



# Imperial Sovereignty and Local Politics

The Bhadauria Rajputs and the Transition  
from Mughal to British India, 1600–1900

Tripurdaman Singh



# Imperial Sovereignty and Local Politics

From the 1600s till the dawn of the 20th century, the Raja of Bhadawar ruled over a tract of country in north India under the umbrella of the Mughal, Maratha and British empires. But what did it mean to rule under different expansive imperial states? What did it mean to rebel? How did such local polities affect the constitution of imperial sovereignty? This book attempts to answer these questions by examining the development of political relations between the Bhadauria Rajputs and the Mughal, Maratha and British empires between 1600 and 1900.

Using the Bhadauria example, the book demonstrates how imperial state formation was intimately connected to local politics, and the imperial state's ability to establish a shared normative framework with local political formations. It contends that it was the ritual and symbolic ties between local polities and imperial states which created a shared conceptual realm of sovereignty, distinct from instrumental and administrative relations.

The book finally argues that the highly ritualised Mughal conceptual realm, by separating political authority and symbolic sovereignty, framed rebellion as a political challenge in the locality rather than a conceptual challenge to the emperor's universal sovereignty. It enabled a local group to rebel against the state's political authority while insulating its symbolic sovereignty. The British state fundamentally misunderstood Mughal conceptual categories and upended the symbolic system, undermining the process through which political relations had been understood.

**Tripurdaman Singh** is an Indian Council of Historical Research Post-Doctoral Fellow, and a Director of the Agra District Cooperative Bank. He read Politics at the University of Warwick, and earned an MPhil in Modern South Asian Studies and a PhD in History from the University of Cambridge.



# **Imperial Sovereignty and Local Politics**

The Bhadauria Rajputs and the Transition from  
Mughal to British India, 1600–1900

Tripurdaman Singh



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, vic 3207, Australia

314 to 321, 3rd Floor, Plot No.3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108497435](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108497435)

© Tripurdaman Singh 2019

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2019

Printed in India

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-108-49743-5 HB

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

To the fond memory of my supervisor at Cambridge, the late Professor C. A. Bayly. It would never have seen the light of day without his generosity, faith, encouragement and constant guidance.

And to my great-grandfather, Hon. Lt. Raja Mahendra Man Singh of Bhadawar, who first conceived the monumental task of writing the history of the Bhadauria clan but sadly passed away before it could be taken up in earnest.



# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
<i>Note on Transliterations</i>	xiii
<i>Glossary of Commonly Used Indian Words</i>	xv
Introduction	1
1. Integration into the Mughal System	27
2. Decline of the Mughals, Emergence of the Marathas	64
3. The Maratha Supremacy	90
4. The Rise of the Company Bahadur and the British Raj	125
5. The Uprising, the Bandit and Pax Britannica	162
Conclusion	200
<i>Appendices</i>	214
<i>Bibliography</i>	219
<i>Index</i>	234



## Acknowledgements

There is a great debt of gratitude owed to the numerous people who made this book conceivable, and while listing everyone is next to impossible, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my profound thanks to those without whom this project would never have made it to this point.

To my parents, for making it all possible. To Mushtaq Ahmed Qureshi, who has been a tremendous source of support and encouragement. To Dr Adeel Hussain, Dr Anshul Avijit, Dr Parul Bhandari, Professor Tahir Kamran, Amir Khan, Simon Wolf – friends, interlocutors and intellectual companions on this journey. To the examiners of my PhD – Dr Shruti Kapila and Dr Anna-Maria Misra – whose suggestions and advice considerably improved the quality of my work. To Nadia Cavalletto for splendid Italian food.

Finally, to the editors and staff at Cambridge University Press, especially Qudsiya Ahmed, Aniruddha De and Sohini Ghosh, who have been such a delight to work with, and without whose patience and dedication this book would not have seen the light of day.



