewer Arabic; but their numbers were bound to increase. As Sarkar understood the term, the innumerable scholars who had acquired intimate knowledge of these languages and their literatures in Islamic institutions were not Orientalists, since he assumed them to lack the dispassionate attitude toward texts of the true researcher. Thus, rather than Muslim clerics or others trained in Indian intellectual traditions, European scholars like Ignác Goldziher were invited to give the annual lectures on Islamic subjects that were established on the first anniversary of Khuda Bakhsh’s death.

As I have argued in chapter 5, the devaluation of Patna’s traditions of Islamicate learning accelerated after Bihar’s separation from Bengal. Those who sought to counter this decline frequently incorporated the library into their proposals. Reporting on the activities of a government committee examining Muslim education in the new province, the Amrita Bazar Patrika informed readers that the province’s Muslims were “more than ever determined to preserve Patna as a seat of learning.” The paper explained that the committee had recommended

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283 Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 3.
284 Ibid., 42.
286 The Tribune, September 24, 1910.
the establishment of a new madrasa to be located in Patna “for historical reasons,” since “the city is, of course, a Moslem stronghold, having an Oriental library which boasts a very fine collection of manuscripts.” The library figured, in this coverage and in the committee’s deliberations, as a crucial site establishing Patna’s essentially Muslim identity and offering a model for maintaining Muslim traditions of learning in forms suited to modern social needs.

Members of the committee, which included Abdul Muqtadir, argued that the new madrasa should be headed by a scholar—ideally a Bihari whom the government would send to Europe for training—who would not only deliver lectures there and inspect the rest of the madrasas in the province, but additionally supervise the collection and cataloguing of manuscripts at the Khuda Bakhsh library. They argued that “in some quarters in this country the ancient learning is held in very low esteem and that to restore the confidence and zeal of the Maulvis it is necessary to have a man who can speak from experience of the high esteem in which such learning is held in Europe.” What was needed, in other words, was a scholar in the mold of Muqtadir, one who was equally comfortable with European and Islamic learning and who could manage both the practicalities of administering a system of schools and the intellectual labor of collecting and organizing historical manuscripts. Such a man, they hoped, would inspire the province’s Muslim intellectuals by assuring them that their expertise was valued by the putatively more advanced scholars of Europe.

The library was equally important to those who thought Muslim education should be overhauled more fundamentally and, ideally, merged into secular institutions. When discussions began around the foundation of a university in Patna, Salahuddin and his allies renewed their insistence that education on Islam should be oriented around the library and guided by a liberal, critical approach. Salahuddin strenuously opposed any separate institution or degree devoted specifically to Muslims, fearing that these would “accentuate... racial differences.” From both ideal and pragmatic points of view, he argued, the “hair-splitting theological squabbles [and] long-winded discussions on unimportant legal points” fostered by such programs would “hardly be a source of culture and illumination such as we require in these days.” While education should not be narrowly “practical,” he argued, it should be in accord with the demands of modern society, which for him did not include excessive attention to religious doctrine. By 1920, Salahuddin had turned from seeking government aid to encouraging Muslims to fund this education themselves, but the message was the same. He explained that he did not mean that instruction should not take place in Hindustani, Arabic, and Persian, or that Indians should “play the sedulous ape to the West.” Indeed, Indians should at all costs maintain “Eastern culture” and “stand on [their] own strength.” But far from reinforcing religious doctrine, Salahuddin envisioned the library and other institutions enabling secular research—not in Islam itself but in “Islamic Studies,” that is, “Islamic Culture and Civilization.”

The Bengali Hindu educationist Ashutosh Mukherjee, the vice-chancellor of Calcutta University and an old friend of Khuda Bakhsh’s (as well as the father of the Hindu nationalist

287 The Amrita Bazar Patrika, June 8, 1914.
288 BSA, B&O, Education Department, Education Branch, June 1914, 20-43 A.
290 Ibid., 464.
291 Ibid.; see also “Bihar Educational Conference: President’s Address,” The Leader, October 3, 1913.
293 Ibid., 35–36, 38.
leader Shyama Prasad Mukherjee), made an allied argument after the establishment of Patna University and the Bihar and Orissa Research Society. He exhorted the members of the Society to “make this Library the seat and centre of Islamic research.... Rich is your treasure, calling for the seeker to come, to unlock it, to distribute it broadcast.” He argued that though Muslims had “at one time held aloft the torch of learning,” they had since forgotten their own scholarly traditions. Now that the Biharis had their own University in addition to the Khuda Bakhsh library, they were well equipped to honor their own traditions of learning, if they were reconfigured in the new mold of “Post-Graduate study and research.”

Like Salahuddin, Mukherjee saw the library as “veritable store-house of literary relics,” an unmatched resource for spurring a new era in which Muslims, and Indians in general, would become the foremost experts on their own history and traditions and “cease to yield the lead” to Europeans. Only by making the methods of critical research their own, he argued, could they “hope to enjoy self-respect.” Without Khuda Bakhsh’s unquestioning faith in Islam or his intimate connection with what Salahuddin called “the fast-retreating old world,” Salahuddin and Mukherjee were firmly positioned in a twentieth-century intellectual culture, influenced by nationalist rejections of mimicry as well as by India’s growing network of scholarly institutions. Nonetheless, they were adamant in their belief that the library he had established, as well as the ambidextrous methodologies that he had endorsed, must be central to the rejuvenation of Islamic scholarship.

Books, philanthropy, and the middle class

The Khuda Bakhsh library was not the only library in Patna in this period. Several small libraries existed on private initiative; one of these was the Chaitanya Pustakalay, which held a small collection of books and periodicals in Hindi, Sanskrit, and Bengali and was located in an old Gaudiya Vaishnavite temple in the Gai Ghat neighborhood of Patna City. The library was founded in 1870 by the temple’s priest, who was inspired by his friendship with the Hindi writer Bharatendu Harishchandra to join the campaign for the promotion of Hindi. A few other small institutions subsisted on government support, supplemented by membership fees. The Bar Library (founded 1886) offered reading matter and a social space to a few dozen of the district’s lawyers. The Hughes Club (founded in 1883 near Mangal Talab by the city magistrate, a Mr. Hughes) included the Bihar Hitaishi Library, which served for “the educated and wealthy residents” of Patna City. But the monthly subsidy of Rs. 10 the library received from the municipality was meager, and it struggled to attract members and expand its collection. As of 1909, there were only twenty-eight members, who paid about Rs. 6 annually to peruse the

294 Mookerjee, Historical Research in Bihar and Orissa, 19.
295 Ibid., 20–21.
296 Ibid., 17–20.
297 Khuda Bukhsh, My Father, 43.
299 BSA, Annual General Administration Reports of the Patna Division for 1892-93 and 1895-96; Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1900-1901 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902), ccxciii.
300 BSA, Annual General Administration Reports of the Patna Division for 1895-96 and 1896-97; The Bihar Times, September 8, 1897; Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1900-1901, ccxciii.
library’s newspapers and a collection of some 275 books in English, as well as some in Hindi and Urdu.  

