

The Many Identities of Ameer Khan: From Pindari Chief to Nawab of Tonk

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Ameer Khan, the Pathan chief who commanded a large native army in North India in the 19th century and became the Nawab of Tonk from fairly humble origins in one of the most remarkable stories in the politics of those times, is one character in Indian history that has had many identities ascribed to him. The British chroniclers designated him as a Pindari and attributed various negative characteristics to his personality. He was portrayed as a corrupt mercenary whose loyalties were fluid, who indulged in covetous activities, 'one of the most atrocious villains that India has ever produced'¹ or 'the most conspicuous of the leaders of the banditti'.² Yet other contemporaries have designated Ameer Khan 'differently', and could not resist praising him for his talents and abilities.³

With the signing of the various treaties under the system of Subsidiary Alliance, the major political powers of India were compelled to reduce their military strength. With the disbanding of all these native armies, a large number of professional soldiers, often organized on community lines, became jobless. They came to fill the traditional military labour market of India.⁴ Few scholars have taken up the case study of such tribes and war-bands, and how they faced the challenges posed to their survival and patronage with the demise of various native political powers.⁵ One immediate concern for these groups was the lack of resources to sustain themselves in the absence of service opportunities; and very often they committed acts of robbery and plunder in order to address that lack. The Pindaris were one such group, estimated to number more than 50,000. It was believed that they rode out yearly from their safe retreats in the valleys of Narmada to loot the villages of Rajputana, the sacred land of Puri, and along the route following the waters of the River Krishna to the South.⁶

These leaderless bands provided the perfect labour power for any ambitious military adventurer willing to organize these trained professional soldiers into an orderly military contingent. Since these soldiers had served under various political authorities in diverse regions of the subcontinent, they were familiar with the geographical terrain and the various techniques of warfare prevalent across mainland South Asia. They had the ability to become the best fighting force given the right direction and leadership. This background provides the immediate context for the emergence of the army of Ameer Khan as the main challenger and competitor to the Marathas and the Rajput chieftaincies in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Perhaps this could explain why the English East India Company was also concerned with Khan's band of militiamen, especially due to the presence of an effective artillery wing in his army. It is in this context that this paper will re-explore the infamous identity of Ameer Khan as a mere Pindari and resituate him more fairly within the challenges and possibilities of those times.

Ameer Khan as a 'Pindari' Chief

Firstly, the label of 'Pindari' itself needs to be re-investigated when considering a figure like Ameer Khan. To make this distinction, we need to explore the meaning of the term 'pindari', and how the identity of a Pathan chief got intermingled with that of the Pindaris. This line of distinction gets blurred due to the close association that these communities enjoyed with the Marathas at various periods of time from the rule of Shivaji onward. The term 'pindari' has been interpreted by scholars variously: some see its origin in the French word 'pandour' (soldier in a militia); others relate it to words popular in the Marathi

language like *pendha* (a bundle of straw), *pind parna* (to follow), *pendha* (a kind of intoxicating drink consumed by the members of these bands), *paiend* (a road), and the verb *aroo* (to shut), among others.⁷ The English records describe the Pindaris as ‘unlicensed freebooters’.⁸ The Marathas had the reputation of employing a massive number of Pindaris in their armies. Here they were predatory hordes who were retained in the army after the payment of a tax called *palpati* for the right to plunder. The use of this force as a military unit was started during the times of Shivaji – he allowed them to retain plundered coins of copper, while the looted silver had to be handed over to the Maratha Treasury.⁹

The Pindaris were also part of the military labour market which existed in India since medieval times. They were sought after as using their military services was much more convenient and effective, as opposed to raising organized military units from scratch, which required major initial investment. They were a cost-effective military labour option for the lesser Maratha chiefs who were unable to maintain an independent standing army. Furthermore, the Pindari forces were neither moved by the notion of dying for the ‘nation’ nor did they take an oath to die for their master. Their approach towards their terms of service was individualistic: as Randolph Cooper explains, ‘to a great degree it was every man for himself and if you were foolish enough to die for someone else’s concept of honour, you could not enjoy the spoils of plunder’.¹⁰

Although contemporary British writers claimed that Ameer Khan was a Pindari, the British official records don’t regard him as one of the Pindari leaders associated with the Marathas.¹¹ Ameer Khan was from a Pathan lineage. Tala Khan, the grandfather of Ameer Khan, came to Delhi at the time of the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah. Ameer was born in Sambhal in Rohilkhand in 1769; and at the age of twelve, he left his home in search of fortune. He first approached the Scindhia General De Boigne, and expressed his inclination to serve under him. He was refused on grounds of his tender age. He then approached the Raja of Jodhpur and entered his service. After a few months, he received his dismissal and visited Surat and Baroda in search of a new job. He arrived in Bhopal in 1795 and served the rival factions at the court alternately until 1798.¹²

Scholars who have questioned his identity as a Pindari have argued that he headed a separate organization of the Pathan soldiers who were different from the Pindaris. The Pathan formation was composed of paid troops who did not subsist on disorderly loot and plunder. It was not merely a cavalry unit, but also reckoned as one of the most efficient native infantry units in India at that time. Additionally, it had an

effective artillery wing. The Pathans were regarded as more disciplined in their demeanour than the Pindaris.¹³ According to R.W. Frazer, Ameer Khan had an army of well-paid Pathans, numbering upwards of 10,000 infantry soldiers, and 15,000 cavalymen, supported by artillery.¹⁴

