CHAPTER II

The Surat Riot of 1795: A Second Look

In August 1795, Surat, the premier port city of the Mughal Empire, saw a short, but concentrated spell of Hindu-Muslim rioting. Lakshmi Subramanian - the first to analyze the riot in detail⁷ - has defined it as "the response of a collapsing social order to the thrust of a highly adaptive banking and trading group which had adroitly allied itself to the rising English power on the West Coast of India". She goes on to observe:

The violent protest by the Muslims against the new order served only to reaffirm the significance of the Anglo-Bania alliance as the central fact in the unfolding political and commercial situation on the West Coast.⁸

Although uncovering a major axis around which the riot erupted, this analysis is cast overwhelmingly within the framework of a narrative that has its underpinnings in a broadly functionalist-Marxist discourse that accords primacy to the forces and relations of production, as the thrust and basis of social dynamics and historical explanation. Entrenchment in these premises, which have been part of the received tradition of a good deal of Indian historiography, has led Subramanian in her reconstruction to elide and gloss over other significant dimensions of the conflict, notably those pertaining to the articulations of religious doctrines and symbols in popular consciousness, as also the nature of their entanglement in contested civil and political spaces. As it transpires, these are all aspects on which the primary sources are not exactly silent.

It also seems to be the case that, under the weight of a mono-causal explanation such as the one advanced in this important essay by

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⁸ Ibid. p. 205.
Subramanian, the disparate body of events comprising the riot, along with the elements of social dissonance and fluidity compacted therein - *microevents* in terms of Victor Turner - tend to either disappear from the historical record or are displaced to its margins.

This chapter intends to follow a different tack in reconstructing the 'Hindu-Muslim' riot in Surat in 1795 A.D. It tries to work back into the text all those elements that indicate that the riot, albeit a violent protest against the 'Anglo-Bania Order,' simultaneously embodied wider and more pervasive features, signifying a rupture that was laden with greater historical agency than has found recognition in this reading. Deeply inflected with ongoing processes of identity-formation, as also those of disjuncture in the realm of the civic or the public in pre-colonial Surat, the riot drew upon expansive, iridescent notions of religious community articulated in and around the specificities of an urban environment. Although, perhaps, not unaware of these possibilities, Lakshmi Subramanian adopts the secular shift, *namely*, changes in the domain of political economy under the aegis of the East India Company and its corporate association of merchants, brokers and shroffs, coming to a head around the mid-eighteenth century, as her cardinal, even exclusive, figure for explaining the riot.

This chapter attempts an alternative reading of the riot, relying upon two connected methodological moves: a) assimilating as much as possible those parts of the primary evidence on the riot that have been glossed over, neutered, or scantily attended to in Subramanian's analysis; and b) turning these to account through an analysis of discrete moments that went into the articulation of the riot. In doing so the chapter aspires to be at least a thin version of Clifford Geertz's concept of "thick description."9 A

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9 Clifford Geertz, Ch. 1: 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture' in his *The Interpretation of Cultures*, London (Fontana Press), 1993, pp.3-32.
reconstruction along these lines holds the prospects of revealing the interplay of contingencies and long-term processes (i.e. elements of a longue duree) in determining the peculiar dynamics of urban social history in India, and broadens out into larger historiographic issues pertaining to religious/communal conflicts in India.

In order to articulate these positions the chapter explores the possibility of breaking down the Big Event called the Riot into a series of smaller processual units registered through the actions of individuals and/or groups, impacting on one another and culminating into the ‘Riot.’ From this angle a riot could be seen as a concatenation of a variety of “microevents” governed by different logics, and not necessarily as a rupture of the civic-order predicated on, and wholly contained in, the structures of political-economy and its short-term or longer-term crises. A reification of the latter, in historical writings has long withheld the development of insights into collective violence in South Asia as an enduring socio-historical phenomenon. In concrete terms a perspective concerned with event-structure as a problematic seems useful in two respects: One, it suggests the possibility of conjuring a riot in terms of an ensemble of concrete, specific moments and collective actions, which, in turn, may be located in wider structures of socio-economic change but without being necessarily imbued with and driven by a telos supplied by the latter; And, two, it enables one to capture the elements of flux and indeterminacy, implying a certain irreducibility of what constitutes the social, inhering in disturbances of this order. From this perspective, riots also embody more inchoate, and hence less quantifiable, planes of social change or dislocation than mainline historical thinking tends to permit.

The Riot: An Overview

It was the 4th of August 1795 A.D., very late into the night, when an alarm went up in Hing Pol, a rich ‘Bania’ neighbourhood of Surat.
A man had been seen climbing down the first floor of the house of Aditram Bhat, a leading Brahmin Shroff who worked for the English East India Company. With the neighbourhood waking up to the shriek of 'thief, thief', some of the residents, reportedly, joined the chase to apprehend the culprit who was fleeing away with his accomplices. The man was seized. It turned out, as it was claimed, that he was a darweish or a faqir who was the muezzin\textsuperscript{10} of a mosque in the vicinity of the house of Aditram Bhat.

Seized by the crowd, the 'culprit' was tied up with ropes until the early hours of the morning. He was then carried to the Bakshi of the town deputing on behalf of the Nawab; from there he was taken to Mr. M.G. Farmer, the English chief at Surat, from where he was brought back to the Bakshi, and then taken to the Nawab. From the moment of his seizure, and between and around the circuits of power he was conducted through, the cause for and against the Muezzin sharpened into a civic contest that quickly gathered to itself features of a religious strife. A day later, on 6th August, it broke out into full-blooded rioting in which Hindu shops and localities in the city came under the violent attack of large groups of Muslims.

The East India Company, which along with the Nawab of Surat ran a dual government, was quick to appoint a four member Committee\textsuperscript{11} with the brief of establishing the 'Cause' of the riot and identifying who its leaders were. Set up on 8\textsuperscript{th} August, 1795, the Committee assumed charge of its responsibilities forthwith, and held its first meeting on the following day. The investigations, which were spread over nearly a month, were held in camera in order to safeguard witnesses from the wrath of the rioters.

\textsuperscript{10} Generally referred to in the English record of the depositions as the "Crier" of the mosque, \textit{i.e.}, the man who gives the call to prayers, the \textit{azan}.

\textsuperscript{11} The four members of the Committee were: John Spencer, Edward Galley, Alexander Ramsay, and John Hector Cherry.
Seventy-seven people deposed before the Committee. The depositions, which were committed to writing, were elicited largely in response to a core of standardized questions. This appears to be the Committee’s notion of the format for ‘cross-examining’ witness accounts, one against the other.

The reconstruction of the riot in this chapter is based principally on the report submitted by the Committee on 22nd September 1795. Running into 189 large folio size pages, the bulk of the report consists of the depositions of the seventy-seven witnesses. Being among the first few instances when testimonies of people who had seen and experienced a riot first hand came to be recorded in considerable detail, the report is a unique piece of documentation. It makes it possible for us to see the riot from the eyes of participants-observers; and, also, occasionally hear them speak, albeit through an English medium _most of the times_, since the report comprises the English translation the depositions. However, on quite a few occasions we are privy to the original wordings of the witnesses spoken in a dialect of Hindi, that have been preserved in the English translation, either because they defied translation or the translator judiciously retained them to convey the sense of the indigenous.

This documentation allows us an inside view of the Riot: the events, the issues, and the contestatory themes that went into its making. Compared for instance with the accounts we come by in medieval chronicles, here the very attempt to establish the ‘facts of the case’ after a detailed scrutiny, enables us to peer deeper into social phenomena even as we become aware of the ‘essentialist’ presumptions which were a part of the ‘colonial’ textual imagination even at this early stage (although the use

12 See _Selection 87: Report of the Committee appointed to investigate the cause and find out the Promoters of the Riot which took place in Surat on 6th of August 1795_. Maharashtra State Archive (henceforth _MSA_), Bombay, f.50. The Report henceforth shall be referred to as _Col._
For more references to the Riot of August 1795 A.D. see _Surat Factory Diary_ (henceforth _SFD_), No. 32 of 1795, ff. 437-50, 550-67, 574-586, _passim_. Also _SFD_, Nos. 687 & 688 of 1795.
of the term ‘colonial’ in the context would be hardly appropriate). On the basis of a close reading of these witness accounts we have attempted a “thick description” of the riot, looking at it from multiple subject positions, trying to assay the nuances, motivations, and inconsistencies of individual stances and actors to the fast evolving situation as well as mapping the ideational complexes in which they were rooted.

The empirical materials yielded by this trenchant though limited attempt at interrogation provide a firm foundation for one to attempt a detailed, microscopic, reconstruction of the riot, dilating upon its many conflicted facets. Even when the depositions concur in their acknowledgment and substantive descriptions of an event, the salience ascribed to particular themes by the witnesses, individually or in groups (being, seemingly, protagonists of specific positions and causes), show considerable divergence. The chapter attempts to build an account of the riot and what it entailed in terms of issues and areas of conflict from as many ‘angles’ as one is able to discern in the body of the depositions.

The event as contested evidence

We may begin with what everyone seemed to agree the riot started with, *viz.*, the events of the 4th/5th night when the neighbourhood awoke to an alarm raised by the family of Aditram Bhatt upon encountering thieves in their house. As it transpired, the very first events in the conflict related to contests over evidence regarding the culpability or the innocence of the Muezzin, with claims and counter claims by the two parties in the dispute and which remained unresolved till the outbreak of the Riot less that two days later.

The very first depositions to be filed were of men directly involved in this ‘originary statement’ of the conflict: namely, Khushalbhai
Lakshmidat, the son of Aditram Bhatt, who deposed both for himself and his father; and the alleged culprit, the Muezzin, i.e. Muhammad Reza Bengali (alias Khwaja). Both depositions, in the first instance, were filed “at the sirkar of Nuwab Sufdur ud’ Dowleh Buhadur” prior to the institution of the Committee of Inquiry by the English. As expected, they made contrary claims as to what transpired the night before, the details of which are important for us.