Patna’s ecosystem of libraries continued to grow in the 1910s and ’20s, after the city became a provincial capital. Each library catered to distinct needs and geographies. Researchers had the libraries of Patna University and the Bihar and Orissa Research Society; students and other middle-class residents of the central part of the city had the Maheshwar Public Library; and residents of the New Capital were sometimes joined by visitors from other parts of the city at the substantial collection, of mostly English publications, founded by Sachchidananda Sinha. With the exception of the research institutions, which were supported by the government as resources for the entire province, none of these libraries sought or received much attention from outside the city. Certainly none acquired anything approaching the fame of the Khuda Bakhsh library, nor its centrality in narratives of reform and rebirth.

It was noteworthy, then, that the district’s most remarkable and most celebrated library, apart from the Khuda Bakhsh library itself, should be found 40 miles outside of the city, in the small qasba of Desna. This was the home of many contributors to Al-Punch, as well as that of the famed scholar Sayyid Suleiman Nadwi and many other prominent literary figures. In 1899, the educated young men of the village, influenced by the reformist ideas of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, founded an organization called the Mazakira-e Ilmiya (Scholarly Conference), which in 1904 was renamed the Anjuman Al-Islah, or Reform Society. There they shared newspapers and books, in service of satisfying their literary passions and “recognizing education and cultivation as paramount in life’s every undertaking.” What began as a few novels and books of stories in a single broken-down cabinet quickly became a “smallish library” and, with time, grew into a large collection of Urdu books, newspapers, and magazines. By the 1920s, there were about 5,000 volumes in the library. Most of these were printed Urdu books, but in addition to manuscripts—some of them quite rare—and books in Arabic, Persian, and English, the collection was also unusual in including several hundred volumes of periodicals, among them complete runs of most of the important Urdu magazines.

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301 *The Beharee*, January 22, 1909; BSA, B&O, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, July 1913, 1-11 A.


305 KBOPL, Mss. 243 (Sayyid Abd ul-Hakīm, “Anjuman Al-Islāh Desna kī Sālānā Report” [The Annual Report of
The Al-Islah library was a near-contemporary of the Khuda Bakhsh library and, like it, was guided by a reformist conviction that education held the key to the uplift of a sharif Muslim community shaken by the political environment of the late nineteenth century. The service gentry of Desna had close links with Patna, too, both socially and professionally. Despite their similarities, though, the two libraries differed markedly in their motivations, their contents, and their relationships with their communities.

Looking back in 1928 at the origins of the Anjuman Al-Islah, the Anjuman’s head and one of its founding patrons, Sayyid Abdul Hakim, presented a distinctly bellicose interpretation of the intentions behind the organization’s founding. He told his fellow members that when the Hindi-Urdu conflict had begun and Hindu activists were trying to “purify” Urdu out of existence, “the brothers of the watan decided that they would join the fight to protect the chastity of their queen [i.e., Urdu], against this whore [bāzārī chhokrī, i.e., Hindi]. They needed war materiel for this battle, and you’ll be astonished to hear that Desna was a major magazine for munitions from the start of the war,” helping the soldiers of Urdu prove their language’s intellectual richness as well as its deep roots in Bihar.306 Hakim’s martial imagery undoubtedly reveals the communal hostilities of the 1920s as much as those of the Anjuman’s early years.307 But it also reflects the deep worries of many sharif Muslims at the turn of the century about the future of the language whose fate seemed inextricable from their own. Though Hakim strenuously denied that either the Anjuman or Urdu itself was for Muslims alone, the Anjuman’s links with its members’ Muslim identity were clearly visible.308 A poem read at the 1904 meeting, and included with Hakim’s own report in Al-Punch, exalted those who “spread Islam however possible” and who “are kept sleepless all night by the pain of the qaum.”309 Two years later, attendees at the Anjuman’s two-day annual meeting arrived to see that “banners were fluttering all around, glittering with the Islamic symbol of the moon and star.”310 Khuda Bakhsh was equally explicit about his commitments to Islam and Muslims, but his careful efforts to present his library as a politically neutral space open to all communities stood in contrast to the Anjuman’s frank and combative avowal of its Muslim identity.

While Khuda Bakhsh would never have compared books to weapons, his strategic invocations of historical texts are echoed in Hakim’s portrayal of books as instruments to be used in intellectual and political struggles. The nature of the two libraries’ collections, however, reflected their divergent senses of what was at stake. For Khuda Bakhsh, the thrill and the

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307 Such confrontational language was commonplace on both sides of the Hindi-Urdu conflict. For examples of similar rhetoric from supporters of Hindi, see Christopher King, One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 135–39. Hakim took quite a different tone in the late 1930s, arguing that since “Hindus and Muslims are now becoming like milk and sugar,” and since Hindi and Urdu were actually the same language, it was fitting that the library had begun to acquire books in Hindi script. KBOPL, Sayyid Abd ul-Hakim, “Anjuman Al-Islah Desna kī Sālāna Rūdād” [The Annual Report of the Anjuman Al-Islah, Desna], 1939 (?), Mss. 242.
310 “General Meeting Al-Islāh Desna,” Al-Punch, November 1, 1906.
obligation of collecting were propelled by rarity, magnificence, and antiquity. The field of action was the universe of Arabic and Persian texts from throughout the vast area between India and Spain, while books meant for everyday utility were primarily in English. Though the members of the Anjuman likewise prided themselves on their valuable manuscripts, they mainly focused not on preservation but on compiling a comprehensive record of their own language and their own times. Printed books took the place of manuscripts, and newspapers and magazines were a priority. Already by 1904, they maintained subscriptions to sixteen periodicals, and by the 1930s, they had accumulated 485 bound volumes of magazines.\footnote{311}

Finally, each library presented a different face to its location and its community. Until he handed it over to the government and began to solicit outside contributions and cooperation, Khuda Bakhsh’s library was almost entirely the product of individual passion—first his father’s and then his own, supported in the latter case by the labors of the book-hunter Muhammad Maqi. Its existence was made possible, however, by considerations that were closely tied to the kind of place that Patna was. These included Khuda Bakhsh’s professional success as a lawyer (as well as that of his father before him), and by the relationships he formed, in youth as well as in adulthood, with both European and Indian elites. The library’s institutional health and resilience, in Khuda Bakhsh’s lifetime and after, was further bolstered by its recognition as an institution “in which the whole Province is interested,” and indeed the whole country.\footnote{312}

As provincial as Patna sometimes seemed from the point of view of a place like Calcutta, it was a roaring metropolis when compared to Desna. In this village of about a thousand residents, cooperation among neighbors and between generations was understood as necessary for a project like the Anjuman.\footnote{313} People from outside Desna supported and visited the Al-Islah library almost from the start, but Desnavis remained fiercely proud and possessive of their Anjuman, to the point that a speaker at the 1906 annual meeting had to warn against “‘party feeling’” in reference to an organization founded on its pattern in the qasba of Asthanwan, two miles over.\footnote{314} The Al-Islah library did receive occasional notice in wider circles, thanks to the publicity efforts of Desnavis as well as the admiring remarks of the numerous famous scholars, including Abdul Haq and Sayyid Mahmud, who visited the library and pronounced it the country’s largest and best collection of Urdu materials.\footnote{315} Through the good offices of sympathizers in Patna and Motihari, the library even received funding from the provincial government during Fakhruddin’s term as Minister of Education in the 1920s.\footnote{316} But for all this, the library remained obscure to nearly everyone outside Desna and Asthanwan, despite a collection with few rivals even in the

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\item[312] BSA, B&O, Municipal Department, Local Self-Government Branch, July 1913, 1-11 A.
\item[314] “General Meeting Al-Islāh Desna,” \textit{Al-Punch}, November 1, 1906; BSA, B&O, Political Department, Special Section, 64 of 1915.
\end{footnotes}
big cities of India. The differences between the city and the qasba, and between the two institutional structures, finally grew too great. Like all elements of qasba society, the Anjuman Al-Islah fell on hard times after Partition, and its collection was absorbed by the Khuda Bakhsh library in 1960.