## Abbreviations

ARAO	Agra Regional Archival Office
BRHD	Bhadawar Raj Historical Documents
Elliot and Dowson	<i>The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians</i> , ed. and trans. Henry Elliot and John Dowson
NWP	North-Western Provinces
PD	Peshwa Daftar (Maharashtra State Archives)
TPP	Thomas Perry Papers
UPSA	Uttar Pradesh State Archives
V & PO	Village and Post Office



## Note on Transliterations

All vernacular words used in the book have been transliterated using their modern spellings, except when quoted directly from a primary or secondary source. For example, Awadh in place of the colonial spelling of Oudh, except where quoting directly from a source.

In certain cases, transliteration varies depending on the source of the material – for example, *tabsildar* and *tehsildar*, both spellings are used in quotes taken directly from the source material. Other such examples include *pargana/pargannah/pergannah* and *zamindar/zemindaar*.

In the case of the name of the clan, Bhadauria is the standard spelling used today, and the text follows this custom. On the other hand, other more obsolete versions of the spelling – Bhadauriya, Bhadauriyah, Bhadawariya, Bhaduria, Bhadoriya – are often used in quotes taken directly from primary sources. All refer to the same clan.

For old Mughal and Maratha terminology which has become a part of the academic discourse on South Asia – such as *zamindar*, *mansabdar*, *kamavisdar* – the standard spellings have been used throughout, unless a variation is quoted directly from a source.

For dates in the sources, the footnotes mention the date as used in the sources. For Maratha documents, this is the Islamic calendar or Arba.



## Glossary of Commonly Used Indian Words

Arba	Refers to the Islamic Calendar or AH.
<i>darbar</i>	A gathering of the ruler's court. The gathering could be functional, to discuss matters of state, or it could be ceremonial like British <i>darbars</i> .
<i>farman</i>	An official writ, order or directive. Originally used by the Mughal administrative system, it enjoyed parlance up to the early years of British rule.
<i>faujdar</i>	The military and police commandant of a province, or part of a province.
<i>jagir</i>	A type of feudal land grant which could be either conditional or unconditional, and short term or long term.
<i>kamavisdar</i>	Maratha governor of an area designated as a 'kamavisi' or sub-province, usually about a hundred to two hundred villages.
<i>mansabdar</i>	An officer in the hierarchic Mughal administrative system. Included both civil and military officers, who were graded by their rank or <i>mansab</i> .
<i>pargana</i> or <i>pergannah</i>	An administrative unit below the district. Originally used by the Mughal administration where a <i>sarkar</i> or district consisted of several <i>parganas</i> , which in turn consisted of several <i>mouzas</i> or main villages.
<i>putwaree</i>	Administrative officer of the sub-division of a district, akin to a village accountant. Traditionally, as the lowest representative of the revenue system, a putwaree maintained records of land ownership, cultivation and revenue.
Peshwa	The Prime Minister and de-facto ruler of the Maratha Empire.

<i>sanad</i>	A certificate or deed granted to lineage chiefs and <i>rajās</i> by the Mughal emperor, and later by the British government, confirming them in their position. On occasion, <i>sanads</i> of adoption were also granted.
<i>tehsil</i> or <i>tabsil</i>	An administrative unit below a district in colonial India. An updated version of <i>pargana</i> .
<i>tehsildar</i>	An administrative officer in charge of land and revenue from a <i>tehsil</i> . <i>Putwarees</i> report to the <i>tehsildar</i> .
<i>zamindar</i>	An aristocrat, typically hereditary, holding control of a tract of land and the power of collecting revenue from it. <i>Zamindars</i> could range in size and power from the lineage chiefs like the <i>rajās</i> to those controlling only a few hectares.
<i>zamindari</i>	The right or the tract of land over which a <i>zamindar</i> claimed the right to revenue.