According to Khushalbhai it was about one in the night when thieves entered his house from the rear. As he woke up he saw that one of them had opened an “escritoire” in the room he was sleeping in and had taken out “Gold Joys and Pearl ornaments value about 500 rupees” which he passed on to an accomplice. He had proceeded to break open another of those cupboards when Khushalbhai awakened the other members of his family. His wife, who was up by then, raised a cry whereupon she received a blow on the head and the thieves, leaping out of the window, took to the heels. As they were descending the ladder which they had used to scale the walls of the house, Khushalbhai threw a stone which struck one of them on the head. They were next seen fleeing to the musjid. Khushalbhai along with some of the neighbours who had stepped out after hearing the alarm, rushed to the mosque to seize them. While two men made their escape through the farther end of the mosque, a third came forward with his face covered with a cloth. He was instantly recognized by the wound on his head. The crowd seized him and brought him to “where they lived” and bound him. Within a short time some fifteen men from the mosque came demanding his release but people of the neighbourhood refused to give them up. For the crowd, the thief’s identity was confirmed beyond doubt when in response to a query as to why he was thieving, the man retorted ‘how anyone could have recognized him when there was no light in the

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13 The cumbersome spelling of names as they figure in the Report of the Inquiry Committee have been simplified and brought closer to modern conventions.
If he was not present in the house himself how could he have known that the house had no light, the crowd retorted! In his deposition Khushalbhai stated that he recognized the man presented before the sarkar as the one he had seen burgling his house. This in turn begs the question, ‘if there was indeed no light in the house, how it was that Khushalbhai could identify the man who had broken into his house?’ The conundrum remains unaddressed in the text of the Report submitted by the Committee of Inquiry.

The accused Muezzin, gave a completely contrary account of the event:

...at night hearing a disturbance and the cry of thieves, he awoke. There is in the Musjid a Pomegranate tree. He was standing there by a Tattee [bamboo-wood fencing] talking to the people when the Banians assembled there struck him over the head with a stick, and then binding him carried him to their street, and there kept him. Further (sic) he knows nothing relative to the robbery. He did not set his foot beyond the Tattee [a fencing of bamboo-wood]...14

In terms of hard facts the muezzin’s complicity in the theft hinged on three crucial bits of evidence: Did the muezzin use the ladder, was he hit by a stone or a stick, and, finally, the precise circumstances in which he was nabbed. As far as the wound on the suspect’s head was the clue to the thief’s identity, the verdict of the English Surgeon, Dr. Archibald Little, who was summoned by the English chief immediately after the matter came up before him, militated against the Muezzin’s declaration:

“the wound was 2 Inches in length, and nearly 1/2 an Inch in depth in the Centre, and that it had been given by a sharp pointed Stone or Brick” 15

14 Ibid., p. 60. The tattee refers to a bamboo fence.
15 Ibid., f. 8. Mirza Jan who was present when the doctor examined the wound on the muezzin corroborates that such was the doctor’s pronouncement, ibid., ff. 115. See also, Luximon Bawajee, ff. 104-05.
On the two remaining points, however, there is little unanimity in the accounts of the principal witnesses, and the Report of the Committee leaves much to be desired.

Did the muezzin use the ladder? In Khushalbhai’s first deposition, which was filed before the sarkar of the Nawab, there is no mention of the ladder as the contrivance with which the walls of his house were scaled.\(^\text{16}\) It figures for the first time in his subsequent declaration before the Chief, which is one of the two papers placed by him before the Committee of Enquiry on 10th August.\(^\text{17}\) The three people appointed by the Nawab to carry out an inspection of the site of burglary and “make particular inquiries as to the mode in which it had been effected”,\(^\text{18}\) — Mirza Jan (the Amin), Muhammad Shaw,\(^\text{19}\) and Namdar Khan - submitted reports that discounted the possibility of the use of the ladder by the thief. Mirza Jan records:

Muhammad Shaw remarked to Khushalboy that the place the Ladder was appeared so difficult of ascent that he could not conceive a Thief could have got up there and proposed that he should make some one attempt it, to satisfy him. His [Khushalboy’s] answer was that ‘the powers of a robber were very different from that of a Bannian.’\(^\text{20}\)

Namdar Khan reports the same: given the ladder they were shown and the height that needed to be scaled to get into the house it “appeared impracticable” that the ladder was used.\(^\text{21}\) Under instructions from the Nawab, Mirza Jan reported these findings to the Chief and also conveyed to him the Nawab’s wish that two people might attend on the part of the

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\(^{16}\) Cf. Ibid., ff. 59-60. The document is a translation of the original in Persian, “Dated the 19th Muhurrum 1210 of the Hijrah”.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., ff. 61-2. This is an English translation of the original which was consciously taken in “the hindoo (sic) language”, and is dated “Sravun vud 5th Wednesday 1851”.
\(^{18}\) Ibid. ff. 115.
\(^{19}\) He is described as the Qazi’s Naib, Ibid. ff. 106.
\(^{20}\) Ibid.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., ff. 156-7.
Chief and again assist in forming a judgment of the place. Before the Chief could do so riots had broken out.

In the English investigations, the ladder, somehow, is not accorded the centrality it deserved in establishing the muezzin’s guilt. The narrative maintains a curious silence over the particulars of this episode - although as we have seen, references to it are not wanting in the depositions.

Somewhat curious in this context are the two papers placed by the Chief before the Committee of Inquiry in his dispatch of 10th August. One of these is the declaration of a certain Nanna Bhoola who states that his house adjoins the musjid and that he was a witness to the muezzin daily ascending the wall (to get into the musjid?) by climbing up a ladder. Nanna had once even asked him to desist from it, but to no effect.

It is noteworthy that Nanna Bhoola’s testimony follows immediately after an English translation of Khushalbhai’s declaration before the Chief wherein, as stated earlier, for the first time the use of a ladder by the thieves is mentioned. Could Bhoola’s testimony have been an after thought, a piece of ‘secondary elaboration’ of the ladder thesis serving to bolster Khushalbhai’s altered version? The impression one gets is that the two papers, together, were designed to correct a critical lapse in Khushalbhai’s previous declaration before the Bakhshi which had been duly presented to the Chief and also placed before the Committee of Inquiry by the Nawab’s office. There is hence a specific mention of the fact that the first deposition was taken in Persian as opposed to the second

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22 Ibid., ff. 115. Cf. 106 where Luximon Bawajee confirms this and notes that Mirza Jan had asked the Chief to send Luximon with him to check out the veracity of his observation.
23 Ibid., ff. 115-16; 106.
24 Ibid., ff. 62.
25 Ibid., ff. 128.
which, as if to restore the balance, was taken before the Chief in the "hindoo language".26

On the other hand, if the Nawab was aware of the ladder as the alleged instrument of the burglary - which he evidently was, having sent his men to ascertain the "mode" of the theft - why does it not find a mention in Khushalbhai's declaration before his sarkar? Do we have here an indication that the evidence was suppressed? Or, conversely, did the Nawab's government order a formal inspection of the site on the following day to counteract the amended version tendered by Khushalbhai in his subsequent deposition made before the Chief on the 5th? Both Mirza Jan and Abdur Rahim were present on this occasion and they would have brought the Nawab news about this development. One might have been inclined to subscribe to the latter view had it not been for the evidence furnished by Abdur Rahim, the Bakhshi's special khidmutgar, which indicates that the formal inspection of the site of robbery (which took place on the 6th, shortly before riots broke out) was preceded by one the day before. Faced with the contradictory claims of Khushalbhai and the Muezzin in their declarations before him, the Bakhshi had dispatched Abdur Rahim to ascertain the truth. This is what he records:

"My Master... said to me God only knows the truth[,] [G]o with Khushalbhai's man (his name was Nannaboy) and examine the place where he says the robbery was committed. When I arrived there a short Ladder was Shawn to me placed against a corner wall. [A]nd I was told that the Thief had from that Ladder entered the windows of the upper story. I confess it appeared to me impracticable and I observed to the people present that without wings such a thing could not be effected, I asked if they had any witnesses of the fact asserted. They said "all the witnesses th[ere] are, are gone to Durya Muhull, we here [did] not see it." I returned to my Master with a re[port] that I had obeyed his orders and from what I h[ave] seen I could not

26 According to Mirza Jan the deposition was taken in Gujarati, ibid., ff. 114. But Ubdur Ruheem, who was also present, says it was in Hindi, ff. 128; and so does Khushalboy, ff. 66.
conceive how the robbery could have been effected as was asserted".\textsuperscript{27}

Since this occurred before the Chief had a chance to examine the matter,\textsuperscript{28} it is unlikely that the Nawab’s response was aimed at stemming a mischief. The inconsistencies of the evidence on record make it difficult to conclude anything for sure.

The third crucial point related to the precise circumstance in which the muezzin was seized. What was the muezzin doing then, and where exactly was he nabbed - in the musjid or around it? Once again, there seems little unanimity not just in the body of the evidence, but even in successive depositions and statements of the principal witnesses, Khushalbhai and the muezzin.