In keeping with these differences between the libraries in Desna and Bankipur, early twentieth-century observers rarely compared the two, even when they were familiar with both. Hundreds of miles west of Patna, however, the Rampur Raza Library provided a prominent foil to the Khuda Bakhsh library. Many commentators in the early twentieth century assailed princely Rampur as a den of debauchery and decline—Abdul Halim Sharar wrote a novel called Asrār-e Darbār-e Harāmpur (The Secrets of the Court of Sintown)—but even critics frequently celebrated the state’s past achievements, particularly in the domain of culture. Khuda Bakhsh, for instance, called the Rampur of Kalb Ali Khan’s time, when his father and the nawab had been in fierce competition for books, the site of a “literary and poetic constellation of extraordinary brilliance.” But regardless of where one stood, the past and present of the city were inextricably identified with the aristocratic culture surrounding the nawabs’ court.

Although the Rampur library was older and larger than Khuda Bakhsh’s, historically it had been kept solely for the state’s rulers and their administrators. This changed in 1896, under the new nawab, Hamid Ali Khan (r. 1889-1930), the grandson of Khuda Bakhsh’s old rival Kalb Ali Khan. Having been impressed with the Bodleian Library while visiting Oxford, Hamid Ali Khan decided to open his library to visitors. His modernization program also incorporated the erection of a new library building and, more importantly, the employment of a raft of scholars, scribes, and conservators to preserve, organize, and catalogue the library’s collections for researchers’ benefit. Henry Beveridge visited the library shortly afterward, and ranked it above even the Khuda Bakhsh library, pronouncing it “the best private library” that he had visited in India, as well as “probably the best collection of Persian and Arabic MSS. in that country.” Even after the Rampur library was opened to outsiders, however, some restrictions seem to have persisted. Jadunath Sarkar felt obligated, for instance, to acknowledge the “enlightened courtesy” of the Rampur nawab in allowing him to copy parts of a certain manuscript.

The differences between the two libraries thus reflected their distinctive environments and histories. Where the Rampur library was the outgrowth of a royal dynasty’s private collection, Khuda Bakhsh had assembled his library on his earnings as a district-level lawyer and opened it

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317 Suleiman Nadwi, whose hometown loyalties were accompanied by wide knowledge, compares the library’s collection with those of several contemporaries in Nadwi, “Hamārī Zābān Bīswān Sādī Meñ,” 144–54.
318 Disnavī, “Desna Library Markham,” 16.
319 However, the title of a 1953 book on the Desna library, Ek Aur Mashriq Kutub-Khāna (Another Eastern Library) alluded to V.C. Scott O’Connor’s An Eastern Library, then freshly translated into Urdu. Scott O’Connor, Ek Mashriq Kutubkhāna; Disnavī, Ek Aur Mashriq Kutub-Khāna.
321 Razak Khan, “Minority Pasts: The Other Histories of a ‘Muslim Locality,’ Rampur 1889-1949” (Ph.D., Freie Universität Berlin, 2013), 65–87. The title identifies the novel as part of the “mysteries” genre inspired by George W.M. Reynolds, one of whose novels was called The Mysteries of the Court of London.
324 Beveridge, “Notes on Persian MSS.,” 74.
to the public on his own initiative (and at his father’s urging), with the support of local elites and the colonial government. For the contemporaries who celebrated his library, Khuda Bakhsh’s ordinary background was of deep significance. His achievements as a collector and librarian were nearly matched, in their views, by his merit as a paragon of middle-class integrity.

When Khuda Bakhsh opened his library to the public in 1891, he was already a person of note in Patna. He was a Khan Bahadur and the government pleader, with a thriving legal practice. In contemporary terms, however, he was middle class, because although his background was respectable he was neither a landlord nor the inheritor of any substantial wealth or title. Luckily for him, the boundaries of sharif identity were changing rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century. For Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s acolytes and sympathizers, the aristocratic classes were under suspicion as dissipated spendthrifts complicit in, or responsible for, the decline of Muslim political power in the subcontinent. Discipline, sobriety, and frugality were the values adopted by the lawyers, merchants, and bureaucrats who were working to replace the old elites. As Margrit Pernau writes, “the way to social standing was no longer birth, but achievement; no longer the demonstration of an abundance of time and money, but the systematic allocation of resources; no longer the cultivation and patronage of the fine arts, but well-directed philanthropy.”

Even as he marshalled support from representatives of the old elites, including zamindars, bankers, and even the Hyderabad court, Khuda Bakhsh seemed to combine these middle-class virtues perfectly. In fact, reformists and aristocrats were not necessarily at odds. Shibli Numani said, for instance, that “it is very much to the library’s good fortune that Patna’s great and famous notables [raïs] are its supporters,” and singled out the modernist rais Qazi Sayyid Riza Husain for praise. Shibli’s regard for the collection was matched by his admiration for Khuda Bakhsh’s philanthropy and his feats of institution-building. He provided his readers with a summary of the financial arrangements made for the library, including a detailed account of the library’s donors and how much they had given. This accounting served a didactic purpose: just as Khuda Bakhsh argued that people only valued things when they had not come free, Shibli’s description serves both to honor the library’s benefactors and to provide his readers with illustrations of praiseworthy conduct.

The true model held up for emulation, however, was not any of the library’s elite donors but Khuda Bakhsh himself. The only point of contention among his admirers was whether it was his generosity or his self-sacrificing dedication, in “giving his entire life as a waqf,” that was more praiseworthy. These writers agreed that what made Khuda Bakhsh most remarkable was that he seemed so ordinary—Sarkar observed that “there are 3 or 4 such men in every District Court in Bengal”—and so humble, leading “the simplest life.” And yet, they marveled, he had had achieved something so magnificent, leaving his country “richer by a treasure surpassing the gifts of princes and millionaires.” Shibli asked, “Is it a matter of any small wonder that a vakil

326 Margrit Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 266.
329 Ibid.
of unremarkable status, without any property and whose income was limited only to that of a
district practice, could spend Rs. 250,000 on assembling a library? Without a doubt, such a
superb person can be judged an emblem of the storied ancient Muslims whose courageous deeds
we commemorate.”

Writing in a different register from Shibli but joining his effort to assess his contemporary
in historical terms, Sachchidananda Sinha says that “the study of biographies of men like Khuda
Bakhsh yields the richest harvest to posterity, since there is traced in them the evolution of the
mental processes and outlook, and also useful activities, of great public workers, calculated to
exercise a healthy and stimulating influence on the mind of succeeding generations.”

Having been a man who “considered biographies as the most instructive of all studies,” Khuda Bakhsh
would undoubtedly have been pleased to see his own life made into an edifying story.