# Introduction

चमके सूरज राज भदावर, गायें गीत तुम्हारे उमावर  
राजा बदन सिंह रखवारे, हम आये द्वार तिहारे  
मेरे पूरण हो सब काम, बतेशवर बाबा के धाम<sup>1</sup>

The sun of the Bhadawar Raj blazes forth, sing we the songs of your greatness,  
O Maharaja Badan Singh our protector, we have come to your door  
May all our wishes be fulfilled, in the town of Lord Bateshwar

In 1560, the Bhadawar country to the south-east of Agra was invaded by Mughal troops seeking to put an end to the resistance of the Bhadauria Rajputs, who still continued to challenge imperial control. At the end of the operations, not only were the Bhadauria strongholds still intact, but their leader, Raja Mukutman, became a Mughal mansabdar – an imperial officer and grandee, with a title, a *jagir*, and in command of his own troops. Almost three hundred years later, the Bhadawar Raja threw his weight behind the British government and supported them with men and material during the 1857 uprising. In the years following the uprising, he found his forts razed, his military capability curtailed and his privileged status under threat. This might have been a localised action, but it fit a more pervasive pattern.

In 1858, having overcome the uprising and re-established their supremacy across northern India, the British set out to exact vengeance against the native population. From the Mughal emperor to petulant *zamindars*, hundreds of powerful lineages were swept aside in the storm of British fury, and thousands of rebels were hung, or blown apart by cannon. One hundred and fifty years before this, the Mughal Empire had faced a similar predicament with the rebellion of the Rajput clans of Rajasthan, led for a period of time by Aurangzeb's son Akbar. However, when the rebellion ended after two and a half decades of desultory fighting, it ended not with any hangings but with the

---

<sup>1</sup> Lines from a Bhadauria folk song referring to the celebrated Maharaja Badan Singh who ruled Bhadawar from 1644 to 1654, and is credited with building the temples at Bateshwar and fort at Ater.

recognition by the Rajput rulers of Mughal sovereignty and their restoration as Mughal nobles. Mughal operations against the bandits around Agra in the 16th century culminated in the recognition of the bandit chief as a 'Raja' and his recruitment into imperial service. British operations against bandits in the 19th century resulted in the Pindari War of 1816–18, and prolonged anti-thuggee operations thereafter.

The four instances collectively raise several stark questions. What did it mean to rule? How was sovereignty constituted? What did it mean to rebel? How were these terms articulated? How did the rebellion challenge this sovereignty? Whose sovereignty existed in the locality? How did these political actors, whether raja or bandit, engage with the imperial state? And how did the answers to these questions change over time? In the interconnected matrix of these questions, and the ontological issues underlying that matrix, lies the genesis of this book. It is an attempt to search for answers to these questions through appraising and exploring the history of the Bhadauria Rajputs.

In a nutshell, it examines the development of political relations between the Bhadauria Rajputs and the dominant powers over the period of Mughal, Maratha and British rule from 1600 to 1900.<sup>2</sup> Through this examination, it explores the constitution of sovereignty and the formation of the imperial state, and the nature of the state's relationship with such intermediate groups over this period.

\* \* \*

The political relations of the Rajput clans of India with the dominant powers are a fascinating but relatively underexplored field of study. Directly and indirectly, in the form of peasant proprietors, *zamindars*, lineage chiefs, rajas and princes, Rajputs accounted for the vast majority of intermediate power holders in Northern India. The negotiated relationship between these intermediate power holders and the dominant power that constructed an empire was fundamental to the structure of the political terrain as a whole. This relationship – between localised power holders who provided access to the resources of the locality on the one hand and the dominant power that provided the ideological framework to structure this relationship

---

<sup>2</sup> These were, as Bayly described, the three great aspirants to continental empire. See C. A. Bayly, 'Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India,' *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993): 9.

on the other – formed the pivot around which pan-Indian polities were constructed.<sup>3</sup>

The examination of the nature of such relationships is thus crucial to understanding the nature of these imperial states and the societies over which they ruled, and this sometimes unstated assumption has formed a hinge point for both traditional and revisionist scholarship on the nature of the state in early modern India. In fact, the basis and structure of this relationship have been the major point of contention for both sides – namely the nature and orientation of the links between the centre and the locality.<sup>4</sup>