As we know, the Muezzin had initially stated that he was awakened by the alarm of theft and was standing near a tree when the Banias hit him with a stick. However, if Abdur Rahim’s testimony is relied upon, by the time the matter came up before the Chief a slight variation had possibly occurred even in his version:

The Bengalee affirmed his innocence, and said ‘blow me from a Gun if I am guilty. These people wounded me with a stick as I went to the Tuttee to know what the noise was I heard and which I conceived to arise from their usual ceremonies on an Eclipse. They called out to me, “where is our Thief, where is our Thief”. “What Thief do you talk about said I” on which I received a blow on the head with a stick...\textsuperscript{29}

On the other hand, while Khushalbhai, in his first statement, had said that the thief “on receiving the blow fled to the Musjid... the neighbours and they of the house ran towards the mosque saying their thief was there and the above described person coming forward covered with a

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. ff. 127-28.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. This is clear from the sequence of events in Abdur Rahim’s deposition.
\textsuperscript{29} Abdur Rahim’s deposition, ibid., p. 128.
certain new facts entered his second recount of the event. Here the thief not only “ran off and entered the Mosque in the sight of all the Street People”, we are also told that they of the neighbourhood “afterwards assembled and went into the Mosque with a lighted Mushal [torch] when two Persons ran off, and this one was secured”.31

And what do the neighbours testify? An important witness is Parmananddas Shamdas who lived opposite Khushalbhai, their houses separated only by a narrow lane. He saw the entire drama from the moment the alarm was sounded till the Muezzin is apprehended it differs from it in some of the finer details. As Shamdas claimed, he had not only seen the Muezzin and his accomplices descend the ladder, he also recognized him by the moonlight and called out that it was Khwaja. His son, sleeping in the front portion of the house facing the musjid, and who had opened the window on hearing him scream, saw first three men and then, behind them, Khwaja running away towards the musjid.32 What happened then?

By this time all the neighbourhood were alarmed and assembled in front of my house and seized the Khwajeh or Mu-ezzin just as he had got over the Tattee, which marks the boundary of the Musjid.33

In this account, as we can see, Khwaja was nabbed before he could really make it to the musjid - although the simultaneity of people getting up from slumber, assembling in front of a house, and nabbing a thief in the act of running to safety to a place straight up front does sound rather improbable.

31 Ibid. p. 61.
32 Ibid. ff. 72-3.
33 Ibid. ff. 73. See ff. 79-80 for the testimony of Sewuckram, the son of Purmanundass Shamdas.
Not surprisingly, the foibles of evidence regarding the truth of the matter affected the Nawab and the English no less than the common folk. Both of them put forth contradictory accounts of the initial event. The Chief’s version, evidently based on Khushalbhai’s declaration before him, is the same, on this particular point, as what Khushalbhai testified to in the Bakhshi’s presence. All the same, there is an important difference: In his first two ‘depositions’ Khushalbhai had maintained that they seized the man as he came forward from the Musjid-end covered in a cloth. While the Chief here states that at the time he was nabbed the Muezzin was sitting inside the mosque with his head covered with a blanket. Which of these authoritative statements does one regard as authentic?

In his final deposition before the Committee of Inquiry Khushalbhai retracted even further, from both of his earlier positions - the one in Persian as well as the second in the “hindoo language” - and states that they caught the man just as he was on the point of crossing the wooden fencing which was the mosque’s boundary with the neighbourhood. Thus in terms of stringency of evidence it is difficult to nail the muezzin.

How, then, does one account for the discrepancies? One very likely possibility is that these witness accounts are additive, combining varying degrees of ‘hearsay’ with what was actually seen. Perhaps, the long drawn-out nature of the enquiry itself gave individual recall a chance to become enmeshed with more synthetic accounts churned up by acts of collective-cumulative recall outside the precincts of the formal inquiry, blurring the distinction between what was actually seen by one witness with what other participants in the drama reported having seen. Intrinsically to the construction of such accounts would be the impulse on the part of special interest groups of participants thrown on one or the other side of a cause of drumming up

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34 Ibid. pp. 57-8.
35 “Tattee” refers here to a wooden fence. The word is still used in Hindustani, as in khus ki tattee.
observations to produce matching versions. What seems more pertinent in
the specific recant of Khushalbhai is the urge to ward off, in the aftermath
of a bloody religious strife, charges of violating sacred space by virtue of
having entered the premises of the musjid to apprehend the muezzin. However, none of the depositions on the ‘Muslim’ side makes a point
about this although many adduce ‘religious prejudice’ as the basis of Hindu
action against the muezzin.

**Claiming the offender’s body: the contested civic jurisdiction**

The first act of Khushalbhai and the people of Hing Pol, after the
muezzin’s seizure, was to secure him with coir ropes. A crowd of
something like two hundred was now gathered around him and very soon
rival claims over the person of the muezzin came to the fore in which
deeper issues relating to shifts in the nature of civic jurisdiction and those
stemming from suspicions or implicit averseness of social groups towards
one another became intertwined.

Shortly after his arrest, about 2.00 in the morning, the man’s wife,
came to the Fateh Musjid to which the Muezzin’s nephew, Panah Allah,
was attached to seek his help. They next contacted Haji Ghulam
Moinuddin who lived in the vicinity of Hing Pol and was himself the
muezzin of the Hussaini mosque to intercede on behalf of the Bengali faqir.
Panah Allah and Ghulam Moinuddin provide critical information on the
networking of support in defense of the beleaguered muezzin. But to this
we shall turn a little later in greater detail. Taking a peep from the musjid
he was attached to Ghulam Moinuddin saw an assembly of two to three
people and was deterred. He decided on reporting the matter to the Amin. At
about 3.00 in the morning news of the disturbance was brought to the

36 Cf. in particular the question put to Khushalbhai by theand his answer thereto *Ibid.* ff. 71.
38 Ghulam Moinuddin’s deposition, pp. 137-42: and for Panah Allah, pp. 143-48. These are
among some of the most detailed depositions in the Report.
quarters of the Amin, Mirza Jan, by these men who were heard pleading “Furyad, Furyad”, and, in response, he dispatched with them a sepoy with the instruction that they should go to the Durbar (the Nawab’s residence) from where they should take two more sepoys and then bring the man held in confinement to the Durbar. On reaching there they “were informed that the watch had [already] given the alarm, and that two sepoys had gone for the same purpose”. They therefore reached the spot where the muezzin was held but, as Ghulam Moinuddin reports, the “Hindoos” refused to surrender the man. They said:

...two people have been here from the Durbar, and we would not give the thief up to them, nor will we to you, we have acquainted Luximon, we hold the man the Company’s offender, and, in the morning, we will take him to the Chief. I fell at the feet of Aditram, and begged, that he would, if he liked, put fetters on the Prisoner’s feet, but for God’s sake to unbind his arms, to which he would not listen. I now returned to Mirza Jan.

The sequence of events described by these two witnesses is largely confirmed by Khushalbhai’s detailed, third declaration - with one exception: his account includes a reference to fifteen to twenty armed Muslims who had come to take custody of the accused prior to the appearance of the Nawab’s sepoys. The crowd had not given in to them and even aired the resolve of resisting them if they used force. So they went away. Since this important detail is absent from the depositions of key witnesses on Khushalbhai’s side one tends to see in it a piece of fabrication by Khushalbhai to justify his recalcitrance vis-a-vis the “ancient” and hence hallowed Nawabi authority.

Even as the Nawab’s government was struggling to bring within its purview what clearly appears to be an ordinary ‘law and order’ situation,

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40 Ibid. p. 138.
41 Cf. Ibid. ff. 63-4.
the parties to the dispute initiated independent lines of action: one seeking to bring in the English Chief, the other reaching out to Muslim ‘solidary’ groups for rescuing the muezzin.

    Returning to Mirza Jan, Panah Allah and Ghulam Moinuddin reported what had transpired and were told that no action could be initiated until the morning since the Muezzin had been held under charges of theft and the people in whose custody he was intended to refer the matter to Luximon (an agent of the English, the “Chief’s Purboo”, as he is described) and the Company.\footnote{Ibid. ff. 139. Cf. ff. 113-14.} It was only between nine and ten in the morning that Mirza Jan formally reported the matter to the Nawab.\footnote{Ibid., ff. 114.} News of the disturbance, however, had traveled much faster through the city and people in the Bhandarahwarah - a locality evidently associated with the Bhandarah weavers, who had played a major role in the outbreak of the riot - were up and about even in the early hours of the morning. Dismayed by a lack of initiative on the part of Mirza Jan, Ghulam Moinuddin and Panah Allah had repaired to these Muslim quarters to enlist the support of the Bhandarahs to press the cause of the muezzin before the Bakhshi (and pressurize him into action).

    I went to the Bhandarahwarah with the Nephew of the man confined and told the Mahommedans there who were assembled before their doors, having heard what was passing, that I could get no answer from Mirza Jan for that night, pray ten or twelve of you come with me to the Durbar, to urge our complaint and get him unbound.\footnote{Ibid. ff. 139.}
Joined by a number of Bhandarahs, this motley band arrived, waving the Muezzin’s clothes soiled in his blood, first at the house of Mirza Jan, and then at the Durbar. In both places the reply they got was the same as the one given them earlier and they had to leave: “We had not got further than the Chowk, when the Gun fired. The day being near we agreed to go to the Bukhshee’s”.  

As was his wont in the mornings, the Bakhshi was sitting out in his verandah in the Darya Mahal looking out on the Tapti when cries of “Furyad, Furyad” rent the year. Ghulam Hussain and an old Bhandarah were called up and allowed a hearing. The Bakhshi thereafter summoned his special khidmutgar, Abdur Rahim, and instructed him

[T]o go with two sepoys, whom he said ‘you will keep at a proper distance and tell the Hindoos to come to me with their Prisoner. I will investigate their case and do them justice; but it is not customary that Bannians should bind and detain a Man from midnight till now amongst themselves’.  

An observation by Abdur Rahim, immediately after this, indicates that the question of jurisdiction was beginning to come to the forefront. He says pointedly:

“I must here add the Bukhshee gave me orders to say this to the Hindoos having learned they had refused to deliver him to the people sent from the Durbar”.