Nonetheless, Ameer Khan’s character and activities have resulted in several fanciful constructions. One explanation for this colonial representation may be the fact that the British wished to portray him as insignificant, despite the role that he played in helping the British win over the Rajput States. Similarly, it would be inaccurate to assume that Ameer Khan’s religious beliefs were of no concern to the British. They were conscious of the fact that the presence of Ameer Khan in Rajputana was an essential ‘counterpoise to the predominant influence of the Hindoos in this particular part of India’.¹⁵ Modern historians also see Tonk, the *jagir* of Ameer Khan, as one of the ‘last Muslim states’.¹⁶ Busawan Lal, the biographer of Ameer Khan, describes how the Nawab lived a peaceful life and spent most of his time in religious observances, and in the company of learned and honoured people.¹⁷

This begs the question – how did Ameer Khan come to be associated with the Pindaris? In the words of G. S. Sardesai, the Pindaris were ‘a convenient ingredient of the system of warfare developed by the Marathas’.¹⁸ Ameer Khan was a crucial part of the Maratha military organisation and with his growing influence, he started using the Pindari forces to win favours and wars. In 1812, not less than 60,000 Pindaris were under the control of Ameer Khan.¹⁹ At the same time, we must be cautious of confusing these groups as a homogenous entity – the Marathas, the Pindaris, and Ameer Khan, all had their separate identities, and they played different (and significant) roles in the course of history.

Ameer Khan Pathan as Muslim Hero in Urdu Literature

Contrary to his depiction in the English official sources, the Urdu writers of the same period depict Ameer Khan as a heroic figure in their prose and poetry. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Company had overcome almost all political challenges within the Indian subcontinent. With the signing of the Subsidiary Alliance with Bengal and Awadh, and with the death of Tipu Sultan in 1799, the Company had succeeded in defeating every major power. In the absence of any protagonist for their creations, the Urdu writers found a ray of hope in Ameer Khan. Unsurprisingly, he came to be portrayed as a hero in their writings. He was projected as the last hope against the British, under

whose rule they could dream of the re-establishment of a state ruled by an Muslim ruler. In the process of highlighting his achievements, he was praised as:

'...the one who made Jaswant Rao Holkar "Maharaja" Holkar, who humiliated Baji Rao Peshwa, who proved his mettle to Daulat Rao Sindhia, who was offered a territory worth a crore from Nizam and the Company but refused it due to self-esteem, who rejected the earning/revenue of 18 lakhs, who collected chauth from Gaikwar and Bhosle, who collected kharaj from Rajputana, who became the mediator among the Rajput states, who protected Indore after the demise of Holkar, who renewed the tenet of gallantry in warfare among Rohilla Pathans and who raised the slogan "hindustan belongs to hindustanis"...he was Ameer-e azam, propagator of free will and nationalism among the masses'.²⁰

Ameer Khan emerged as a much favoured figure for commentary by contemporary Urdu writers on account of the particular milieu he occupied. He rose to prominence at a time when disaffection against the Company State was beginning to manifest itself in Indian society, and there was a growing belief that the overthrow of the British ought to be accompanied by a return to pre-colonial Muslim political domination. Ameer Khan's figure became much favoured, as he was seen perhaps as a possible heir to the throne of Delhi on account of the impressive army that he commanded: its reputation was strong enough to scare the British.

Several Urdu poets and writers of the contemporary and near-contemporary period have projected Ameer Khan as a Muslim hero. While discussing the treaty signed between the Company and Ameer Khan, Khwaja Mansoor Husain has referred to a *mushaira* (a gathering of poets) organized in the *madrasa* (religious seminary) of Ghaziuddin Haider (which would later become Delhi College, now Zakir Husain College), which attracted many disbanded soldiers of Ameer Khan's army. The poet Zauq recited *ghazals* (poetry) in the said *mushaira* and his couplets were highly appreciated by the former soldiers of Ameer Khan's army.²¹ These couplets allude to the great regard and pre-eminence enjoyed by Ameer Khan with the Urdu literary circles, while their favourable reception also highlights the public recognition of the social standing of Khan amongst various sections of Delhi society.

According to Husain, Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi, who started a revivalist movement in the early 19th century, was only the spiritual leader of this movement, while Ameer Khan and his forces were the martial wing of it. It is said that Ameer Khan provided logistical and military support during the movement of Bareilvi before and during the battle of Balakot in 1831.²² It has also been suggested that Bareilvi received military training in the camp of Ameer Khan.²³ Other Urdu writers have accused

Ameer Khan and his agent Niranjana Lal of betraying the 'cause' and surrendering to the machinations of the British officials. Husain claims that major contemporary and near-contemporary Urdu poets were sympathetic to the cause and ideology spearheaded by Bareilvi, and this predisposition for the religious ideology of the revivalist movement is reflected in the compositions of these authors as well. Husain senses a certain level of anger and pain among these writers towards Khan's decision of getting into an alliance with the British.²⁴

This line of argument finds some resonance in the works of British officers like Sir John Malcolm, H.T. Prinsep, Charles Metcalfe, and James Skinner. Sir John Malcolm has described Ameer Khan's reputation among the Muslims and in general as follows:²⁵

'...the large army under Ameer Khan (whose reputation was now at its zenith), led to a very general conclusion, that he cherished plans of restoring the Mahomedan power; and there can be no doubt, that had he been a man of great talent, either as a statesman or military commander, the period was most favourable...His Patans were continually exclaiming, that the prediction of a holy mendicant that he would be sovereign of Delhi, was nearly accomplished...'

However, there is little support for this argument in the records available in the archives. In the absence of new academic insights, this remains the dominant interpretation of the activities of Ameer Khan in early twentieth-century Urdu literature.²⁶

Ameer Khan as a British Agent in Rajputana

The British took great advantage of the complex situation in the Rajputana region as they confronted the many players that were trying to gain power in the region. The British, instead of directly engaging in the tussle, decided to play all the stakeholders against each other. To keep the native powers divided, they adopted the attitude of selective intervention, and when convenient, they provided special treatment to Ameer Khan.