Fascinated by the deeds of past scholars and keenly conscious of their “healthy and stimulating
influence,” he had poured himself into preserving their achievements. He did this work for
himself, for Islam, and for India. But it was also, as he put it in the deed of trust, “for the use and
benefit of the public of the district of Patna.”
Conclusion

*Everything has been buried in dust; so many families have been erased. I remember these people’s society; I saw with my own eyes the achievements of their life, their pleasure and leisure. And now when I see today’s way of life, it seems like a new world. Should one call this progress or decay? Or the transformation of ‘fashion’? Although there is certainly progress in modern research, satisfaction and comfort have also degraded.*

—Sayyid Badrul Hasan

A recent children’s book introduces young Indians to the seeming contradiction between Patna’s storied past and its unromantic present. “This is one city you may have actually read about in great detail in school,” the authors observe, “without necessarily associating it with its present-day avatar as capital of Bihar.” They go on to optimistically predict Patna’s resurgence: “Patna may have lost most of its ancient shine but its dynamism still peeps through occasionally—in the intelligence and resourcefulness of its people. You never know when it may regain its lost glory to become a major commercial and political centre of the region, all over again.” Similarly, the writer Amitava Kumar says, “Uniquely perhaps among my country’s most iconic cities, Patna’s glories seem firmly lodged in the distant past.” Growing up there, he was aware that among the “galaxy of iconic figures” in modern Indian history, “none of them were from Patna.”

For these observers, Patna exists primarily as two moments in time: ancient Pataliputra, the capital of magnificent empires, and modern Patna, the dingy and dangerous capital of a state whose name has literally become a synonym for violent chaos, thrown around in newspapers to signify contagious, criminalized, political dysfunction. The children’s book authors suggest that there is also the possibility of a future Patna that will shed the burdens of the past and present. This deferral of hope is echoed in the responses garnered on Facebook by the celebrity architect Hafeez Contractor’s renderings of a futuristic “New Patna World City,” full of gleaming.

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3 Ibid., 111.

4 Amitava Kumar, *A Matter of Rats: A Short Biography of Patna* (New Delhi: Aleph, 2013), 30, 38. Though it reflects a real sense of exclusion, this statement is a bit disingenuous, since even limiting the field to the most famous politicians leaves Sachchidananda Sinha, Rajendra Prasad, Mazharul Haque, Jayaparaksh Narayan, and Ali and Hasan Imam. Although none of these men were born in Patna, they were all intimately connected with the city for decades. On Kumar’s account of his relationship with Patna, see David Boyk, “Home in the Hinterland,” review of *A Matter of Rats*, by Amitava Kumar, *The Los Angeles Review of Books* (October 3, 2014), http://lareviewofbooks.org/review/home-hinterland/ (accessed October 3, 2014).

skyscrapers emerging from newly reclaimed land in the Ganges. Among the comments left by site visitors are admiring remarks like “now Patna will be considered a world city!” and “we r in Patna i cannot imagine,” but also skeptical warnings that “it will take minimum of 500 years.”

At least in popular realms, then, there is a widespread sense that any Patna worthy of admiration must exist either in a Singaporesque future or in imperial antiquity; there is nothing but benighted isolation in Patna’s present and in any readily recalled past. Leaving for other writers the future utopia of New Patna World City, I have attempted here to fill in a small portion of the chasm of time that, in such tellings, lies between ancient Pataliputra and the contemporary city that one guidebook calls “a chaotic eyesore that would be an odd place to voluntarily spend any considerable length of time.” I have sought to challenge the idea that Patna’s provinciality was ever total or unanimously agreed upon, and to show that decay and decline have always been matters of perspective. Before summing up the arguments I have made in the course of this dissertation, I wish to spend some time with one particular Patnaite whose memories of the city offer a deeply individual vantage point on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For him, as for others born into Patna’s old rich families, the city’s metamorphosis into a provincial capital signaled anything but the emergence from obscurity promised by the activists who demanded Bihar’s separation from Bengal.

Memories of a vanished time

This chronicler was Sayyid Badrul Hasan, a lawyer and zamindar who in the 1920s and ’30s devoted great effort to memorializing his times for the benefit of posterity. Hasan was not alone in writing about the transformations that had taken place since the middle of the nineteenth century. Shad Azimabadi, among other contemporaries, also remembered the city and its people in his Naqsh-e Pādār (A Permanent Impression). But Yādgār-e Rozgār (A Memorial of the Age [or of Livelihoods]), the collective biography or tazkira that Hasan published beginning in 1931, is a document unique in its comprehensiveness and its idiosyncratic intimacy. In its 1,296 pages, Hasan tells the life stories of people belonging to more than 600 families. About sixty at the time of writing, he had personally known most of his subjects, among whom there are landlords and courtesans, doctors and bakers, lawyers and counterfeiters. By compiling their biographies, he hoped to preserve a record of what he felt was a dying culture.

Since the early centuries of Islam, Muslims have written tazkiras to show how holy and talented men and women have together formed Muslim communities on both local and global scales. When tazkiras were taken up in India, in Persian and then in Urdu, they focused...
especially on poets, initially as lightly annotated anthologies of poetry and later as profiles of local and regional poetic communities. In the late nineteenth century, in Āb-e Hayāt, Muhammad Husain ‘Āzād’ repurposed the tazkira genre in order to memorialize a lost literary community. Badrul Hasan shares many of his predecessors’ traits, especially Azad’s ambivalent mixture of reformism and nostalgia. Unlike most older tazkira writers, though, Hasan isn’t particularly interested in saints or poets, despite being both devout and fond of literature. Rather than trying to establish Patna’s religious authority or literary creativity, Hasan tries to document a threatened social world by recording the individual people, of all descriptions, who make it up.

Many of the entries are fairly straightforward; some simply record basic facts about a person’s life, while others are elaborate essays on single people or whole families, in which Hasan goes into great detail about events, relationships, and his own sentiments. He is often deeply ambivalent about the direction his world is moving. On the one hand, he speaks proudly of his uncle Qazi Sayyid Riza Husain’s close involvement with Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and of his own prominent roles in local government, including as an Honorary Magistrate. Equally, he praises communities like the Bengalis and the Parsis for embracing modern politics and business without abandoning their beliefs. But, on the other hand, he repeatedly runs into difficulty because his modernist political leanings are incompatible with his sense of Patna’s distinction, refinement, and cohesion. He is unable to decide if modernity represents progress or decay, and whether the old society was corrupt or refined.

In Hasan’s telling, community is produced by the cultivation of talent and virtue, as well as by longstanding links between families. Together, these make Patna a cultured and ethical urban society. His tazkira is very unusual in devoting a substantial amount of space—about a fifth of the entries—to people from outside the elite classes, whom he celebrates for their accomplishments, their integrity, and sometimes simply for their familiarity. He extols the morality of the poor, praising one man for his avoidance of the rich by saying, “worldliness is one ‘line,’ and religiosity is another ‘line.’ Such people are obscure in life, but they leave their name behind after they die.” But though Hasan admires the poor in the abstract, and values the achievements of skilled workers, he insists that hierarchies be maintained.

As long as a craftsman or a peon remains within the familiar structures of deference, Hasan enthusiastically honors his talent. Thus he lovingly details the way that his favorite cook would make rotis, and carefully records the genealogy of blood and training of various chefs, listing

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13 Ibid., 262.

14 Ibid., 751–52.
where their shops were and which elite houses they worked for. One Haji Muhabbat confirms the bounds of behavior by exceeding them: he was so talented, and so dignified and trustworthy, that, “apart from him, no cook had any authority, then or now, to sit and talk with the elites and eat together with them at their *dastarkhwān* [dining-cloth].” Breeding, rather than wealth, is what constitutes gentility; so as the *nawābs* decline, so do their dependents, who have previously learned good breeding from their social betters.