Though contestations over jurisdiction had been widespread in Surat during much of the eighteenth century, and were never really absent from the specific events of 1795, the Bakhshi’s attempt to wrest control of the situation by deputing his special servant on the job drew upon this older vein of civic life with renewed vigour. By the time Abdur Rahim reached

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45 No where in the various narratives does it figure whence the muezzin’s blood-stained clothes were procured by these people and it seems difficult not to see in such accounts an attempt to dramatize the issue.  
46 Ibid.  
48 Ibid.
the spot, Khushalbhai had already left to seek help from the agents of the East India Company - Luximon Ransoor and Luximon Bawaji, both described as the “Chief’s Purboo” - and Abdur Rahim’s attempts to carry out his brief were met with a mixture of recalcitrance and derision from the people assembled around the besieged Muezzin. This is what Abdur Rahim records:

On my approach they called out, ‘take care, take care, this is our Thief, don’t unbind him, don’t take him away’: I answered, all the World knows the Bukhshee’s justice, he is not guilty of oppression. You cannot think of taking justice at [sic] your own hands, come along with me and bring the Prisoner with you, and whatever is proper will no doubt be done’. They replied, ‘No, we will neither attend you, nor shall you carry him away’. I against said, ‘what is this? I never heard of anything like this in the Town before. It is customary to carry a Thief before the Hakum [sic] and you have kept this man bound since a little after midnight. If you chuse [sic] come along to the Chief. I also sent Shankar Bania a sensible man to tell Aditram, how ridiculously these people were acting and to advise them to go with me to the Bukhshee Saheb’s. I received for answer that they had applied to Luximon and till they got his answer I should not carry him away, giving me the Chief’s Dawaye [Dohai] (or warning to withhold in his name). Hearing this I kept one sepoy with me and sent the other to acquaint my Master with the state of affair. They abused my sepoy and on his expressing his discontent I told him, never mind, even swallow abuse for once; but he said he was a sepoy and could not bear abuse. I restrained him with difficulty...4

In the perception of the people sympathetic to the Muezzin’s plight, but especially among officers and servants of the Nawab’s government, the crowd’s conduct constituted an affront to Nawabi authority. It violated prevalent notions of legitimate sovereignty that were analogous with the rights of ‘ancient government’. Despite the fact that the English had consolidated themselves as equal masters of the city after the “Castle Revolution” of 1759,50 the Nawab’s functionaries could still bristle with

40 Ibid. ff. 125. See ff. 133-34 for the deposition of Shankerdas, Aditram’s servant, who corroborates Abdur Rahim.
50 See Lukshmi Subramanian, op.cit.
resentment at the shift of loyalty to the English by a resourceful section of the city's populace. Gulab Moolchand’s testimony offers a brief confirmation of this reaction:

What exclaimed Abdur Rahim you warn me in the Chief’s name, and not we the Government, and of ancient times. Your Chief is of yesterday.\textsuperscript{51}

And when someone in the mob, reportedly, hurled derisions at these ineffectual guardians of public peace, it was adding insult to injury:

A fat B[r]ahmin with large whiskers said from the seat before the Door, the Nawab’s man had come there and gone away again and that they would break their Selah [?]. On this I could not keep my temper hearing my master so reviled.\textsuperscript{52}

The guilt of transgression was not lost upon even those who had thrown in their lot with the English. Thus Khushalbhai, justifying the recourse to agents of the Company, admitted:

“I approved [this line of action] from an apprehension of partiality in the Durbar, although I am a Durbar subject.”\textsuperscript{53}

Similarly, Shankerdas, whom Abdur Rahim describes as a “sensible man” (and whose testimony substantially confirms his deposition on these particular points), records his unease at being asked by his master, Aditram Bhat, to prevent Abdur Rahim from carrying away the muezzin:

“I answered how can I stop the Bukhshee’s favourite servant”.\textsuperscript{54}

Outrageous as this might have been, Abdur Rahim was nonetheless prevailed upon to postpone his undertaking until an appropriate moment. But, significantly, he relented only after having heard from the crowd a

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. ff. 82. 
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. ff. 132: the deposition of Ali Muhammad Khan, one of the two sepoys who accompanied Abdur Rahim to extricate the muezzin from the clutches of the mob. The other sepoy, Abdul Ghafoor, says that it was a “Settiah” who openly mocked at the Nawab calling out from his upstairs window, ff. 131. 
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. ff. 64-65. Similar is the refrain one senses through the admissions of Shankerdas, Aditram's servant. See ff. 132-37. 
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. ff. 132-33.
peculiar form of incantation - the Dohai of the English Chief and the East India Company.

'Dohai': invoking authority, declaring allegiance

This concept, rendered as "Dewaye", or "Warning" in English documentation, figures recurrently in many of the depositions which indicate that it was a populist mode of invoking authority and swearing allegiance to it. It was resorted to by groups and individuals, apparently, at times of conflict. The invocation was a way of announcing one's preferred court of appeal and, in Surat about the time of the 1795 Riot, it had gained an unusual degree of legitimacy. Shankerdas’s words eloquently bear out the meaning of the concept as well as indicate how the crisis of jurisdiction was expressed in and through it:

I went to Aditram... [and] told him that Ubdur Ruheem the Bukhshee’s man was come with some sepoys and was carrying the Prisoner. He said stop them. I answered how can I stop the Bukhshee’s favourite servant. In consequence of his orders I came out and gave Ubdur Ruheem his [Aditram’s] Dewaye, without taking the name of the Company & the Chief; but on his asking ‘whose Dewaye do you give me,’ I called Aditram to the window & desired him to answer, when he gave the Dewaye in the name of the Company and the Chief. They were carrying him away, when I again represented, ‘You hear the warning they have given you, stay a moment till Khushalboy comes from Luximon’s house & then carry him where you please."

It was six in the morning and Luximon Ransoor, the English agent, was still in bed when Khushalbhai knocked at his door and informed him about the happenings of the night. In particular he wanted Runsoor to “give him a Peon to carry the Thief to the Chief’s Garden”. Not having one at the moment, Runsoor sent his servant, Subhan, with Khushalbhai to

55 Ibid. ff. 133. There is a touch of rancour, and also perhaps threat, in Abdur Rahim’s reminder to Shankerdas, when he saw him somewhat later at the Bakhshi’s, about the business of invoking of Dohai: “take care,” he said, “I have not told my Master whose Dewaye you gave. Don’t mention in whose name it was” (ff. 134). See the depositions of Ghulam Moinuddin (ff. 139-40) and Panah Allah (ff. 144) where they say the Hindus gave the Dohai of Luximon and the Company.
56 Luximon Ransoor’s deposition, COI, ff. 108. Khushalbhai had sought the help with reference to “some sepoys in the name of the Amin who had demanded [the Muezzin’s] release”. Also see ff. 82.
Luximon Bawaji, the other English agent, asking him for the same help. While these arrangements were afoot a messenger from Hing Pol hurriedly brought them news of the efforts that were on to take away the muezzin. Luximon sent him back with the instruction that the man was to be brought before him first, and in order to ensure this he followed it up by dispatching a Muslim and a Parsi to repeat the same instruction to Abdur Rahim. The latter appeared to give in and abide by the instruction, but just as the muezzin was being led out of Hing Pol tied by one hand, Abdur Rahim played a ruse to ensure it would the Bakhshi’s primacy that would prevail upon the rest in settling the issue: On the pretext of trying to avoid the filth on the road, he took the Muezzin through the musjid and, once out in the bazar, pronounced that he was obliged to first present the man to his master. However, it was not long before he turned up with the muezzin at the house of Luximon Bawaji.

At Darya Mahal the Muezzin had declared his innocence and expressed a willingness to submit himself to a test by ordeal. But while on his way to Bawaji’s where he was being taken on the orders of the Bakhshi himself, he made a loud appeal for help from the community of Muslims at large. Only two witnesses have left a record of this critical moment: Ghulam Moinuddin and Panah Allah, the two who had stood steadfast in their defense of the Muezzin right from the start and were also among the first to carry news of his plight into the Muslim areas of the city. In their testimonies we encounter another form of Dohai, a significant one.

Panah Allah, the Muezzin’s nephew, says:

On their way to Luximon’s the Prisoner began to call out, ‘I give the Dewaye of the Rusool & of the Chehar Yaree, the Banias have beat and pinioned me, and the Bukhshee, who is our Governor, is delivering me into the hands of the very same Kafir
who has so ill used me. Let the Mohummedans get me released from their hands, and get justice done before any of the Governors', when the Dewaye of Chehar Yaree was circulated by Bengalees, Hindustanees and others who were present...61

The Char-Yari (or Chahar Yari) was the cult of a revitalizing Sunni Islam, the char yar being a reference to the four pious caliphs who succeeded Muhammad. As religious credo, char yari valorized the four caliphs, together, in direct negation of the Shia practice of privileging Ali, the fourth caliph, alongside the stylized, ceremonial, (and at some stage also public) denigration of the three preceding caliphs regarded as usurpers of Ali’s rightful claim to succeed the Prophet. Avoiding a more detailed reference to the implications of this curious practice at this point in the story, one may note briefly that in Sandria Freitag’s significant study of the emergence of religious identities in North India, the cult of Char Yari is recognized as a critical site in defining the boundaries of a distinct Sunni identity in opposition to Shiaite Islam, particularly the latter’s association with the ritualized abuse - tabarra - of the first three caliphs.62 Freitag’s locale is early twentieth century Lucknow and her problematic, the construction of “communalism” and of “public arenas” in the interstices of colonial rule. Later in the chapter we will return to the implications of the Dohai of Char Yari and its potential for community mobilization in late eighteenth century Surat.