While the might of Ameer Khan's mercenary army appears legendary, it also brings to notice the very important consideration that he would have required means of sustenance for his large band of soldiers, whether they were employed in any conquering expedition or not.²⁷ To resolve the issue of sustenance, he encouraged activities like loot and plunder, which became a great threat for various states in Rajputana at this time. To curb this menace, the Rajputana states too tried to arrive at a settlement with Ameer Khan.

The British disapproved of these attempts made by Rajputana states to make peace with Ameer Khan. Any successful attempt to create peace between the two would lessen the leverage of the British in the region. For

instance, when Khan tried to make a deal with the Raja of Nagpur, the British launched a full-fledged military campaign in the name of 'War against Pindaris'.²⁸ At the same time, the British didn't leave any stone unturned to weaken Khan's influence in the court of the Holkars: they urged the Nizam of Hyderabad to incorporate Ameer Khan into his army so that his ties with the Holkars would be impacted.²⁹ They even tried to take advantage of the deteriorating condition of Jaswant Rao Holkar and the impending struggle for succession, which would again undermine the position of Ameer Khan in the court.³⁰ They attempted to stop the monetary support he was receiving from the Holkars.³¹ The British were well aware of the fact that if they were able to curtail the monetary resources available to Ameer Khan, he would be forced to accept their terms and surrender. Therefore, they tried to isolate him among the native states, so that he would be left with no other option but to accept the protection of the Company.

Faced with this policy of the British, Ameer Khan was confronted with serious financial challenges. To maintain his troops, he turned towards Rajputana and tried to capture the tribute which the Rajput States paid to the Holkars.³² A tripartite struggle came to be played out in Rajputana.³³ The British very cleverly refused to offer any assistance to the Rajputs, despite repeated pleas, and left the states of Rajputana to deal with the aggression of Ameer Khan.³⁴ As the British withdrew from the scene, Rajputana was overrun by the Pindaris.³⁵ States like Udaipur faced the worst consequences. Udaipur's treasury was depleted to such an extent that it was unable to raise the amount it owed to the British as tribute. Consequently, Udaipur was forced to sign a treaty with the Company in 1818, whereby it accepted British authority. Since its treasury was virtually empty, the British agreed to accept a tribute of a few *annas* (the smallest unit of currency, basically pittance), which was humiliating for the Rajputs as it did not go well with their status.³⁶

This was also the time when the Company plotted against the other Pindari chiefs and carried out a campaign against them in the name of war against the Pindaris. But instead of putting down Ameer Khan with force, they presented him with an olive branch. And we see British officials negotiating terms of a treaty with Ameer Khan's agent in Delhi.³⁷ Many friendly letters were exchanged during this time between the camp of Ameer Khan, and that of the Governor General and the Resident of Delhi.³⁸ These exchanges resulted in a treaty in 1817 between the Ameer Khan and the British. This treaty was viewed with suspicion by other native states and provided credence to the idea that Ameer Khan was an important element of British policy towards the conquest of Rajputana. It came

to be believed, not incorrectly, that the British were using him as a puppet to fulfil their political ambitions in the region.

Colonial officials have interpreted this treaty as a fortunate event for Ameer Khan, as it set the stage for the public demonstration of colonial benevolence through the Company State's promise of protection to the person of Ameer Khan, his forces, and his possessions.³⁹ Such interpretations are however one sided. Clearly, the British desire to enter into a treaty with Khan was beneficial for them as well – the treaty was very effective in stemming the growing influence of Ameer Khan across North India.⁴⁰

Ameer Khan's political influence was much greater than that of the other Pindari chiefs. Despite his declining relevance in the court of the Holkars, Ameer Khan remained much sought after amongst the other political entities, even those situated outside Hindustan. Therefore, the British thought of tying him down with a treaty rather than putting him down by force. For instance, the British received a secret report in 1811 that the son of the King of Kabul, Prince Mansoor, had approached Ameer Khan's camp with a request to join the Afghan army. This was an ominous development for the British, as it would increase the Afghan King's military power and enable him to expand his territories against the competing claims of the British. The British discouraged any such plans and the Governor General was requested to induce the speedy return of the Prince to his father.⁴¹

Around the same time, another development involving Ameer Khan was unfolding in the Deccan. The escape of Kareem Khan Pindari, an important figure, from the confinement of Tulsi Bai Holkar, added to the British concerns.⁴² They were threatened by such incidents as these events could lead to alliances that could prove lethal for British territorial and political ambitions in the Indian subcontinent. Their worries increased when they came to know that Ghafoor Khan, an agent of Ameer Khan, had played a role in the escape of Kareem Khan and that the fugitive had been given asylum in Ameer Khan's camp and received a warm reception.⁴³ We thus see that these intelligence reports were creating a sense of panic in the British camp, and they continued to be threatened by Khan's power and influence.

The British decided to tie him down with a treaty alliance. But since the British were doubtful of Ameer Khan's intentions, they were also suspicious of Ameer Khan's willingness to submit to negotiations with them. Some of the explanations offered to them for his willingness to submit were Ameer Khan's advancing age, his wish to settle down, and the increasing mutinies in his army.⁴⁴ Though the British were not convinced with these arguments, they also realised that even if Ameer Khan surrendered his army to them, they would find it difficult

to control its soldiers through anybody else they might raise from its ranks to lead it.⁴⁵ It was imperative for them to weaken Khan's power, and to breach his army and influence his soldiers.⁴⁶ The Treaty of 1817, which was ultimately concluded between Ameer Khan and the Company, was the result of a long process of negotiations which were concluded by Rai Datta Ram and Niranjan Lal, agents of Ameer Khan, in the presence of Sir Charles Metcalfe, Resident of Delhi. Lal was promised territories in the Deccan and additional benefits if he was able to make Ameer Khan agree to the terms of the treaty.⁴⁷

The treaty, which was concluded by Niranjan Lal at Delhi in November 1817, and ratified by Ameer Khan on December 16, gave the latter an assurance that the British would protect Ameer Khan and his heirs' rights over the territories granted to him by the Holkars. In return, Ameer Khan was asked to disband his army and surrender all the guns and artillery. He was only allowed to keep a small portion of his army, which was required to manage the internal affairs of his principality. Ameer Khan was made to commit that he would not use aggression against any state, relinquish his connections with the Pindaris, and help the British in their suppression. He was barred from entering into any negotiations without the consent of the British.