Though Hasan does not come from one of the first families of Patna society, his background is comfortably sharif—one grandfather was an opium registrar in Gaya district and the other was the hereditary caretaker of the Sufi shrine next to Mangal Talab in Patna City. In his view, what gave the old Patna society its cohesion was the symbiotic coexistence of cosmopolitan elites like his family with the talented artisans whom they patronized. For this idealized society to function, though, everyone had to respect its internal boundaries. So, while Hasan is steadfastly opposed to any form of religious prejudice (and devotes nearly a third of his entries to Hindus), he is deeply invested in policing social hierarchy. Social mobility poses one threat on this count, and another is presented by the middle classes, who have aristocratic pretensions but lack the breeding and longstanding community ties that Hasan sees as essential to genteel sociality. Thus, in an entry on his late friend Shiv Babu, Hasan rejects the idea that Hindus and Muslims can’t be friends, but insists that true friendship can only exist among social equals:

> The lower classes are destroyers of companionship. Their narrow-mindedness pulls their mind toward profit; those gentlemen don’t pay attention to national reform. Middle-class people don’t behave according to their own status... they befriend the upper classes and then pull them down to their own level for personal motives. For this very reason, it is appropriate to have friends according to your own ‘society.’ ...
>
> Where there is higher and lower, there can be nothing resembling friendship.

Anyone who represents a threat to these norms provokes Hasan’s indignation, regardless of his personal merits. Over and over, he pivots from praising individuals for their accomplishments and perseverance to lambasting the phenomena that they represent. His entry on one Jagarnath Dhobi exemplifies this pattern. Hasan is enthusiastic at first, praising Jagarnath as an educated man of humble caste origins who earned enough in the railways to buy a house and start a medical shop: “This man was very dignified and well-mannered, and adopted the English mode of living; a man couldn’t say he was a *dhobi* [washerman] without knowing that he was one.” Hasan goes on to say that Jagarnath was well educated in English, and that he himself had met

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15 Ibid., 712–16.
16 Ibid., 925–27.
17 Ibid., 428–30. The word I have translated as “breeding” is *tarbiyat*, which can also mean upbringing or cultivation.
him personally and “found him an extremely good man... of clear ideas.” So far, this seems to be a straightforward story of social mobility made possible through education, tenacity, and integrity.

Very suddenly, though, Hasan changes his tone entirely, without acknowledging the shift or explaining the connection to Jagarnath. He argues that although knowledge is good, it is dangerous without the appropriate breeding. Beastliness replaces humanity and pridefulness replaces humility. The more a person learns, the more degraded he becomes. In the end, Hasan says, “knowledge without cultivation is food without salt, which everybody knows is inedible.” A person who has one but not the other “cannot be praised by Creation, for he lacks admirable qualities. The light of knowledge will be there, but it will be dim.” So despite Jagarnath’s numerous good qualities, the specter of education without proper breeding looms behind him. The colonial education system, Hasan says, lacks any attention to breeding because Asian and European cultures are entirely opposed. “Asians need national cultivation: [to know] where they live and which customs they are bound by, and what ‘society’ they belong to; otherwise their hearts will ache and Asianness will be annihilated and the country will be ‘Europeanized.’” Jagarnath Dhobi may be a praiseworthy man who has seized the opportunities available to him, but Hasan fears that the national and civilizational threat accompanying these opportunities far outweighs their scattered benefits.

The context suggests, however, that what is actually at issue has less to do with Westernization and more to do with the danger of losing the genteel sociality that comes with breeding, among people of whatever economic class. It seems doubtful that Jagarnath Dhobi would excite such consternation if he were merely upwardly mobile, especially given Hasan’s praise for his success. Hasan has nothing but goodwill, for instance, for a chutney-maker named Muzaffar Husain and a court peon called Sarfaraz Khan, who have become prosperous but remained deferential; Sarfaraz Khan, he says, “never competed with his superiors.... For this reason, he was praised by Creation.” By contrast, as a parvenu whose rise took place outside the structures of patronage, Jagarnath Dhobi provokes passionate, if unanchored, resentment.

It is not only Anglicization and arrivism that Hasan fears, but the spread of what he calls, in transliterated English, “fashion.” Saying that, “in place of ‘nationality,’ ‘fashionality’ has been seen in every era,” he embarks on a long riff about the hundreds of hats that have been in fashion in Patna over the years: the Turkish fez, the Calcutta coachmen’s cap, the Amroha hat, the molded Lakhnavi hat, the Delhi dopaliya, the Benarsi hat, embroidered hats, night caps, hats over coats and pants, hats over lungi and slippers, and, most recently, the Gandhi cap. Fashion, for Hasan, includes changing styles of clothes and, more generally, a fickle and imitative disregard for identity and tradition. Despite his avowed support for English education—he complains that Muslims, unlike Bengalis and Kayasthas, “have never even been able to catch the dust of that departed caravan”—Hasan argues here that such education threatens to destroy Asian culture, breeding, wealth, and self-respect. He even uses his concept of fashionality to link the city’s decline as a moral space to the degeneration of elite families. Where there have

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20 Ibid., 302.
21 Ibid., 302–3.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 303–5.
24 Ibid., 251, 254, 258.
traditionally been twelve causes for these families’ descent into poverty, ranging from narcotics to litigiousness, attention to ‘fashion’ has recently become the thirteenth.\textsuperscript{25} Has an was not alone in making these complaints; Ram Gopal Singh Chowdhary had complained in 1915 that “such is the pernicious effect of ‘fashion,’ that our educated young men are sacrificing everything and all considerations at its altar. They have become what is called ‘slaves of fashion,’” and abandoned the good, old Indian games like wrestling and kabaddi.\textsuperscript{26} And already in 1901, the \textit{Bihar Bandhu} had invoked haberdashery to illustrate the inconstancy that it argued was undermining “nationality.”\textsuperscript{27} If Biharis (and Indians more generally) clashed over which language they spoke, how they should dress, and what they should wear on their heads, then how would they ever unite? “The tassel of a Turkish hat flutters on someone’s head; on someone else’s head is flapping a four-finger-wide dopaliya. A molded hat is stretched on someone’s head as though a pot of quicklime had been overturned, and someone else’s head bears a bundled-up turban. As long as we might prattle on, we could keep listing different fads. Wherever you look, there’s disunion.”\textsuperscript{28}

For the \textit{Bihar Bandhu}, since Patna was already “as good as being Bihar’s capital,” its college students and lawyers had an excellent opportunity to counteract this disunity.\textsuperscript{29} In Hasan’s view thirty years later, though, it is not so easy. He has seen the results of the movement led by those students and lawyers, and he is dismayed at its consequences for the old order. Ultimately, though, Hasan asks not that we return to the past, but simply that we appreciate and learn from it. Where other tazkira writers choose a specific archetype, the saint or the poet, to represent talent and virtue, Hasan with his encyclopedic eclecticism insists that Patna was exceptional specifically because of its capaciousness and heterogeneity. Provincial it may have been, but it was self-sufficient and it drew the accomplished toward it from places like Calcutta and Lucknow. Sometimes, the people he memorializes were distinguished in themselves; but even when they were not, they are worth remembering because they helped compose Patna’s society.