Ghulam Moinuddin provides some more important details regarding the Muezzin’s mode of invocation:

As they were carrying him to Luximon’s he exclaimed, ‘Dewaye! Dewaye! in the name of God, of the Prophet, and the Chehar Yaree! tell the Siyuds, tell the Mussulmans that the Bukhshee has delivered me to the very Hindu that had

61 Ibid. ff. 146.
maltreated me, make it known to all [,] and that I am innocent’. When he was being carried to Luximon’s, twenty five or fifty Mussulman’s assembled there. Some went to tell the Siyud (who was their general Preacher) others their Brethren, and I went to break my fast.63

Significantly, Abdur Rahim who was with the Muezzin all this time maintains an intriguing silence on the subject.

If Luximon Bawaji’s words are any further indication, by now the rather simple issue of theft in a locality of the city was not only embroiled in a jurisdictional clash but also, concomitantly, deeply tinged in the colours of an impending conflict between religious communities. He ascribes the following remarks to Abdur Rahim when he came to his place with the accused:

“You see these Hindus and Bania’s, how they are breeding Disturbance in the Town, they have beat this Fukeer, without any fault, for which reason the Bukhshee has sent him to you”.

And Luximon remonstrated thus:

What do you bring him to me for? When I sent a sepoy in the Chief’s name, you would not give him up, carry him back to your master, and I will report to mine what has happened: you say he is not at fault, he is however the Person that committed the Robbery last night, ask him what he says now.65

Prior to any proper investigation, as we can see, the patrons of the disputing parties had taken sides and Abdur Rahim’s presumption of the Muezzin’s innocence was matched by Luximon Bawajee’s conviction of his guilt.

63 Ibid. ff. 140.
64 Ibid. ff. 103. Khushalboy, Shinkerduass, (Aditram’s servant), and Shereboy (Luximon Bawajee’s own sepoy) who were all present on this occasion, however, do not report these particular remarks of Ubdur Ruheem (cf. ff. 65, 134, 155-56).
Before returning to Darya Mahal with the Muezzin, Abdur Rahim asked Bawaji to send Khushalbhai too to the Bakhshi so that he may be apprised of what had actually transpired. Bawaji records the reactions of Khushalbhai and also his own course of action:

Khushalboy, much alarmed, said to me, ‘I am afraid to go to the Bukhshee’s, some of the Mussulmans will kill me, or do me some mischief’. I assured him nothing could happen to him, and observed that the affair was now before the English Government, which would prevent the Bukhshee from deciding it, but at his request I ordered two Peons to accompany him to the Durya Muhull. Thinking it might not be proper for the English Government Sepoys to appear at the Bukhshee’s, I sent another man to bring back those I had given to Khushalboy as soon as he should arrive at the Durya Muhull.66

At Darya Mahal, where a group of Muslims had already gathered, the matter was taken up afresh. Gokulnath Mehta, the Bakhshi’s munshi, took down the testimonies in Persian. As before, the muezzin and Khushalbhai told contrary tales, necessitating Abdur Rahim to be dispatched forthwith to take a look at the site of burglary and gather witnesses from Hing Pol. The discordance that he observed between the height that had to be scaled to get into Aditram’s house and the size of the ladder allegedly used convinced him of the implausibility of the charge against the muezzin. And of witnesses he could find none. They, including Aditram, had all by then taken to the Garden of the English Chief, to report the matter to him, expressing their misgivings and seeking his direct intervention.

In his final deposition, which as we know was before the Committee of Inquiry, Khushalbhai noted that soon after his testimony had been recorded at the Bakhshi’s, he was abused and threatened:

66 Ibid. ff. 103-04.
“Soon after some Siyuds assembled there also, who with the Bukhshee’s Mohummedan servants and others, said to me ‘we will spit in your Mouth, make you a Mussulman as well as all your Neighbours and plunder your Houses’.”

The English report on the riot accords prime importance to this evidence, although there is no corroboration for it in the depositions of the other witnesses. Conspicuously enough, there is no reference to it even in the deposition of Shankerdas, although he was present in the lobby of Darya Mahal where the testimony was recorded in writing, and he had not failed to notice the presence of a Sayed there. In his testimony he drew attention to the fact that:

“[T]here was disturbance out of doors, when an adopted Brother of mine called to me to take care of what I did, for my life was not safe, to relinquish everything even at the expense of my service and come home with all speed”.

Aditram’s fears, however, are of a piece. He told Bawajee when the latter arrived on duty at the residence of the English Chief:

“[M]y son Khushalboy is at Durya Muhull, we are afraid of the People there, and wish to represent our Case to the Chief, that he may do us Justice, for we don’t expect to meet with it at the Durbar from Mohummedans”.

The Chief immediately ordered for two chobdars, one to go to Durya Mahal asking for the accused to be brought to him, and the second to summon Mirza Jan. In a short while they arrived. A carpet was spread “as there were many respectable Bannian Merchants assembled”.

In the meanwhile, Ghulam Moinuddin and Panah Allah who were away during the time the Muezzin and Khushalbhai were brought before

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67 Ibid. ff. 65-66.
68 Ibid. ff. 7-8. For, the English argued, if this could happen in the Durbar there was every justification for removing the inquiry from the Nawab’s cutchbery and taking it within their own purview if only for a while.
69 Ibid. ff. 134.
70 Ibid. ff. 104.
71 Ibid. ff. 104.
the Chief, and whose absence appears to be a bit intriguing in the light of a peculiar anomaly in their accounts which need not detain us here, reached Darya Mahal. They had come at the behest of the Muezzin's wife, and perhaps with his mother-in-law in tow, to apply a paste of turmeric and oil to the man's wound and allay his distress. Panic struck them when they learnt that Muezzin had been transferred to the Chief. Dropping the potion they fled to the English Garden only to be barred from entering the Chief's premises by sepoys guarding the gates. They hung outside while the contentious issue was under deliberation within.72

In the presence of "Mughal Officers of Justice" the evidence was again recorded.73 This time, though, it was in Gujarati.74 Thereafter, Doctor Little was asked to examine the wound on the Muezzin's head. His verdict was that it had been caused by a stone and not a stick as the Muezzin claimed. For the English Chief this was clinching evidence of the man's crime.

Civic arenas, political domains, community

The papers of this inquiry, along with the doctor's report and the earlier depositions in Persian which Abdur Rahim had brought with himself from the Bakhshi's, were now delivered to Mirza Jan to be handed over to the Nawab. The Chief instructed him:

"to carry the Prisoner to the Durbar and beg the Nawab would order a proper and strict Enquiry to be made before the Officers of the Government whose duty it was to take cognizance of and decide on such cases".75

72 Ibid. ff. 147. From Ghulam Moinuddin's account it appears that the Muezzin's mother-in-law had accompanied them, cf. ff. 141.
73 Cf. Ibid. ff. 07. The Chief made a point of informing the Committee of Inquiry that the evidence was recorded in their presence. Also on this see Mirza Jan, ff. 114, where he says "the Chief desired me to take the declarations afresh..."
74 Ibid. ff. 114. According to Abdur Rahim in "hindee."
75 Ibid. ff. 105.
Both Aditram and Khushalbhai were unnerved by the prospects of going to the Durbar and unequivocally stated their apprehensions to the Chief:

“Sir, if you are going to send us to the Mughal Government for Justice, we are afraid we shall not meet it, and from the menaces we have received from the Mussulmans, we are even fearful of our Lives”.\(^{76}\)

The Chief pointedly drew Mirza Jan’s attention to these remarks:

“Listen to what they said... take good care that...no harm happened to the Complainants”.

And Mirza Jan assured him it would not.

What exactly was the nature of power between the two, is a question worth looking into. In Mirza Jan’s reportage, the Chief’s instructions are both general and couched in terms of civility – quite unlike the versions we come by in accounts of witnesses advocating Khushalbhai’s cause. Here the same instructions are rendered in more specific and peremptory tones, and one senses a degree of hauteur in the Chief’s bearing towards the “Mughal Officers of Justice”. Thus, in Parmanandas’ testimony, the Nawab is almost directed “to recover what had been stolen”.\(^{77}\) And in Gulab Moolchand’s testimony, he was to “find out his [Muezzin’s] accomplices and try to recover the Joys”. Furthermore, in response to the threat felt by Aditram and Khushalbhai from the Muslims they had seen assembled at Durya Mahal earlier in the day, and who had been, supposedly, “put off till tomorrow” by the Bakhshi, the Chief issued Mirza Jan a stern warning:

\(^{76}\) Ibid. ff. 105; cf. ff. 83, 109, passim

\(^{77}\) Ibid. ff. 82-83. Khushalboy’s version of what the Chief said is somewhat different: “Take care, if you are not able to prevent the Mohammedans insulting them, I will send a guard to protect them”, ff. 66-7.
"[T]ake care there be no Riot, if there is any Disturbance I shall send sepoys to take up the offenders".78

These are strong words, and they sharply contrast with Mirza Jan’s tame recollection of the brief the English Chief handed him for the Nawabi government:

"to minutely investigate the affair and let him know the result".79

The ball at last was in the Nawab’s court. Seven or eight people were conducted before him. A brief interrogation ensued, with Khushalbhai and Muezzin each telling him his version of the story. The Nawab gave Khushalbhai and his supporters assurances of redressing the matter. He asked them to wait “on the outside of the Durbar” till they were called back after he had finished dining. They waited till it was evening.80

At about 4.00 o’clock, Mirza Jan, with whom apparently the Nawab had conferred at length, came out. He took Khushalbhai aside and told him:

"the Nawab now desires you to go home, come tomorrow, and the Nawab will inquire into the Robbery and endeavour to recover the Joys stolen".81

Once again Khushalbhai and his companions expressed their fear of an assault from the Muslims, who, some of them believed, “were assembled at the Mosque”.82 Upon this Mirza Jan went back to the Nawab and, returning from him, proffered the services of two government sepoys to escort them to safety and stand guard at their houses. Obviously dissatisfied, Khushalbhai conveyed to Mirza Jan their inadequacy in the face of the threat hovering over them and asked for fifteen to twenty men.