As Ameer Khan's artillery was one of the most efficient at that time, it is not surprising that the British coveted it. This was a primary motive that drove the British to enter into this settlement with him. Ameer Khan offered to surrender his artillery, and the Governor General considered this as one of the most significant achievements for the Company State at that time.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the British failed to acquire complete faith in Ameer Khan, and they continued to be wary and watchful of him.⁴⁹

After the conclusion of the treaty, Ameer Khan sent his son Wazir ud Daulah into the protection of the Resident of Delhi, while he set about settling his affairs of state. This arrangement was however not mentioned in the treaty.⁵⁰ Wazir ud Daulah was received with the greatest civility by the Resident, but his stay in Delhi was a costly affair and the British were reluctant to bear such expenses for long. Later appeals by Ameer Khan to visit Delhi, which would have been a financial strain for the Company, were consequently denied.⁵¹ While the Governor General did not approve of the advances made to Ameer Khan's family for its support earlier, the latter was granted a *jagir* (land grant) at Palwal to assist him and his son bear their expenses.⁵² This demonstrates that even after he had surrendered, Ameer Khan remained a significant figure in British perception and they were reluctant to take direct action against him. While they gave financial reasons for disallowing his visit to Delhi, they were perhaps wary of

the cordial relationship that existed between the Mughal princes and Wazir ud Daulah.⁵³

With the culmination of this treaty, we witness the fulfilment of multiple British desires. On the one hand, they were able to breach the invincible network of the Pindaris which posed a serious challenge to the Company State on the battlefield, and was a grave threat to the security of roads and the efficient working of its newly expanding communication network (dawk system).⁵⁴ On the other hand, by letting Ameer Khan have a free hand in Rajputana, the British were able to gather all the Rajput powers into a united front against the Pindaris, but under the very convenient umbrella of British protection.⁵⁵

In the struggle between the various ruling houses of Marathas, Rajputs and the Pindaris, it was the British who had eventually emerged victorious. The so-called 'Pindari War' ended with a huge advantage to the British, and almost all the major local powers were weakened and seeking British protection. This was the culmination of the British policy of interfering in the internal matters of local chieftains while hiding behind the veil of a policy of non-interference. Any remaining challenge to British domination were erased after the Anglo Maratha War and with the conclusion of a set of treaties signed in 1818 with the Holkars, the Scindhias, Ameer Khan and the various Rajputana states.

In 1817, when the Pindari and Marathas forces were losing ground, the British took control of the situation. The Scindhias were made to sign a treaty with the British which freed the latter to sign or enter into any kind of engagements with the Rajputana states of Udaipur, Jodhpur, Kota, Bundi and other powers on the left bank of Chambal.⁵⁶ After the Scindhias, the Holkars signed the Treaty of Mandisor with the British after their defeat at Mehidpur in 1818 and gave up their authority over the Rajputana states. Both these treaties gave full freedom to the British to enter into treaties with other Rajput chiefs without recognizing any native authority. These new treaties were generally more favourable to the British and had a more authoritative tone to them. While in 1803 the Indian states had enjoyed enough military and political status to negotiate with the British, with the defeat of the Marathas in 1818, the native chieftains were left with no other alternative but to accept the protection of the British. This is quite evident when we study the difference in the terms and conditions of the treaties signed with the states of Rajputana in 1803 and 1818.⁵⁷

With the establishment of control over Rajputana and Central India,⁵⁸ the British territorial boundaries extended on the Indian map. In all these arrangements, the main consideration was to guard against any future disturbance of public peace by the native powers and to

foster their absolute dependence on the Company. It was a warning for the native rulers not to take part in any hostile attempt against the Company. This shows us that the British were looking for allies like Ameer Khan. In the place of local ruling chieftains, they set out to create petty dependent courts exercising authority according to their 'fitness for rule', subject to the direct control of the British Government.⁵⁹

Another result of these treaties was the establishment of direct political relations with the Rajput princes in 1818. Sir David Ochterlony was appointed as the 'Resident in Rajputana and Commissioner General of the Rajput States'. The states accredited to him were Jodhpur, Kota, Bundi and Karauli.⁶⁰ The headquarters was to be in Rampur of Tonk.⁶¹

Ameer Khan, 'Nawab' of Tonk

In 1806, Jaswant Rao Holkar had assigned Tonk to Ameer Khan. Later, the British confirmed the right of Ameer Khan over Tonk by the treaty concluded in 1817. Henceforth, Ameer Khan adopted the title of 'Nawab' of Tonk. The entire principality given to Ameer Khan by the British consisted of 6 *parganas* (territorial-administrative units in a state) situated partly in Rajputana and partly in Central India. Tonk, Aligarh and Nimbahera were part of Rajputana, while Chhabra, Sironj and Pirawa were part of Central India. These *parganas* were not contiguous but were separated from each other by varying distances ranging from 20 to 250 miles. These *parganas* became the seat of government of Nawab Ameer Khan and Tonk became the centre of his principality. After his submission to the British, Ameer Khan remained faithful to the very end. When Lord William Bentinck visited Ajmer, Nawab Ameer Khan was among the first to present himself before the Governor General.⁶²