Hasan insists that he takes no pleasure in writing and wants neither aesthetic praise nor financial reward.\textsuperscript{30} What he has to offer in place of literary talent, he says, is personal experience, which has an authority that younger critics and imaginative writers cannot match: “Existing people can write excellent essays, but... what can anyone write who hasn’t seen these things? Excellent novels and imaginary things could be written, but unseen things can’t be brought in front of you. Since the author has received a long life, opportunities to meet people, and good health and memory, he has been able to write this.”\textsuperscript{31} Using these advantages for the public good, he has “presented a memento of the deceased [yādgār-e raftgān] and a sketch of the era and the

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 881–82. Hasan says debauchery is the primary cause, and the others are negligence, worship of flattery, drunkenness, worship of tradition, illness, household expenditures in excess of one’s status, costly gatherings, the wrath of God, and theft.


\textsuperscript{27} The paper gave “nationality” in Hindi (jātīyatā) together with the English word in parentheses.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Bihar Bandhu}, September 15, 1901.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{30} Hasan, \textit{Yādgār-e Rozgār}, 263–64.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 1046.
state of changes before you; this will be beneficial, not immediately but eventually, to your future
generations.\footnote{Ibid., 1166.}

Although even such a massive tome has no pretense of being comprehensive, Hasan
suggests that he can at least approach a synoptic view of the old Patna. In the anonymous,
dispersed city that Patna has become for him, he assumes that readers will want to know where
their old acquaintances are now, so he announces that he’ll tell them not only where the old
administrators and lawyers have gone, but also the peons and shopkeepers. But as for the lawyers
who have come to Patna recently, he says, he doesn’t know them and he has nothing to say about
them.\footnote{Ibid., 979, 1159–61.}

\textit{Yādgār-e Rozgār} bears some resemblance to two earlier and better-known works that
combine history and biography, namely the first version of Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s \textit{Āsār us-
Sanādīd} and Abdul Halim Sharar’s \textit{Guzashta Lakhnaū}. Sharar’s evocative portrayal of the
history and culture of Lucknow under the nawabs, published between 1913 and 1920, was
suffused with yearning for the city’s precolonial past—even while, as C.M. Naim points out,
Sharar was aware that elements of the culture he mourned were still alive. In comparison, Sayyid
Ahmad’s 1847 account of Delhi, while looking melancholically to the ruins on the city’s
outskirts, was emphatically an account of the present that included a tazkira of notable living
people as well as descriptions of the city’s history and monuments. But when Sayyid Ahmad
revised his book a mere seven years later, Naim argues, he rejected all the expressivity of his first
attempt and abandoned his references to the people he had formerly “cherished and considered
integral to any definition of the city.”\footnote{C.M. Naim, “Interrogating ‘The East,’ ‘Culture,’
and ‘Loss,’ in Abdul Halim Sharar’s \textit{Guzashta Lakhna‘u},” in \textit{Indo-Muslim Cultures in Transition},
and His Two Books Called ‘Asar-al-Sanadid,’” \textit{Modern Asian Studies} 45, no. 3 (2011): 3–
23, 37.} Hasan’s \textit{Yādgār} combines Sharar’s nostalgia with Sayyid
Ahmad’s original conviction that individual biographies are essential to any understanding of a
city. However, where his predecessors celebrate the distinctive cultures of capital cities with at
least partial claims to political autonomy, Hasan is a thoroughly colonial subject who orients his
life around the City Courts and devotes hundreds of pages to their denizens. The Patna he knows
and loves is the happily provincial city of his youth and of the previous generation, the one that
existed before the Marwaris owned all the shops and the farms were replaced with government
buildings. The city that has come into being since 1912 is “a new city, a new world,” he says.
“There are new people; there’s a new style. Either these are dreams, or those were.”\footnote{Hasan,
\textit{Yādgār-e Rozgār}, 1161.}

\textbf{Urbane provincials}

Hasan’s account of his times is, of course, open to interpretations other than his own. If
Jagarnath Dhobi had ever read his own entry, or perhaps even if Muzaffar Husain had read his,
their reactions might have been at odds with Hasan’s.\footnote{Some of Hasan’s subjects and
their descendants were certainly eager to read about themselves. Naqi Ahmad Irshad remembers
that Hasan’s son came to his house to present the first two volumes to his father. Unfortunately,
when a visitor learned that Hasan had written about his family, he immediately borrowed the
book and didn’t return it for years. Irshād, “Kuchh Badr ul-Hasan ke Bāre Meñ,” 1297.} What Hasan sees as appalling social
chaos or as comforting tranquility might strike others quite differently. As for the “new people”
who have arrived in Patna, they might be grateful for the “new world” that has come into being. These potential divergences reflect the fact that, much like Al-Punch the bahurūpiyā, Patna has appeared in several guises. It has been a mofussil town, not much different from any number of provincial places, and also a richly distinctive urban center. It has been the metropolis of Bihar, and also a minor satellite of Calcutta. It has been a bastion of forms of power and prestige inherited from the Mughals, and also the domain of colonial administrators and middle-class professionals. And it has been one node among many in regional and national cultural networks, and also the home of an almost unrivaled store of knowledge. Some of these varied roles have been produced by thoroughgoing social and political changes, while others have reflected competing perceptions as much as concrete differences.

In moving back and forth between Patna itself and the wider world outside, and between the city’s physical environment and its public culture, I have tried to capture some of these tensions and ambiguities. I have argued that it is not merely the case that Patna was both urban and provincial, but also that its urbanity had a specifically provincial character. The city’s loss of wealth and grandeur was visible everywhere, reflected in Patnaites’ recognition that power now resided elsewhere and in the widespread sense that local culture was held in diminishing esteem in the city as well as outside. Provinciality was felt, however, not simply as a lack but as an integral part of what made Patna and its public culture distinctive, whether it was expressed in Al-Punch’s playful confidence, in the separation activists’ deft use of the press to both counter and exploit Bihar’s “backwardness,” or in Badrul Hasan’s wounded nostalgia for lost intimacy.

This raises the question of whether Patna was, in fact, distinctive. In some ways, it undoubtedly was. Unlike Murshidabad or Agra, for example, it had close links with both north India and Bengal. It had a larger population than most mofussil cities, and was far from the most obscure town in Bihar or in India. It also had a particularly rich legacy of political power, mercantile wealth, and cultural prestige. At the same time, though every city has its own history and is shaped by different combinations of forces, useful parallels can be drawn between Patna and many other cities. South Asia is full of places, from Peshawar to Indore to Madurai and from Dhaka to Cuttack to Surat, that experienced declines, resurgences, and transformations under changing economic and political regimes. Some of these were Mughal or post-Mughal cities, like Patna, while others bore different inheritances. Nor are the ambiguities and reversals of Patna’s provincial urbanity unique to the subcontinent. Echoes and harmonies can be found all over the world, resonating in the Zhejiang “middle-county radicalism” that “fan[ned] the fire of iconoclasm across the prairie” and into Shanghai, and in the hapless insistence of Gogol’s provincials that “this is not the provinces, this is the capital, this is Paris itself!”