There has of course been expansive writing on Rajput history and their role in this political arena – *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* by Colonel Tod<sup>5</sup> and, more recently, the similarly contextualised work on the major families of Rajputana by Manoshi Bhattacharya.<sup>6</sup> But drawing much of their material from the oral histories and bardic traditions of the princely houses of Rajasthan, both tend to focus almost exclusively on dynastic history and tradition rather than an analysis of the structure of their political relations, either with the dominant powers or with each other. In this story, the histories of the clans of northern India and the Gangetic plain, including the Bhadaurias who played a politically crucial role from the 17th century onwards, are given at best a passing mention. Colonial era writings by Captain Bingley<sup>7</sup> and Sir Henry Elliot<sup>8</sup> take a wider perspective but, being nothing more than short biographical notes on a variety of castes and clans, also fail to provide any detail or contextual understanding about the facts that they present.

At the other end of the spectrum, more academic analysis of Rajput polities has tended to take a ‘top-down’ perspective and been constrained by their limits in scope

---

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Richard Fox, *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 3, 4; and Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> See Burton Stein, ‘A Decade of Historical Efflorescence,’ *South Asia Research* 10, no. 2 (1990): 125–38; Shireen Moosvi, ‘The Pre-Colonial State,’ *Social Scientist* 33, no. 3/4 (2005) 40–53; and Athar M. Ali, ‘The Mughal Polity: A Critique of Revisionist Approaches,’ *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 4 (1993): 699–710.

<sup>5</sup> James Tod, *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Manoshi Bhattacharya, *The Royal Rajputs* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> A. H. Bingley, *Handbook on Rajputs* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> Henry Miers Elliot, *Memoirs on the History, Folklore and Distribution of the Races of the North Western Provinces* (London: Trubner & Co, 1869).

or time. They have studied, for example, phenomena such as ‘Maratha relations with the major states of Rajputana’<sup>9</sup> or ‘Mughal religious policies with reference to the Rajputs’.<sup>10</sup> This form of writing history suffers from two major drawbacks as far as the present historiography is concerned – namely the perspective it takes and the categories it uses. In the first instance, it reinforces the centrality and perspective of the dominant power – Mughal or Maratha. By doing so, not only does it prejudice the nature of the relationship between the dominant power and local polity, it also fails to take into account the dynamism that characterised a fundamental and paradigmatic two-way exchange of resources.<sup>11</sup> In the second instance, it also focuses almost exclusively on the Rajput clans in Rajasthan and tends to lump them together within the generic category of ‘Rajput’.<sup>12</sup>

While at one level, the use of such broad categories and a unilateral view of political and social processes creates a kind of coherence; at another level, it obscures the nature and micro-historical reality of these social and political processes. ‘Historical truth’, to quote Eric Stokes, ‘marches only briefly to tunes of sounding generality.’<sup>13</sup> Social and political processes were not only an ideational exercise (although they were that as well) – they also resulted in social and political changes at all levels on the ground, and the way these effects were distributed were as important as the nature of the processes themselves. To put it succinctly, therefore, it is often unhelpful to make firm distinctions between social structure and social action.<sup>14</sup>

It is to this that Bernard Cohn referred when he stated that it was not sufficient to simply add up in an aggregate fashion the characteristics of broad social categories such as the Rajputs and assume that there had been a uniform process by which such categories had come to be formed. In his words,

---

<sup>9</sup> R. K. Saxena, *Maratha Relations with the Major States of Rajputana, 1761–1818* (New Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1973).

<sup>10</sup> Satish Chandra, *Mughal Religious Policies: The Rajputs and the Deccan* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> See Surinder Singh, ‘Mughal Centralisation and Local Resistance in North Western India: An Exploration of the Ballad of Dulla Bhatti,’ in *Popular Literature and Pre-Modern Societies in South Asia*, ed. Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur (New Delhi: Pearson, 2008), 89.