After becoming a Nawab, Ameer Khan passed much of his life engaged in acts of piety and in the company of religious scholars. The Nawab invited the family of the prominent Muslim scholar Syed Ahmad Bareilvi to settle in Tonk after the scholar's death in 1831. The emergence of Tonk as a kind of state whose ruler was deeply religious owed as much to these philanthropic activities as to the austere lifestyle adopted by the Nawab in keeping with the principles of Islam.⁶³ Henry T. Prinsep commented on the difference between his court and those of the other native rulers, which were marked by pompous display and ostentation. Ameer Khan presented himself as the champion of faith and a hero of his times.⁶⁴ He is said to have abided by the rules of *shar'ia* in his personal life. His successors, Wazirud Daulah (d. 1864) and Mohammad Ali Khan (d. 1867), continued with many of his policies. The ruling family of Tonk thus came to have certain

sacral associations. The graves of many members of the family were converted into cenotaphs and became places of pilgrimage. In the later period, *Urs* (day of passing into the presence of God) celebrations started taking place at the *mazaars* (grave shrines) of many members of the ruling elite like Naughaza Sahib, Mohne Mansoor Sahib, Sayed Mohammad Ali Sahib, Maulana Irfan Sahib, etc.⁶⁵ Therefore, it was as much through patronage as through personal example that the Nawab and his family were able to establish Tonk as a religious-minded principality.

Under Ameer Khan's rulership, Tonk also emerged as a vibrant cultural centre in North India.⁶⁶ Although he was illiterate, Khan showed great interest in the fields of art and scholarship. The emergence of Tonk as a prominent state under British rule has been associated, in large parts, with the contributions of the Nawab in preserving the region's distinct heritage, and in providing patronage to scholars, literati, theologians and various institutions of native education. Ameer Khan's active interest in patronising various art forms and culture came at an especially opportune time when the unstable political atmosphere of the sub-continent was witnessing the decline of the erstwhile centres of political and cultural pre-eminence like Awadh and Delhi. Khan's court provided asylum to people with different expertise and skills. Tonk slowly emerged as a major centre for poets, scholars, physicians, artists, etc. The Nawab patronized many scholars from Rampur and appointed them to various positions in his administration. Hakim Sayed Anwar Ali Rampuri (a Unani practitioner) took up service at Tonk as the teacher of the Nawab's son Mohammad Wazir Khan. Maulana Khaliqul Rehman Rampuri, a Pathan, who came to Tonk with the Nawab, was a great scholar of theology, Arabic and Persian. He established the *madrasa* of Motibagh which continues to function till the present. Maulana Mohammad Rampuri, a scholar and an expert of *fiqh* (Islamic law) was appointed as a *mufti* (judicial official) of the state.⁶⁷

Nawab Ameer Khan also admitted many of his earlier military associates and commanders into statecraft and gave them high positions in the administration. Mukhtar ud Daulah Mehmood Khan, a friend of his military days, was not an *alim* himself, but patronized various forms of arts and contributed immensely to Tonk's architecture. Khan's father-in-law, Akhonzada Mohammad Giyazkhan, a soldier, became renowned as a member of the *ahl-e saif* (nobles known for their military skills). Another confidant of Khan, Faqir Mohammad 'Goya', became a famous poet of his times (he was an ancestral relation of Josh 'Maliabadi', the famous 20th c. Urdu poet). Shadat Khan and Mohammad Shah Khan Sani, erstwhile commanders of his army, were appointed as *risaldar* (incharge of military contingent) of Tonk.⁶⁸

The association of Tonk with Islamic scholarship and culture does not mean that it was an exclusive state for Muslims. Tonk had a considerable number of prominent Baniyas and Kayastha (merchant and scribal castes respectively) persons in its administration. Often condemned by many for manipulating Ameer Khan and persuading him to sign a treaty with the British, men like Rai Daata Ram and Niranjan Lal were nevertheless very powerful in Tonk's court and society. Rai Daata Ram, who had been a *Diwan* (revenue minister) at the court of Bhopal, became one of Ameer Khan's closest confidants. He left this position in Bhopal due to a conflict, and soon after, came to Tonk with Ameer Khan and was appointed as the *Wazir* (chief minister) of the state. Any order from the Nawab was incomplete without his signature and *mohar* (seal). He was the one who was in-charge of the day-to-day running of the state. Niranjan Lal and the biographer of Ameer Khan, Munshi Busawan Lal, were also residents of the *mohalla* (locality) specifically meant for the well-to-do Kayasthas and Baniyas of Tonk.⁶⁹

In addition to patronising artists and litterateurs, religious leaders and able administrators, the Nawab also showed great interest in the field of education. In the early years of his reign, education was largely imparted by privately managed *maktabs* (primary and secondary schools providing Islamic education), *pathshalas* (native schools for Hindus), etc. The oldest amongst such native institutions of learning was the school run by Maulana Khaliqul Rehman near Motibagh. With time, the number of these traditional schools kept on increasing. Mosques also functioned as important centres of education. Privately managed schools were opened in two of the prominent mosques of Tonk, Qafala Masjid and Masjid Ajam Shah. The state provided these institutions with *jagir* (land grants or endowments) to encourage teachers and support such ventures. The subjects taught in these schools included languages like Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Hindi and Sanskrit, along with theology, logic and many of the rational sciences. Besides these schools, learned Hindu pundits and Muslim *maulavis* (scholars of law) ran schools in their houses. Though they did not receive regular salaries from the state, they were given financial aid in some way or the other.⁷⁰