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If Patna was distinguished in part by its provinciality, then what happened after 1912, when the city took on its new mantle of centrality? To begin with, the largely horizontal networks linking it to other towns, both in Bihar and outside it, were replaced by vertical ties defined by the parallel structures of the colonial state and nationalist politics. A small sign of this movement can be found in the names taken by Patna’s newspapers over the years. The period before the separation saw Al-Punch, whose name signaled both the paper’s Muslim affiliation and its links with the global Punch genre; there were also the Bihar Bandhu (The Friend of Bihar), the Bihar Times (later the Beharee), and the Bihar Herald, all of which announced their ambition to speak to and for the whole region of Bihar. Among the papers that appeared after the separation, by contrast, were the Express, the Searchlight (the successor to the Beharee, later absorbed by the Hindustan Times), Desh (The Country), Aryavarta (The Land of the Aryans), Janata (The Public), Navshakti (New Power), The Motherland, and the Indian Nation. Either explicitly or implicitly, all of these represented a shift in scope from the region to the nation. Even the apparent exception, Pataliputra, evoked not only Patna’s own history but also the immense Mauryan empire whose wheel and lion symbols were later adopted as national emblems of independent India.

Becoming the capital of a new province, and that too at a time when Calcutta was demoted from its place of primacy, was undoubtedly a boon for Patna as a whole. It brought recognition, political opportunities, important new institutions, investment from both government and private parties, and migrants from both villages and cities. But the realignments that the separation brought to the city’s politics and public culture were received with shock in some quarters at the same time as they were celebrated in others. Even the greatest beneficiaries, the Bihari professionals, had to contend with an unintended consequence of the separation, the unprecedented influx of middle-class Bengalis with whom they had to compete. Outside the city, Arvind Das notes, the growth of the urban market enriched middling and prosperous peasants belonging to the intermediate-status Yadav, Kurmi, and Koeri castes, with important long-term implications for mostly landless Dalit agricultural workers.

Leaving aside tallies of winners and losers, the separation ultimately had a limited ability to bring progress and prominence to the city and the province. Patna remained the government-centered city that it became after 1912, with little industry and limited wholesale commerce. Many of the remaining vestiges of its old public culture were erased when thousands of Muslims fled during the partition of India and Pakistan. The city’s domination by politics grew in later decades as influence in the legislature and the bureaucracy replaced property as the surest route to power and wealth. Biharis seeking education and medical treatment still come to Patna, but the institutions that serve these needs have lost much of their luster. At one time, talented young Biharis went to Calcutta for their educations; now they leave for Delhi and other destinations. The Bihar Hitaishi library has struggled to survive for many years, and its neighbor, the library of the Anjuman-e Taraqqi-e Urdu, has been entirely destroyed.

The intellectual liveliness and vigorous public life that I have chronicled in this dissertation, however, have not vanished. The libraries founded by Khuda Bakhsh and Sachchidananda Sinha are both thronged daily. Patna today is one of the major centers of Hindi publishing; poets and novelists still gather at tea stalls in the evening; even Urdu books, hard to come by in many other Indian cities, are readily available in Sabzi Bagh. And the Patna Book Fair, which fills the Gandhi Maidan (formerly the Bankipur Lawn), attracts enormous crowds.

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every year. The teachers, doctors, and activists who work to change Patna’s often dismal circumstances invoke motifs, like mofussil backwardness and ancient glory, that were familiar to their forebears a century ago. As it was at the turn of the twentieth century, Patna remains today an indissoluble amalgam of the provincial and the urban.
Glossary

**achkan/अचकन**
A long jacket worn by men.

**ādivāsī/आदिवासी**
An aboriginal or tribal person. Lit., “original inhabitant.”

**ashrāf/अश्राफ**
Plural of *sharīf*, q.v.

**akhbār/अखबार**
A newspaper or newsletter.

**ālāp/आलाप**
The prelude to a song, typically a slow improvisation exploring the melodic mode.

**ālim/आलिम**
A scholar, especially one knowledgeable in Islam.

**amīr/अमीर**
A nobleman or ruler. Singular of *umrā*.

**amla/अमला**
Clerks, officials, or functionaries, especially in the Persian or vernacular department of a court or government office. Plural of *āmil*.

**auqāf/औक़ाफ़**
Plural of *waqf*, q.v.

**bābū/बाबू**
Sometimes an honorific applied to an educated Indian man. More often, however (especially when used by Europeans), a disparaging term implying that the target was a deceitful, effete, and deracinated clerk. Also spelled “baboo.”

**bahādur/बहादुर**
“Brave,” an honorific applied to colonial titles like “Rai Bahadur” and “Khan Bahadur,” given respectively to Hindus and Muslims.

**bahurūpiyā/बहरूपिया**
Also *bahurūp*. A clown, mimic, or one who dresses in costume. Lit., one of many appearances.

**barrister**
A lawyer trained in Britain, typically at the Inns of Court in London.
bastī / बस्ती / bestos
Settlement or village, sometimes used pejoratively for “slum.”

bhadralok / ভাড়ালোক / भडरोक / bāḍāloko
The Bengali “gentlefolk” or middle classes. Men of this class were often disparaged as bābūs, q.v.

Bhojpur / भोजपुर / ভোজপুর / Bhojpur
A town in Shahabad district (now in Bhojpur district), southwest of Patna; also the region extending west of the Gandak and Son rivers, which meet the Ganges to Patna’s north and west, respectively.

Bhojpurī / भोजपुरी / bhojpurī / Bhojpuri
A language spoken in and near the Bhojpur region, from western Bihar to the area around Benares. Closely related to Hindi, Magahi, and Awadhi.

bidesiyyā / बिदेसिया / bidēsiya
“Foreigner,” i.e., a working-class emigrant from Bihar and neighboring regions, typically to Calcutta. Also a play by Bhikhari Thakur about such a migrant, and later a genre of plays inspired by Thakur’s original.

chādar / चादर / chādar / chādar
A sheet, often decorated, especially when laid as a votive offering on a holy person’s grave. Also spelled “chador.”

civil station
A suburb inhabited by European administrators and merchants and their families. Distinct from both the military cantonment and from the Indian city, from which it was usually separated by some distance.

communalism
Religious bigotry, especially resentment or hatred between Hindus and Muslims.

dālān / दालान / dālān
A courtyard or parlor, typically outdoors.

darbār / दरबार / darbār
A royal court or, by extension, a formal official audience. Often spelled “durbar.”

dargāh / दरगाह / dargāh
A Sufi shrine.

dehāt / देहात / dehāt
Villages or the countryside.
desh / देश / دِیش
Country, land, or homeland.

deshī / देशी / دِیشی
National; indigenous; of or belonging to the desh, q.v. Also “desī.”

dīwān / दीवान / دیوان
The collected works, and especially ghazals (q.v.), of a poet or other writer.

dīwān-khāna / दीवान-खाना / دیوان خانہ
A room for meeting guests, typically detached from the house.

durbar
See darbār.

ekkā / एक्का / اک
A light one-horse carriage.

Ganga / गंगा / گانگا
The Ganges river.

gañwār / गंवार / گئوار
A bumpkin; rustic. From gāon.

gāon / गाँव / گاؤن
A village.

gazetted
A gazetted officer is a government employee who has received an appointment high enough to merit announcement in an official gazette.

ghazal / ग़ज़ल / غزَّل
An Urdu poetic form, consisting of rhymed couplets.

ghāṭ / घाट / گھاٹ
Dock or bathing steps, usually on a river. Also “ghaut.”

guldasta / गुलदस्ता / گولدستہ
A periodical poetic anthology; a kind of printed mushāira, q.v. Lit., a bouquet.

gurudwārā / गुरुद्वारा / گردوارہ
A Sikh temple.

hadith / हदीस / حديث
The traditions or reports of the Prophet Muhammad’s actions and words. Pronounced hadīs in Urdu and Hindi.
hakīm / हकीम / كَتَبَٰم
A doctor in Islamic medicine, also called yunānī tibb (lit., Greek medicine).

hazrat / حضرت / حضرت
An honorific akin to “sir.”