<sup>12</sup> Satish Chandra references this phenomenon. See Satish Chandra, J. S. Grewal and Irfan Habib, ‘Akbar and His Age: A Symposium,’ *Social Scientist* 20, no. 9/10 (1992): 62.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 14.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.

It is not sufficient to add up the amount of land that Rajputs or Muslims were supposed to have lost at the establishment of British rule in a particular region in order to understand their social position vis-à-vis other groups. Some lineages of Rajputs gained land, some families of Muslim landlords went into public service and were able to convert their income back into landed status. This view of the process of internal change in the social structure can only be obtained by tracing in a disaggregated fashion the actual land transfers and career patterns of individuals, families and groups.<sup>15</sup>

Where such studies – taking a bottom-up perspective and focusing on ground-level social and political history – have been attempted, they have been constrained by both the kind of scholarship then prevalent and the categories and concepts that they utilise. Path breaking as the work of Anil Banerjee<sup>16</sup> and Maharaja Karni Singh<sup>17</sup> is, it is defined and constrained by the period during which they were written. Banerjee retains an almost exclusive focus on Rajasthan and the instrumental relationship between the Rajput polities of Rajasthan and the Mughals, and its effects on the internal composition of these states. Instrumental, in this context, means purely economic or military. His study also concludes with the rise of Maratha power, thereby avoiding a vital period of change and transition.

The Maharaja of Bikaner's study focuses on the relations of his ancestors with the rulers of Delhi through a long period from the formation of Bikaner until independence. In his own words, its originality lies essentially in bringing together material from a wide variety of sources and interpreting it to enquire into the causes and consequences of major events.<sup>18</sup> It focuses almost exclusively on synthesising a variety of sources with the aim of exploring the relationship between Bikaner and Delhi. While these sources shed light on previously unexplored areas of the political relationship between the centre and the periphery, in the absence of any element of historiographical theory or analysis, the work nevertheless ignores the wider conceptual implications of the events and processes being studied.

---

<sup>15</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 174.

<sup>16</sup> Anil Chandra Banerjee, *Aspects of Rajput State and Society* (New Delhi: Rajesh Publications, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> Maharaja Karni Singh, *The Relations of the House of Bikaner with the Central Powers, 1465–1949* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

More sophisticated scholarship has partially bridged these gaps in the study of Rajput history. Richard Fox, for example, in his pioneering study of the Rajput clans of eastern Uttar Pradesh propounded the theory of the Rajput polity as a segmentary lineage.<sup>19</sup> Although Fox starts from the same ontological premise as this book, his work suffers from several drawbacks – the most glaring of which was his absolute reliance on accounts of colonial revenue officers. While he sought to explore the relations of the state with the hinterland, and focused on the development cycles and organisational principles of the lineages themselves, Fox nevertheless also failed to either explain the nature of state power in the hinterland or to properly account for the role that these Rajput communities played as fundamental parts of wider and larger Mughal, Maratha and British polities. He acknowledged his own weaknesses in not knowing what strengthened or weakened the state and its influence in the hinterland, but carried it further by omitting the study of political events through which such processes can be brought to life.

More recently, Malavika Kasturi studied the social history of the Rajput clans of northern India, and demonstrated the reconstitution of Rajput identity through the 19th century and the colonial encounter in the context of their encounter with colonial rule through the processes of land, rebellion, domestic spaces, inheritance and consumption.<sup>20</sup> Kasturi's work is pioneering and a singularly important intervention in Rajput history. Nevertheless, it left certain questions unanswered when it comes to the political relations on which the reconstitution of Rajput identity was predicated. First, it ignored the pre-history of the historical context in which it was located, which is particularly important since these groups had consistently been part of larger polities. Second, the reconstitution of this identity was intimately connected to the reconstitution of sovereignty – but Kasturi failed to follow up on these implications.