It was only during the reign of Nawab Ibrahim Ali Khan (d.1930) that Western education became popular in the region. The first state-owned primary school was opened in 1870, which taught English along with the other Oriental languages. The number of Muslim students remained very low in these schools, since the culture of *madrassa* at every mosque was very strong in Tonk and people preferred to send their children there. Initially, the number of Muslim students in the primary schools imparting Western knowledge was five; later, in 1885-86, it increased to 238. Formal education remained

a strong feature of Tonk, so much so that a special Tonk Boarding House was built at Mayo College in Ajmer in 1878 for the children of the royal family.⁷¹

During 1857, the Nawab of Tonk Muhammad Wazir ud Daulah Mirza Khan remained loyal to the British. However, most of his troops sided with the mutineers at Delhi and deserted him. They also extorted money from the Nawab, declaring him a deserter from the faith and a Christian convert. Although he continued to inform the British about the movement of the mutineers and helped rescue some Europeans, in May 1857, the allowance that the Nawab's family had enjoyed from the Company State was stopped at the behest of the Commission of Delhi. In 1859 however, under the 'Act of Good Service, Loyalty and Fidelity during the Late Disturbance in Central India', the Nawab of Tonk was named among the list of awardees for his services to the British Empire.⁷² In acknowledgment of his services, the official salute of Wazir ud Daulah was raised from 15 to 17 guns, and he received a *sanad* (official deed) guaranteeing the succession of his family as per the Mohammadan law, in the event that there were no natural heirs. The subsequent Nawabs continued to enjoy friendly relations with the British authorities. The British bestowed high titles to the successive Nawabs, and the Government of India made one Nawab the 'Grand Companion of the Star of India and of the Indian Empire'. His full title was Aminud Daulah Wazirul Mulk Ali Khan Sir Hafiz Muhammad Ibrahim Ali Khan Bahadur Salat Jung G. C. S. I., G. C. I., E.⁷³ The 'Pindaris' had come a long way.

Notes

1. Edward Thornton, *The History of the British Empire in India*, Vol. IV (London: W. M. H. Allen and Company) 1843, p. 460.
2. William Lee-Warner, *The Native States of India* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1910), p. 112.
3. Sir John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India, including Malwa and adjoining Provinces*, 3rd edition, Vol. I (London: Parbury, Allen and Company), 1832, p. 338.
4. Dirk Kolff has coined the phrase 'military labour market'. According to him, in medieval India, there was a huge military labour market available for the employers, which consisted of many war-bands like 'Rajputs', 'Pathans', etc., who were ready to fight for appropriate payment. The Mughal, Marathas and Rajputs states also absorbed the soldiers provided by the tribal belt. For further details on this concept see Dirk H. A. Kolff, *Naugar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
5. For the details about the activities of the armed ascetics and such other groups see William Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), J. M. Ghosh, *Sanyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal* (Calcutta:

- Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1930), and A. K. Dasgupta, *The Fakir and Sanyasi Uprisings* (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi and Company, 1992).
6. R. W. Fraser, *British India, London, 1896*, 7th edition (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1916), p. 187.
 7. For further discussion see Birendra Kumar Sinha, *The Pindaris: 1798-1818* (Calcutta: Bookland, 1971), pp. 1-5.
 8. Records of the origin and progress of the Pindaris is available in the archival records of the Company. For complete details see NAI, Foreign Department, Miscellaneous Branch (FDMB), 1811-1820, Volume no. 124.
 9. Randolph G. S. Cooper, *The Anglo Maratha Campaigns and the Contest for India – The Struggle for Control of the South Asian Military Economy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), p. 32.
 10. Cooper, p. 33
 11. British records on Pindaris mentioned many names of leaders of big and small Pindari bands but the list does not contain the name of Ameer Khan as it does of the leaders Kareem Khan, Heeroo, Cheetoo, Dost Mohammad, Khwaja Buksh, Kadir Buksh, Sahib Khan & Tookoo Khan, Emaumbuksh, Meah Khan, Bappoo Khan, Nuseer Mohammad, Munnoo, Nuthoo, Sirmust Khan, Gunga Meah, Baba Chowdry, Jungulic (?), Rajah Khan, Doongah, Ibraheem Khan, Chainneah, Tantier, Rumzani, etc. NAI, FDMB, 1811-1820, Volume no. 124.
 12. Busawan Lal wrote the memoirs of Ameer Khan, trans. H. T. Prinsep, *The Memoirs of the Pathan soldier of Fortune: the Nawab Ameeroo dwalah Mohammad Amir Khan* (Calcutta: G. H. Huttman, Military Orphan Press, 1932), pp. 9, 13, 17, 20.
 13. Sinha, p. 78
 14. Frazer, p. 191.
 15. Along with Ameer Khan, the position of Nawab of Bhopal was also very crucial for the very same reasons. It was very important to strengthen the footing of the Nawab to give weight and consistency to the Muslim interest in the region. Lal, p. 399
 16. Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770-1830* (Delhi: OUP, 2008), pp. 213-216.
 17. Lal, p. 485. The description shows the Muslim character of Ameer Khan but we have to keep in mind that the text was compiled after he became the Nawab of Tonk and according to the treaty signed with the British he was also bound to change his Pindari habits. So this may be a deliberate portrayal of Khan to show the British that he was a devout Muslim.
 18. G. S. Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas*, Vol. III (Bombay: Phoenix Publication, 1948), p. 477.
 19. Maya Ram, *Rajasthan District Gazetteers Tonk* (Jaipur: Bharat Printers, 1970), p. 24.
 20. Muhammad Aijaz Khan, *Tarikh-e Tonk* (Tonk: Arabic Persian Research Institute, 1983), pp. 67-68.
 21. Khwaja Manzoor Husain has put forward his argument based on one *mushaira* which was said to have taken place sometime in A. D. 1818, the year when a treaty was to be concluded between Ameer Khan, the Pindari chief, and the Company. The report of the said *mushaira* is included in the *Diwan* (collection of literary pieces) of Zauq edited by Muhammad Husain Azad in 1932. He further elaborates that outside the precinct of the *madrassa* of Ghaziuddin, there were innumerable tents of the now-disbanded soldiers of Ameer Khan who became jobless due to the said treaty. These soldiers used to offer their prayers in the mosque located within the *madrassa*, and some of them also attended the said *mushaira*. Azad pointedly says that the couplets like *Gah hujum yaas me hai/ gah hujum hasrat me/ hai yeh mard sipahi pashal/ phirta lashkar lashkar hai* (the crowd is often overtaken by melancholic thought and often repentance; the professional soldiers are wandering from battalion to battalion) gathered a roar of appreciation from the audience. For further discussion and detailed account of the topic see Khwaja Manzoor Husain, *Tehreek-e Jadd wa Jihad: Batour Mauzo-e Sukhn* (Lahore: National Book Foundation, 1978).
 22. Sayyid Ahmad of Rai Bareli, or Barelvi, was an Indian Muslim revivalist. He is considered as a scholarly authority by Ahl-i Hadith and Deobandi movements. The urban morphology of Tonk and the nomenclature of the various *mohallas* therein as *qafila* show a marked influence of the movement of Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi. The living quarters of the family members of Barelvi were located in *qafila*; residential areas and *Ghol* were the areas where living quarters of the soldiers of Northern India were located.
 23. Syed Moinul Haq, *The Great Revolution of 1857* (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1968), pp. 51-52.
 24. For further discussion and a detailed account of the topic see Husain.
 25. Malcolm, p. 338.
 26. See Ghulam Rasool Mehr's *Sirat-e Saiyyid Ahmad Shaheed*, 1939, and Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi's *Sawan-e Saiyyid Ahmad Shaheed*, two volumes (Lucknow: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons Publishers, 1954).
 27. K. N. Panikkar, *British Diplomacy in North India: A Study of the Delhi residency, 1803-57* (Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1968), p. 181.
 28. Ameer Khan wrote a letter to the Resident of Delhi saying that since he was in need of money to maintain his troop, he was making incursions into the country of Nagpur; and that he had the approval of the Maharaja and all the complaints that the Company was receiving were from the courtiers and not from the Maharaja. He further said that he would stop his incursions if the Company agreed to assign him a *jagir* to maintain his troops. In reply, Seton wrote that 'if he can't maintain his troops he better disband them'. NAI, Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 20th March 1810. The army of Ameer Khan was defeated by the British army under the command of Colonel Close and provision was made to station the British force permanently to the 'northward of the Nerbudda' (Narmada) to avoid any further incursion of Ameer Khan or his Pindaris. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 2nd May, 1810, no. 27.
 29. Ameer Khan wrote a proposal in April 1803 mentioning his desire to quit the Holkar camp and was willing to join Nizam's camp. The British Resident had a long discussion with the Nizam's minister Mohipatram and the outcome was that Nizam was not opposed to take him in provided