78 Ibid. ff. 82-83. Khushalbhai’s version of what the Chief said is somewhat different: “Take care, if you are not able to prevent the Mohummedans insulting them, I will send a guard to protect them”, ff. 66-7.
79 Ibid. ff. 114.
80 Cf. the depositions of Purmunundass and Goolab Moolchand, ff. 75, 83.
81 Ibid. ff. 83.
82 Ibid. ff. 75.
A bit startled, Mirza Jan remarked “How not enough? The Nawab's Rattan is sufficient”. \(83\)

The reference to the Nawab's ratan - perhaps a staff, popularly sanctified as an emblem of royal authority - proved definitive. Khushalbhai and his people retired to their homes. He posted the two sepoys “on the side of my house next to the Musjid, and directed them to prevent any one that might excite a Disturbance there”. \(84\)

As for the Muezzin, he was “confined in the Durbar”. \(85\) Late in the evening, urged on by Muezzin's mother-in-law, Panah Allah carried him food and stayed with him the night.

**On the eve of the riot**

By all accounts the night at Hing Pol passed peacefully. The two sepoys, Sidi Bushir and Rahim Khan, kept a night-long vigil and early next day reported to the Nawab that nothing amiss had occurred. \(86\) And, if Parmanundas is to be believed, Khushalbhai even slept indolently until he woke him up and informed him of the consternation brewing outside:

In the morning a great crowd assembled in the Mosque, when I went to Khushalboy and told him he was sleeping when everything in the Mosque bore the appearance of mischief, that he had better apply to the Chief for a Guard of sepoys... but in the meanwhile it became ten o'clock, when Khushalboy went out and I came to my own house. \(87\)

Basing himself on this evidence the English Chief felt justified to even argue that the confident assurances of the Nawab, despite the apprehensions that were brought to his notice, had lulled Khushalboy into negligence of his own safety and of the properties deposited in his house.

\(83\) Ibid. ff. 67, 75, 83, 114.
\(84\) Ibid. ff. 67, 75.
\(85\) Ibid. ff. 146; 114.
\(86\) For the depositions of the two sepoys, ff. 121-24.
\(87\) Ibid. ff. 76.
(which, incidentally, included substantial treasures of the Sur-Soubah as well). In all probability this picture is overdrawn and, perhaps, also tendentious. Other accounts enable us to chart the movements of Khushalboy and his father, as well as of some of their main supporters, in some detail. And these indicate that the Bhat family far from being indolent was ripped with nervous activity between the time they returned from the Durbar and the breaking out of the riot.

Lines of communications between them and agents of the English were kept alive right through. On the 5th evening, Aditram and Khushalbhai went, respectively, to Luximon Bawaji and Luximon Runsoor, the two “Purboos” of the Chief, and briefed them about the day’s developments. The same evening Aditram went to Nanpurah, a locality in Surat and met another influential Parsi shroff, Manockjee Pestonjee, working in some capacity for the English not specified in our documents, but commanding enough social eminence to move around in a horse drawn carriage. Aditram asked for two of his “Master’s Sepoys” to guard his house against the Muslims. Pestonjee informed the Chief and Ramsing, arrived on the job. The front part of the house was guarded by them and the back by the Nawab’s sepoys.

Did the Bhats now repose in peace? It seems otherwise. When Pestonjee reached their house shortly after 8.00 on the morning of the 6th, in response to a call for help from Aditram, Khushalbhai was away at Bawaji’s, and there was palpable tension in the air. He reports thus:

On the 6th about 8 o’clock in the morning Aditram’s man came to me and told me his Master wanted me immediately. I

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88 Ibid. ff. 11-12.
89 Ibid. ff. 105, 109.
90 Ibid. ff. 87. For the deposition of the two sepoys, ff. 97-9.
91 Ibid. ff. 97.
put on my clothes and went there and was conducted up to Khushalboy's Room. Aditram told me privately, 'my people bring me information from without that the Mussulmans are assembling in different places, in the Musjid and before the Nukhas at which I was much alarmed.' I asked him where is Khushalboy. He answered 'gone to Luximon Bawajee's upon the Business. At this time Khushalboy returned, I asked him what he had done at Luximon to which he replied Luximon has promised me if any thing of the kind happens tell me immediately and I will send and inform the Chief and get sepoys to protect your House. On which I [i.e. Pestonjee] told him to send directly, for the people were assembled and there would be no time when they began to plunder. We then sent Nannaboy, a Parsee who acts as broker to an Armenian. On his going, I asked Aditram and Khushalboy 'why are you so much afraid, what have you in your House'. They answered we have a great deal of Property at Stake, only see, and saying this they opened a Chest standing in Khushalboy's Room and I saw some Gold Bangles and Ingots. Shutting the Chest again they brought me down stairs, and in a Room showed me a Chest containing Bags of Rupees, which they told me, they estimated at from 40 to 45000 Rupees. At the time they shut this Chest one of Aditram's People came into the room, and said 'Mirza Jan's Khidmutgar is come and says Khushalboy is wanted at the Durbar.' From thence we descended into the shop, and I asked the khidmutgar, 'what is it you say'. He answered 'I come for Khushalboy, Mirza Jan wants to do him justice'. I observed to him as did Khushalboy, there is a Disturbance now in Town, How can he go. He answered you have nothing to fear. I am one of the Government People, and will carry you through the Gopee poorah, where you will meet with no molestation'. I then asked him, will you give a written Security in two Lacs of Rupees that he shall meet with no harm in the Road. He said, yes, why not. Upon which I told Khushalboy that as a Government man would do that, he had better go, and he went accordingly. I then said to Aditram, don't be afraid, Luximon has promised Khushalboy, one of your People (meaning Nannaboy) is gone, and I will go also to Luximon and bring a Guard to protect you. Saying this, I descended into Hing Pol...

Pestonjee offers us a rare and fairly detailed view of the predilections of the Bhats on the fateful morning of 6th August. How much of this picture do we actually take for granted? One will never really know

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92 Ibid. ff. 87-88.
for sure. The contrary implications of Permunundas’ testimony aside, the other three witnesses - Bawaji, Shankerdas, and Khushalbhai - cohere with Pestonjee in one essential respect: a great consternation engulfed the camp of Aditram. Beyond this, however, these snapshots of a family caught in the travails of tension and conflict, taken from close quarters, appear uneven in their coverage and at points, if not contradictory, out of sync with each other.

If, for instance, we asked, what exactly took Khushalbhai to Bawaji on 6th morning we hear discordant voices. According to Bawaji “Khushalbhai came to my House and asked me ‘can I go today to the Durbar to get Justice?’ I answered ‘Yes, why not, if they have sent for you’. Subsequently, he thought it necessary to reverse his advice:

“Just as I was preparing to go to my Master’s as usual, Khushalboy being with me at this time, I heard there was a number of Mohummedans assembled from the Chaoury to the Durbar. I then told Khushalboy ‘...I think you had better not go to the Durbar today...’”

Conversely, in Pestonji’s version of what Khushalbhai told him of his visit to Bawaji immediately after he returned from there, the disturbance was still in the offing: Bawaji promised to help him if trouble broke out, “if any thing of the kind happens,” he had said. In Khushalbhai’s own narrative, the visit to Bawaji is blanked out, as it were. And although Pestonji’s presence at his house the time things were coming to a head is recorded, there is not a word on the exercise he and his father went through of showing Pestonjee the money and treasures stored in their house which the latter describes in such details. But even more strangely, rather than Aditram or Khushalbhai, it is Pestonji who is the first to depose on the extent of valuables in their house, looted during the riot, in concrete terms, causing one to wonder why? Do we have here an instance of Inquiry for a second hearing, immediately after Pestonjee had deposed, answered hazily,

93 Ibid. ff. 105.
furnishing an estimate of the "treasures" in his house that is at variance with what he supposedly revealed to Pestonjee personally on 6th morning:

Aditram Luckmidhut being again called... confirms the Account of Manokjee Pestonjee in all those particulars which relate to him and asked what amount of Treasures he had in his House, answers, that being upward of 60 years of age he has relinquished the Management of his affairs and Business entirely to his son Khushalboy, for the last seven years, that he believes there was from ten to fifteen thousand rupees in specie belonging to themselves, but he cannot speak with accuracy, that there was Property belonging to the Sur-Soubah also but what amount in Venetians etc. his son knows, for he does not.94

And Kirparam Aditram, Khushalboy’s brother, bluntly stated his ignorance when questioned about the family’s assets:

How should I know? The Person who keeps the keys can tell best, and that Person was Khushalboy who also receives and pays all Monies in our house.95

Kirparam’s cryptic denial prompted the Committee to summon Khushalbhai once more. He gave an estimate which bears comparison with Pestonji’s more impressionistic estimate:

**Quest.** As you have now had sufficient time, can you inform us of the amount of your actual Loss.  
**Answ.** The Loss of my Father’s family, and of my Uncle Muncheram, including the Balance of our Cash amounts to Rupees 58,100 and here I must inform you that I have been careful in undervaluing, and not overrating, the Estimate. This statement is independent of the Loss sustained by Sir-Soubah...96

The omissions, denials, and claims regarding the assets of Aditram Bhat makes this patch of Pestonji’s testimony suspect, valuable as it is in other respects. Could it be that in the aftermath of the riot he and Khushalbhai liaised, for reasons that elude us for the moment, and that his deposition in part is an effort at ‘special pleading’?