In most cases, as Lalit Mehta noted, historiography was dominated by either events, such as the work of Bikaner, or institutions, such as the work of Fox, and neglected the histories of families, clans and persons who made these events and institutions.<sup>21</sup> It would be safe to say that the history of the political relations of the Rajput clans with the dominant powers – from their own

<sup>19</sup> Fox, *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule*.

<sup>20</sup> Malavika Kasturi, *Embattled Identities: Rajput Lineages and the Colonial State in Nineteenth Century North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Lalit Mehta, *Caste, Clan and Ethnicity: A Study of the Mehtas of Rajasthan* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1999), 29.

perspective, taking into account both its instrumental and non-instrumental components, and assessing its transitions through periods of flux and change – has indeed yet to be written. This can be stated all the more strongly for the Rajput clans of northern India, the Bhadaurias in particular, who have remained almost peripheral to the study of Rajput history and society.

As Farhat Hasan stated, the experience of imperial sovereignty emerged through intricate layers of interconnectedness between imperial sovereignty and local power relations and the extent to which the system of rule represented, involved, reinforced and integrated local structures of power. State formation was deeply entangled with and drew its meaning from local relations of power.<sup>22</sup>

Keeping this in mind, the lack of expansive studies of the development of political relations between intermediate power holders such as the Bhadaurias and the dominant powers implies a serious gap in the study of Rajput politics, state formation and early modern north Indian political history. If imperial sovereignty was entangled with local relations of power, then the processes by which such sovereignty was constituted in the locality are of utmost importance. To paraphrase John Richards, it is essential to unearth and analyse the discrete narratives of local action, and integrate them with the wider story of state formation and the transition from Mughal to British rule in order to complete our understanding of this process, especially as it was perceived in the locality.<sup>23</sup>

\* \* \*

The Bhadaurias were among the most important and politically relevant of the Rajput clans of northern India, particularly from the period of the establishment of Islamic rule. From the early 1400s onwards, and especially from the establishment of the Mughal Empire in the first quarter of the 16th century, we find repeated references to them in a variety of contemporaneous sources. Geographically concentrated in the ravine country bounded by the present-day districts of Agra, Etawah, Bhind and Dholpur, they occupied a strategically important and relatively inaccessible slice of territory in this period.

---

<sup>22</sup> Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, 1572–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–2.

<sup>23</sup> John F. Richards, 'Warriors and the State in Early Modern India,' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 3 (2004): 391.

In his short monograph, Captain Bingley describes the Bhadauria clan as ‘this famous and loyal clan’ and states: ‘Although the rise of the Bhadawar Rajas only dates from the 16th century, their achievements and illustrious marriages have raised them greatly in the estimation of the neighbouring Rajput princes.’<sup>24</sup> The official *Manual of Titles* of the erstwhile United Provinces described the family of the head of the clan as ‘amongst the most noble and well-respected in the United Provinces’.<sup>25</sup> The Settlement Report of the Gonda district calls the Bhadaurias ‘the highest blood of all the Chhatris (Kshatriyas) in Northern India’.<sup>26</sup>

During the Mughal period, the Bhadauria clan retained a position of political relevance. Abu’l Fazl, the court historian and confidante to the Mughal emperor Akbar, stated that the Bhadaurias ‘are distinguished for their sense and their courage, and famed for bravery over all other landlords’.<sup>27</sup> Shah Nawaz Khan called them ‘bold and undaunted’.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, as a host of both official and unofficial chronicles testify (and as part of this book demonstrates), they were to play a politically crucial role through the Mughal period. In fact, as the earliest district gazetteer compiled for Agra noted: ‘Tradition recounts that before the decline of the empire – that is, probably before the death of Aurangzeb, the rajas of Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bhadawar and Bundi were called the four pillars of the State or *arkaan i daulat*’,<sup>29</sup> a claim supported by the official text ‘Rajas and Nawabs’.<sup>30</sup>

This transformation is noteworthy in itself, since a number of pre-Mughal and Mughal texts often characterise the Bhadaurias as a tribe of bandits, robbers and freebooters in violent and perpetual conflict with the state – ‘they always were in revolt against the Sultans of Hind’, as Abu’l Fazl once opined.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Bingley, *Handbook on Rajputs*, 49.