- that he would not have to shoulder the entire burden alone. He asked the Company for support arguing that such was the multitude of the troops in Ameer Khan's party that without the assistance of the British government, the Nizam was unable to bear the whole expense. But Stevenson was neither empowered to assist the Nizam financially nor disposed to advise Mohipatram to close negotiations with Ameer Khan. He, however, reported the whole situation to Arthur Wellesley. For more details see Biswanath Ghosh, *British Policy towards the Pathans and the Pindaris in Central India: 1805-1818* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1966), pp. 14-15.
30. The Resident of Delhi got an intelligence report from the camp of Holkar which says '...Ameer Khan had come within a short distance of the camp, ravaging the country in the course of this progress that this had occasioned great alarm among the ministers and enemy and seemed conscious of their inability to oppose him'. It is further stated in the same report that a letter had been written by them to Col. Close in the name of the Raja to solicit that a detachment might be sent to that quarter against Ameer Khan, in which case it would be joined and cooperated with by the troops of the Holkars. NAI, Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 23rd March, 1810. For more such disputes see NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 29th May 1810, no. 91.
 31. A letter was received by the Resident of Delhi from Jaswant Rao Holkar which talks about the extent to which the management of the Holkar camp was influenced by the British since Rao's health was deteriorating continuously and powers in favour of British control were gaining strength. Due to this, news came that Rao had agreed to give Seronj (which was the *jaidaad* (property) of Ameer Khan) to British protection, For Further details see NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 16th January 1810, no. 54. For orders related to the annexation of the *jagir* of Ameer Khan by Jaswant Rao Holkar see NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 23rd January 1810, no. 91.
 32. The intelligence reports of the British news writer in Holkar's camp inform that Ameer Khan was proceeding towards Udaipur to meet the Rana to obtain money since the Rana was a tributary of Holkar and Ameer Khan was in greatest want of the money. Holkar's minister, Balram Seth, supported Ameer Khan in this endeavour. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 21st July, 1810, no. 38. For more insights on Bala Ram Seth, see NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 25th September, 1810, no. 98.
 33. The situation in the Rajputana when Ameer Khan took refuge there was singularly favourable for the freebooters, who thrived on chaotic situations. Man Singh, the Raja of Jodhpur, and Jagat Singh, the Raja of Jaipur, were determined to gain the hand of Krishna Kumari, the daughter of the Rana of Udaipur. While this issue was going on, Jaipur gave asylum to the posthumous son of Bhim Singh, the brother of Man Singh, who was in contention with his brother to seek the *masnad* (throne) of Jodhpur. This action of the Raja of Jaipur added to the present enmity and the Rajput states became once more divided by these two questions. Tensions were high and actual hostilities between these two Rajput states became so intense that this gave Ameer Khan a golden opportunity to benefit from the on-going rivalries. For more details on this episode see Ghosh, *British Policy Towards the Pathans*, pp. 36-39.
 34. A *vakeel* (representative) was sent by Jaipur to Delhi to discuss the critical matter related to Ameer Khan. He explained the dreadful situation of his state but the Resident pointed out the limitation of his interference in these matters since the British were barred by many treaties. The *vakeel* explained how his country was suffering from the mischief of Khan's troops and how the agriculturists were facing molestation. Khan had also demanded 30 lakhs rupees from them. He entreated the Resident that 'one word from you (Resident) would affect this, cannot that one word be spoken', see NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 25th September, 1810, no. 107.
 35. For the dealing of Ameer Khan with Udaipur and Jaipur see NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 6th August, 1810, no. 78 and 25th September, 1810, no. 104.
 36. Prinsep, p. 359.
 37. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 17th October, 1817, no. 9.
 38. One of such agents was Shahid Khan, though we do not get details of what they discussed in the meeting between the Khan and Resident of Delhi, since these agents were sent to avoid written correspondence. But we get a sense that cordial relations existed between the two. On arrival, an amicable reception was given to the agent and on his departure, he was presented with gifts helpful for his journey. For various such details see NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 25th August, 1810, no. 32, 5th June, 1810, no. 55, 16th June, 1810, no. 44, 28th December, 1810, no. 84.
 39. Thornton, pp. 460-461
 40. To stop Ameer Khan was essential now as it was feared that if he continued to exercise his plans in Rajputana, he would very soon be in possession of Udaipur, Jaipur and Jodhpur, which would have provided him with a revenue of almost 2 crores of rupees. With resources like these, his army could become invincible. See NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 25th September, 1810, no. 107.
 41. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 15th March, 1811, no. 69.
 42. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 4th September, 1812, no. 38
 43. Ghafoor Khan was one of the agents of Ameer Khan. He was situated in Holkar's court to keep Ameer Khan well aware of the situation in the court. Later, Ameer Khan was involved in a property dispute related to some *jagir* with him. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 25th January, 1812, no. 30, and Foreign Department, Political Branch, 15th July, 1817, no. 8.
 44. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 15th February, 1817, no. 70, and Foreign Department, Political Branch, 7th April, 1817, no. 18.
 45. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 15th February, 1817, no. 70.