Quibbles apart, it is worth asking if the grim forebodings of the Bhats were shared by other Banias/Hindus as well. The record here is intriguing. Neither Gulabram Mootiram nor Dilichand Khushalbhai, both of whom owned shops in Kelapit in Hing Pol, had any inkling of the Muslims' "design to plunder the Hindoos". Mootiram was in his shop when it was plundered, and Khushalchand learnt of it only at about 8 in the morning. He therefore closed his shop and "hurried home to take care of my family". Presentiments about a possible Muslim assault did not spread beyond Hing Pol. Since neither of them actually lived there - Khushalchand clearly did not, he lived in "Dessoy Pole or Willindah Warah" - they remained ignorant of the danger lurking ahead. However, Adit Boolah and Gosaing Sambajee both of whom lived in Hing Pol, were also caught unawares. Sambajee (evidently a Gosain as indicated by his name, a known sect of warrior ascetics) whose 'Dewul' (temple) devoted to Hanuman in Hing Pol was looted, was in fact away at the river when rioting broke out. Even more surprising is Khushalbhai's brother, Kirparam's, denial of any knowledge of the Muslims' "intention to plunder". "Had I gone out [of the House], I should have heard," was his answer to a pointed query by the Committee! But, on the other hand, if we are to be guided by the testimony of Purshotamdas Hejaramal, another householder of Hing Pol, the threat could have hardly escaped the attention of any one living in the vicinity:

**Quest.** Had you any previous reason to suspect the Mohummedans would plunder you?  
**Answ.** The whole day from the time the Bukhshee's servant carried the Thief away several Parties of Bhandarahs, Bengalee Fukeers and other Mohummedans from behind the House of the deceased Nuwab Sufdur

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97 Ibid. ff. 164.  
98 Ibid. ff. 171.  
100 Ibid. ff. 173-4.
Khan threatened us, saying ‘we will beat you, we’ll cut your Heads off tonight.’\textsuperscript{101}

On Hejaramal being asked if he could “recollect any particular Person who threatened him thus”, he replied he could not. But Baay Jyotee’s evidence supports his contention: “We were threatened with destruction from the night that the Thief was seized”.\textsuperscript{102}

The morning before the riot: at the durbar

To pick us the threads of the unfolding drama where we left them last, Khushalbhai reached the Durbar safely but, as he and Culwah, his personal sepoys, were to claim, the moment they arrived there they were jostled around and abused by the servants of the Nawab. Khushalbhai was then confined in the Kachehri by the side of a criminal accused of murder. Thus confined he would soon be privy to a flurry of voices bringing in news of the plunder and the rioting which had overtaken the city outside.

Since the early hours of the morning the Durbar had been in action. It was the locus of activities that cumulatively drew Muslims in increasing numbers. The depositions bear traces of three such occasions, two of which are clearly distinguished by the presence of an enigmatic figure: Sayed Ismail, described as the Chief of the Siyuds, a personage generally credited with exercising a considerable, if undefined, influence over the Muslims of the city and in whom the English, at least, tended to see the directing force of the ‘Insurrection’. Panah Allah, who had stayed the night at the Durbar with the muezzin, is one of the two witnesses to touch upon the earliest of these occasions. In his account there is a quaint ‘ceremonial’ resonance about it.

In the morning Siyud Ismail came to the Durbar. The Nawab called him, the Prisoner and several Bengalees amongst the number Hajee Ghulam before him, but what passed I can’t

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. ff. 162-3.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid. ff. 164.
tell as I was not admitted. I understand, however, that the Prisoner, as well as the rest received Beetlenut. When they came out I understood that the Nawab said, He knew the Story, and would do Justice, as would the Surdar. Siyud Ismael returned to Ydroos, and I returned with the Prisoner. A little later news came that the City was plundering... (Ibid. ff. 147-8).

What precisely was the basis of the certitude one could read in the Nawab’s demeanour is difficult to surmise. Ghulam Moinuddin (also, Haji Ghulam) could have directly shed light on it, but he remains quiet on the affair even when he speaks about other, immediately adjacent, events. However, Panah Allah’s seemingly loaded reference to the courtesy of offering beetle-nut tempts one to read a spirit of pronounced civility, if not also of camaraderie, between the Nawab and his early morning visitors.

In the semiotics of medieval power the consumption of beetle nut or beetle leaves was a marker of royal-aristocratic privilege. Sporadic references to this condiment as a signifier of elevated, or even regal, status can be found in medieval Indian chronicles, the most celebrated being Ziauddin Barni’s fourteenth century account, where he dwells on the necessity of the sultan crushing the power of village headmen (the khuts, mugaddams, and chowdhuries) whose power and arrogance is intimated to him, among other things, by the fact that they had taken to chewing beetle leaves. For a commoner in the eighteenth century to be offered beetle nut by the Nawab would have been a mark of exceptional favour, and hence, perhaps, the gravity attached to it by Panah Allah.

To the English, too, the ceremony appeared anomalous and they made a special mention of it in their report:

“In reading the Evidence of Pannah Allah it strikes your Committee as very extraordinary that the Nuwab (as this Bengalee asserts) should give Betlenut to a person accused of Robbery, even before his trial, and from the circumstance, we
infer a decided mark of particularly or fear [i.e., of the Nuwab towards him and his supporters].

A more detailed record of the transactions between the Nawab and Sayed Ismail (the latter’s clientele included) is available in the account of Sayed Abdul Wali, his acknowledged “friend”, who had accompanied Sayed Ismail to the Durbar but preferred not to go in, and who would later depose before the Committee on his behalf. This account raises the possibility of a construction materially different from the ‘unction’ one is tempted to read in the fragmentary notes of Panah Allah and shows up the predicament of the Nawab. It also provides the first vital clues to locate the Sayed in the burgeoning civic crisis.

The next day [6th August, morning] the very same Bengalees and Bhandarahs [who had approached him the day before and with whom he had been to the Bukhshi] returned to the Siyud saying ‘still Sir we see no release of the Muezzin in spite of all your assurances yesterday, ‘...he accompanied them thither [to the Durbar] where the Nuwab addressed them to this effect, ‘you took patience yesterday, and there is no occasion for such an assembly, the matter is under enquiry by me and has been investigated by the Chief, wait today and tomorrow you shall be satisfied, if the Mussulman is to blame he shall be punished, if the Hindoo is in fault he shall be corrected’. The Siyud then took the Bengalees and Bhandarahs before the Nuwab to prove how He became concerned, as the Nuwab and demanded, ‘what occasion is there for assembling? There is the Chief and I am your Governor, the doing of justice belongs to me’. The Siyud desired them to declare before the Nuwab by whose Dewaye and instigation this assembly had taken place. The Bengalees and Bhandarahs said that the Siyud had nothing to do with it, that they had met the same bad treatment before as they now experienced and that they themselves had gone from house to house and assembled their friends. The Nawab said, ‘I understand

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103 Ibid. ff. 43-4.
you Siyud Saheb, pray tell them to go home, wait today and justice shall be done tomorrow'.

What we sense here is a degree of ambivalence, and also an underlying tension, in the Nawab's stance towards the Sayed's leadership, rooted, one may conjecture, in the latter's obvious rapport with the Muslim populace. Insofar as this was true, a political void surrounded the Nawab's authority, denying him the fruits of effective legitimacy and command over the loyalties of a large section of his subjects. The reference to 'Dohai' by the Sayed as the compelling force that brought him at the head of the mob is an indication of the field of force within which negotiations and transactions occurred in the civic arenas.

Considering that what we have come by are only fragments of the Nawab's conduct during a critical and trying moment in the life of a city, and the divergent possibilities of interpretation that these offer, as we have just seen, one feels the need to see the Nawab and his actions in terms of the structures of authority within which they were expressed, canalized, and operated. In order to test the boundaries and modalities of the Nawab's position one requires a more rigorous, sociologically informed understanding of urban space in pre-modern India. One, for instance, would need to ask, what precisely was the social basis of power in an 'Islamic' city? What were the constraints or possibilities within which it operated? An obvious difficulty in answering this question is the deeply entrenched historiographic presupposition in favour of depicting such cities as little more than socio-economic agglomerates, with little delineation of the social spaces around which it was articulated. Was there nothing more to a medieval city then, nothing organic that held its divergent denizens in a unifying bond? Were these cities a mere mosaic of mohallas segregated from each other and settled by mutually exclusive jatis of kinship, occupation, and faith? A different approach, more sociologically inclined,
is called for if we are to grasp the character of medieval cities in the context of India, and its long interaction with the Islamic forms of urbanization, with any degree of incisiveness. The pioneering work of Ira Lapidus relating to the larger Islamic world outside of India, for instance, provides much fruitful insight. Her sketches of cities of the Islamic East give us a different model for reading a city, its social construction and the dynamics of power...

The second instance of the Durbar’s ‘activism’ attracted, as well as coincided with, an even larger gathering of Muslims. At about 8.00 o’clock an official team arrived at Hing Pol to inspect the site of burglary and submit the Nawab a report, specifically bearing on the alleged use of the ladder by the muezzin and whether it constituted a sufficiently cogent proof of the man’s crime. Comprised of two personnel from the office of the Qazi, the team also included at least one quasi-religious personage, Namdar Khan, the vaiz of a mosque in Gopipurah. Following them were “one or two Hundred Mohammedans, Coffrees and others”. Khushalbhai, for one, saw them come “through the Musjid”. It is not unlikely that the scare among the Hindu inhabitants of Hing Pol that the Muslims were gathering at the mosque initially stemmed from this spectacle.

The enquiry over, the official delegation and the crowd dispersed. From the remarks of Mirza Jan and Namdar Khan it is evident that the investigating team left the spot convinced that the charge against the Muezzin was untenable. On their way they saw “a great multitude assembled between the Top Khana [ammunition depot] and the Durbar [and]... took a bye way to avoid them...” By the time they made it to the Nawab, the city had churned up and become volatile.