<sup>25</sup> *Manual of Titles* (Allahabad: Superintendent of Printing – United Provinces, 1932), 30.

<sup>26</sup> William Charles Bennett, *The Final Settlement Report on the Gonda District* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1878), 24.

<sup>27</sup> H. Beveridge (trans.), *The Akbar Nama of Abul Fazl* Vol. II (New Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2002), 119.

<sup>28</sup> H. Beveridge (trans.), *Maāthir-ul-Umara of Nawab Samsam-ud-Daula Shah Nawaz Khan* Vol. I (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1979), 828.

<sup>29</sup> E. T. Atkinson and F. H. Fisher (eds), *The Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North Western Provinces in India Vol. VIII – Agra District* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1884), 478.

<sup>30</sup> *Rajas and Nawabs of the North Western Provinces* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1877), 15.

<sup>31</sup> Beveridge, *Akbar Nama of Abul Fazl*, 119.

Nevertheless, by the time Akbar's successor, Jahangir, was on the throne, the Bhadaurias came to be described as 'the guardians of the fort of Akbarabad, the seat of the honour, of the slaves and the treasures of the emperor'.<sup>32</sup> In short, as an official publication succinctly and efficiently put it, 'frequent references to the Bhadaurias by Muslim historians make it clear that at all times they were a powerful and turbulent race'.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, while the political relevance of the Bhadauria clan has been acknowledged and demonstrated, this acknowledgement has never translated into a study of their political relations, or in other words their political, military and ritual links with the dominant powers. In fact, no attempt seems to have been made to either explore the history of the Bhadauria clan or write an account of the area they came to rule over – a politically and culturally constructed territory referred to as Bhadawar<sup>34</sup> in everyday parlance up to this day. The only two attempts at writing their history still remain the 19th-century epic poem *Bhadawar Vansakhyat*,<sup>35</sup> written to record the dynastic history of the Bhadawar Rajas and extol their valour, and the woefully under-researched and utterly inadequate *A Brief History of the Bhadawar State*<sup>36</sup> – both written in Hindi. The Bhadauria Rajputs and the Bhadawar country have thus remained epistemically peripheral to the political history of northern India.

This is in sharp contrast to many of the other major Rajput clans – for example, the Kachwaha Rajputs of Jaipur or the Sisodias of Udaipur – which

---

<sup>32</sup> *Zakbirat-ul-Khawarin of Shaikh Farid Bhakkhari* quoted in K. K. Trivedi, *Agra: Economic and Political Profile of a Mughal Suba 1580–1707* (Pune: Ravish Publishers, 1998), 111.

<sup>33</sup> *Manual of Titles* (Allahabad Superintendent of Printing – United Provinces, 1932), 30.

<sup>34</sup> Bhadawar, in contemporaneous sources, refers to a tract of land around the Jamuna and Chambal rivers, covering parts of the present day districts of Agra, Bhind, Etawah, Dholpur and Gwalior. Traditionally ruled by the Bhadawar Rajas and other Bhadauria *zamindars*, the territory was covered in dense ravines – inaccessible and relatively isolated, despite its strategic importance. Its specific territorial boundaries shifted over time, but, as I argue, authority need not necessarily be consanguineous with territory. Dirks described a similar situation with regards to the polity of Puddukotai – Dirks, *Hollow Crown*, 40–50.

<sup>35</sup> Original manuscript in possession of Shambudayal Sharma, V & P. O. Nowgaon, Tehsil Bah, District Agra.

<sup>36</sup> Ran Singh Bhadauria, *Bhadawar Rajya ka Sankshipt Itihas* (Bhind: Bhadawar Sahitya Samiti, 2005).