46. Runmust Khan, son of the late Doondia Khan, in the service of the Raja of Jaipur, stated that he was in communication with several chiefs of Ameer Khan's army and could bring over a great part of his force if the authority would be given, NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 7th November, 1817, no. 30
47. Lal, p. 462.
48. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 7th April, 1817, no. 18, and Foreign Department, Political Branch, 7th April, 1817, no. 19.
49. In a situation of widespread anarchy, it was difficult for the British to trust anyone, especially a person like Ameer Khan. But the British took into consideration the fact that Ameer Khan was of advanced age by that time, and he was facing mutinies in his armies as well. Moreover, the British did not want to lose the offer of Ameer Khan's surrender of artillery, NAI, Foreign Department, Political branch, 7th April, 1817, no. 18.
50. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 27th March, 1818, no. 70-71.
51. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 24th April 1818, no. 42-43.
52. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 1st May, 1818, no. 39-42.
53. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 21st November, 1818, no. 36.
54. The British had spread a wide network of newswriters in the courts of all the local powers, and the British Residents continuously got reports from them through post or 'dawk'. These intelligence reports were very important for the policy-making of the British, and to receive them uninterruptedly it was important to assure the security of roads and the dawk system. But there are many incidences recorded that tell us how the Pindari activities disrupted this system, NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 30th January, 1818, no. 16.
55. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 20th February, 1818, no. 67.
56. Lee-Warner, p. 110.
57. To see the difference, we can take the example of treaty signed with Alwar in 1803 by Lord Wellesley and the treaty signed with Udaipur in 1818 by Lord Hasting. Whereas the treaty with Alwar talks about the establishment of permanent friendship and having the same friends and enemies, the treaty with Udaipur emphasized the isolation of the state. It pronounced that Udaipur neither interfere nor negotiate with other states. Thus, we see how the state was reduced to a subordinate position. For more discussion see Lee Warner, pp. 124-126.
58. After the Pindaris had been hunted down, the Nawab of Bhopal, Nazar Mohammad, was made a useful instrument in the negotiations for the surrender and settlement of several of the chiefs. Thus Namdar Khan and other principal *sirdars* (chiefs) of the *durrah* of Kareem Khan, were permitted to accept asylum in the Bhopal territory under the Nawab's guarantee of the continuation of their peaceful habits. Their men were distributed in various villages, and put under surveillance of administrative officers after being given small assignments of land. As a reward, *jagirs* were awarded to the Bhopal territory, which helped it to extend its boundaries westwards to the Kalee Sindh. The treaty was concluded on 26th January, 1818, and rectified on 3rd march. Prinsep, pp. 338-339.
59. Prinsep, p. 382.
60. NAI, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 24th April, 1818, no. 13.
61. Establishing the headquarters at Tonk also signifies the importance of Tonk for the British authority. This can be interpreted both ways as either it was done due to the friendly ties and complete faith in Ameer Khan or they wanted to keep him under continuous check.
62. Lal, p. iii.
63. The term
64. Lal, p. iv, vii
65. Aijaz Khan, p. 69.
66. *A report on the Administration of Tonk State 1927-28*, printed at the Tonk State Press, p.1
67. Aijaz Khan, p. 70-71.
68. Aijaz Khan, pp. 70-73.
69. Aijaz Khan, pp. 69-73.
70. Ram, p. 246.
71. Ram, pp. 246-7.
72. NAI, Foreign Department, Misc. Records, 30th December 1859, No. 383.
73. *A Report on the Administration of Tonk State 1927-28*, printed at the Tonk State Press, p. 2.