Islamicate
Connected with the social and cultural forms associated with Muslims, but not necessarily with Islam itself.

janāb / जनाब / جَنَاب
An honorific akin to “sir.”

Kaithi / कैथी / كَعِتَي
A script used for Hindi and other languages. Most closely associated with Kayasthas, for whom it is named, it differs from Nagari (q.v.) partly in that it does not use a top line and does not distinguish between short and long vowels. Although it was primarily used for handwriting in the nineteenth century, it was also sometimes used in printed texts.

khānqāh / ख़ानक़ाह / خَانِقَة
A Sufi hospice or shrine.

maidān / मैदान / میدان
A field.

madrasa / मदरसा / مدرسة
A school teaching both religious and secular subjects to predominantly Muslim students. Also madarsa.

Magadha / मगध / مَغَادح
Also “Magadh.” The region surrounding Patna and generally extending south from the Ganges and east from the Son river; also an ancient polity occupying a similar area.

Magahi / मगही / مَگَهَی
A language spoken in Magadha (q.v.), closely related to Bhojpuri.

Maithili / मैथिली / مَئْتَهْلِی
A language spoken in Mithila (q.v.), with elements in common with Bengali and with other neighboring languages.

mashriq / مشرق / مشرق
The east. In the late nineteenth century, following its adoption from European languages into Arabic, the term began to be used to mean the Orient, specifically the Muslim countries of the Middle East.
maulānā / مولانا / مولانا
A term of address for a maulvī, q.v.

maulvī / مولوی / مولوی
A learned Muslim scholar. Also “maulavi,” “maulawi,” etc.

mehfil / مہفیل / महफिल
A gathering, especially for poetry, song, or dance.

Mīthila / میثیلا / मिथिला
The region north of the Ganges and east of the Gandak river.

mufassal / مفسال / মফসল, মফসল, or মুফসল
The provinces. Also spelled “mofussil” or “mufassil.”

mofussil
See mufassal.

muhalla / موللا / महल्ला
A neighborhood. Also spelled “mohulla.”

mukhtar / مختار / مختار
A lawyer of lesser status than a vakīl (q.v.), not having obtained a degree in law.

mullā / مول / مول
A synonym for maulvī, q.v.; sometimes carries a derogatory connotation of bigotry or excessive conservatism.

mulk / ملک / मुल्क
Country or nation, defined territorially (cf. qaum).

munshi / منشی / मंत्री
A scribe or clerk; sometimes a scholar or teacher.

munsif / مسیف / मुसिफ
The judge of a subordinate civil court.

mushāira / مشاعره / मशायरा
A gathering of poets. See mehfil.

Nagari / نگری / नागरी
A script commonly used to write Hindi, as well as Sanskrit, Nepali, Marathi, and other languages. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Nagari competed with both Kaithi (q.v.) and the Urdu script. Sometimes spelled “Nagri,” and also called “Devanagari.”
nawāb / Nawāb / نواب
Originally a Mughal governor, and in some cases an independent king. In this period, it referred to an Indian nobleman, usually Muslim. Also pronounced nawwāb; it is also the source of the English word “nabob.”

necharī / Nécharī / नेचरी
“Naturist,” a term (often derogatory) for Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his followers, in reference to their espousal of science and rationalism.

nisbat / Nisbat / نسبت
A demonym, i.e., a name indicating a person's place of origin or belonging; for instance, Azimabadi (from Azimabad or Patna), Lakhnavi (from Lucknow), or Dihlavi (from Delhi). From the Arabic nasab, genealogy, lineage, or family.

Oriya / Orissa / Odiya / Odia / ଓଡ଼ିଆ
A person from Orissa; the language of Orissa; pertaining to Orissa. Also spelled “Odiya,” “Uriya,” etc.

paṭwārī / Patwāri / पटवारी / پٹواری
A village accountant or land registrar.

Persianate
Associated with the forms typical of Persian culture and literature. By analogy with “Islamicate,” q.v.

pleader
A lawyer; often treated as synonymous with vakil, q.v.

qasba / Qasba / قصبة
A small town, especially one dominated by the Muslim service gentry.

qasbāti / Qasbātī / قصباتی
Of or belonging to a qasba, q.v.

qaum / Qaum / قوم
Nation or tribe, defined by common descent (cf. mulk). In the late nineteenth century, the term came to refer to Muslims, especially the north Indian ashrāf, q.v.

raīs / Raïs / رئیس
A notable; a rich man; an aristocrat.

rausā / Rauṣa / رووسا
Plural of rats, q.v.

sabhā / Sabha / سابحة
A gathering.
sāhib / साहिब / सاحب
Sir, a gentleman. Sometimes refers to an Englishman. Also spelled “saheb.”

sarpanch / सरपंच / مٌرٌ/ The head of a panchayat or village council.


sepoy
See sipāhī.

shahr / शहर / شهر A city. Also spelled “shehr,” “sheher,” or “shahar.”

shaikh / शैक्ष / شیخ An elder or respected man; a scholar or saint; a person claiming descent from one of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad.

sharbat / शरबत / شراب A cool drink made with syrup and water.

sharīf / शरीफ / شریف Honorable, genteel, or respectable. Typically refers to an elite or well-born Muslim, especially one claiming foreign ancestry.

shurfā / شرفاء / شرفاء Plural of sharīf, q.v.

sipāhī / सिपाही / سپاہی An Indian soldier in the colonial army. Also spelled “sepoy.”

swadeshi / स्वदेशी / سوڈشی Lit., of one’s own country. Refers to goods manufactured in India, and to the movement that advocated their use and the abandonment of imported goods in response to the 1905 Partition of Bengal.

takhallus / تبهالوس / تکہالوس A pen name.

tabla / तबला / طبل A drum or a pair of drums, one larger than the other.
tāluqdār / तालुकदार / تَلْعِدَار
A landholder, generally of higher status than a zamīndar.

taraqqī / तरक़ी / تَرَقْقٍ
Progress.

tazkira / तज़ किरा / تَذْكِیرَ
A collective biography or biographical anthology.

ulamā / उलमा / علماء
Plural of ālim, q.v. Also spelled “ulema.”

umrā / उमरा / عُمْراء
Plural of amīr, q.v.

vaid / वैद / وَّاِدِ
A doctor of Ayurvedic medicine.

vakīl / वकील / وَكِيلِ
A lawyer, typically one trained in India and holding higher status than a mukhtār but lower than a barrister.

viraha / विरह / وَيْرَحا
Separation from a loved one, or the anguish that it causes.

watan / वतन / وَطَنِ
Homeland; used both for one’s home village and in reference to broader areas.

waqf / वक़फ / وَقْفِ
An endowment or trust, often for charitable purposes.

zamīndār / ज़मीनदार / زَمِین‌دَار
A landholder.

zarāfat / ज़राफ़त / فَرْفِعٍ
Wit; the quality of being zarīf.

zarīf / ज़रीफ / قَرِيرَ
See zarāfat.
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