104 Khushalbhia is singular in naming Sayed Ismail among them.
105 Ibid, ff.115.
At the Durbar a restless mob, a few thousand strong, was aggressively awaiting the outcome of the great trial that was on, pressuring the Nawab to dispense justice instantly, while the latter bided time.106

In the presence of Sayed Ismail, the official team placed its observations before the Nawab. Dispatching Mirza Jan to convey these findings to the Chief with a request that he sent two of his own men to confirm them, the Nawab sought help from Sayed Ismail to disperse the howling mob outside107 by convincing them that justice shall be done by the following day or the next:

The Siyud said, ‘Sir, the Mob that is without won’t attend to me, pray desire your own people to appease them and send them home’. That is very right said the Nuwab, ‘I will send my people and do you too use your influence with them’.108

Three of the Nawab’s Abyssinian officers, Siddis, now climbed atop the ‘Great Gates’ of the Durbar and broadcast the Nawab’s assurances to the mob, not with much success though. Sayed Ismail, Namdar Khan, and some others were present too and apparently put in their bit to restore the crowd’s equanimity. Soon thereafter the Sayed departed. Stopping briefly at the Bakhshi’s to inform him of the developments, he “proceeded straight to his own house”. On his heels came the news that riots had broken out.109

The riot breaks out

In the moments immediately preceding the outbreak of rioting - which several accounts concur in placing at about 10.00 in the morning - mobs could be seen virtually everywhere. Reports about these had begun to

106 Ibid. ff. 115, 110, 106, passim.
107 See Mirza Jan’s deposition where he says the Nawab “told me these people have burst my Door. I have told them that I will do justice tomorrow and advised them to go peacefully home, otherwise I will punish them,” (Ibid. ff. 115).
108 Ibid. ff. 119.
109 Ibid. ff. 119, 156-7.
pour in from many directions. Moving in a hackery from Khushalbhai house in Hing Pol to the Durbar, Pestonjee noticed their threatening presence all the way through. The Chief’s head servant, Ratanji Manackji, recorded “a crowd of People equal to the assembly at the Eids or Mohummedan Holidays” at the corner of the Mughallia Serai Nakeh.\textsuperscript{110} Arriving at the Chief’s residence within a short time of each other, Luximon Runsoor, Mirza Jan, and Luximon Bawaji, brought information of what each of them had seen. “Opposite the Dutch Tent near the Castle Parade”, Runsoor had encountered “two or three Hundred common Mohummedans assembled and heard from bye-standers they had met to demand the release of the man who had been taken up the day before”.\textsuperscript{111} Mirza Jan gave an estimate of two to three thousand men, “pressed so on the Durbar, as to oblige him to leave it by the Back Door”.\textsuperscript{112} The numbers were confirmed by Luximon Bawajee,\textsuperscript{113} who, in addition, took in the mob’s violent intent: “a great number... assembled... some with Sticks and others with arms, in a tumultuous manner which appeared to me to threaten something alarming.”\textsuperscript{114} On his way to the Hospital from his house the surgeon, Archibald Little (who we may recall had examined the wound on the muezzin’s forehead), saw the street between the Nukhass and the Durbar crowded with people.

Presumably unmindful of the fact that the ground had shifted dangerously, Mirza Jan was still preoccupied with putting his brief through, namely, ensuring that the Chief sent two of his sepoys to examine the site of buglary, deeming it presumably as an important factor in the upsurge building up all around; and, when he was reminded of the growing disturbance, he would still allay anxieties by telling the Chief that “the Nuwab had assured the Siyuds justice should be done and recommended

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid. ff. 101.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid. ff. 110.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid. ff. 115.
\textsuperscript{113} Vide Luximon Runsoor, Ibid. ff. 110.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid. ff. 106.
their retiring quietly to their homes". Appalled by his complacence, Luximon Bawajee, who had come in just as Mirza Jan was about to take leave of the Chief, remarked:

What Mirza are you saying? I just now saw at least 2000 men assembled. ‘Well’ answered he ‘I am going to disperse them’.115

Within a quarter of an hour of Mirza Jan’s departure news was received at the Chief’s that the Chaoury Bazar had been plundered.116 The looting of a bazar in the proximity of the Castle - which since 1759, when the East India Company routed the forces of the Nawab, had stood as the symbol of the Company’s clout over the proud Mughal metropolis of Surat - must have especially piqued the English.

It was ten in the morning. Hearing “a great and confused noise in the street opposite”, Lieutenant Michael Kennedy had stepped out of his house to determine the cause of the disturbance. He saw several people run by “crying out that the Mussulmans were going to murder the Hindoos”. Putting on his sword he rushed out and saw the rear of a mob, “armed with swords and Bludgeons of every description”. It then “broke off from the Chaoury to the right, in order to assemble again in the broad front of the street opposite the Mint”. Several people had been knocked down and fruit sellers in the market were looted. Closing in upon the rioters he “seized one of the most respectable men... by the Breast and asked him what was the reason of the Tumult... his answer to me was ‘they were going to murder the Kafirs’”.117 The surgeon, Archibald Little, on his way to the hospital at the same time, saw as much somewhere in the vicinity of the Castle: the street between the Nukhas (where criminals were executed) and the Durbar was crowded with people; he “enquired of some of them about me what was the cause of their assembling and they answered me they were going

115 Ibid. ff. 106.
116 Ibid. ff. 110-11.
117 Ibid. ff. 180-1.
to kill the Kafirs, Kafir marna ko jata hyn.” By the time he returned from the Castle, which was soon after, the crowd had turned violent. He then saw “the Mob moving towards the Bukhshee’s, beating and plundering all the Hindoos they met with, and likewise plundering the Bazar before the Castle and Shops in the neighbourhood. After they had passed numbers of the Hindoos shockingly bruised and wounded came to the Chaoury where I was with Lieutenant Kennedy and begged of us to protect them”. Kennedy decided to immediately inform the Commandant. Before he left the spot he ordered the Chaoury Guard to “fall in”, specifically instructing the Subedar not to allow the mob “to return in that riotous manner again”.

The city now was in turmoil. Official news carriers, the harkarehs, traversed in quick succession, carrying dispatches about the ravages of mob fury to the English and the Nawab.

Commands flowed rapidly, from the English at least. The Commandant dispatched a note to the Town Adjutant, who was already at the Chief’s on parole, to apprise the latter of the riot; Michael Kennedy was told to send a havaldar to the Nawab with the message “that if he did not send out People to disperse the Mob... he [the Commandant] would be obliged, if they approached the Guards again, to fire upon them”. The Chief on his part directed “three Companies of Sepoys of the 8th Battalion [to be] formed immediately and marched to the Durbar without loss of time”. The orders ran through the official echelon, from Lieutenant John Harding, the town adjutant, to Lieutenant Wightman, the adjutant, to Major Billes. The troops, with “twenty-four rounds [of ammunition per] man”, were to be accompanied by Lieutenants Brady and Crofts. Immediate action against the mobs, however, was deferred. Despite the urgings of Lieutenant Wightman, the Town Adjutant it appears found it expedient to

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118 Ibid. ff. 183.
meet the Nawab personally before giving the troops final “orders to advance”.

While these arrangements were being put together, three other men (two of them evidently Parsis), belonging to what we may legitimately call the English sphere of influence, were on their way to solicit speedy action from the Nawab to contain the riot. Luximon Runsoor, Luximon Bawaji, and Rustamji Manackji, had set out on their hackeries to see the Nawab. On their way they crossed Pestonji, another Parsi, who was returning from the Durbar, and was visibly anguished by what he had experienced of the languorous ambiance of the Durbar at a time furious winds lashed the city. The groups exchanged impressions about what they were witnessing.

Pestonjee had already conveyed to the Nawab what he had seen of the plunder and violence. Riding on his hackery through one part of the city, he had a close brush with charged sections of the populace, and has left us in his long deposition a compelling vignette of the ‘crowd-in-action’ as well as a sharply contrasting one of the sloth and dilatoriness of the Durbar. To this we must now turn, in extenso, for the broad sweep in which it captures the riot as a spectacle:

I descended into the Hing Pole, and heard many of the Banians who were running by call out the Mussulman’s are coming, calling out Deen, Deen, and plundering the shops, ‘run off, run off’. I then drove to the head of the Road to see what was going on and after a number of Banians had passed, several minutes, I perceived above a couple of hundred Mussulmans coming on crying, Deen, Deen, armed with Clubs and some with swords and sticks. They broke open a shop, close where I was sitting in my Hackery, and pulled out a Carpet. Perceiving their Numbers to increase, I moved off slowly, and they called out Kafir Mader chute kagrah [kidhar] jatta hy! [You Kafir motherfucker, where do you go?] reflecting before I got far that the Chief’s Garden was a long way, I made the best of my way to the Durbar, in the intention of
bringing sepoys to protect Hing Pole and that part of the Town where the Company's and many other principal Surrafs live. On my arrival at the Durbar I told the Nuwab's Khidmutgar to say that I was come, mentioning my name, upon which I was called in. When I entered the Durbar, the Nuwab and his Brother were sitting on a Couch, and Seedee Mossah and Seedee Nasur sitting on the Ground on a Carpet before them. I made my Sulam, and the Nuwab asked me where I came from. I answered that I came from Aditram Bhut's House. He then asked me if I had anything to say, I represented that 'on leaving Aditram's House and coming to the public Street I had seen a great number of Hindoos running and crying out that there were many Mussulmans coming, calling Deen, Deen! who were plundering in their way, that after the Hindoos had passed, I saw the Mussulmans about 200 in number following, some with sticks and others with arms, and on their approaching near where I was at the Corner of the Kelapeet broke open a shop and took out a Carpet. I at this time saw many other Mussulmans coming towards the Place, and some running to the Mosque, that being alarmed for my own safety I moved off slowly, and when I got as far as Maharanee Bh[?]owjee's Mundeer, I made all the haste I could to you, Sir.' Meer Nussrud Deen, the Nawab's brother asked me, 'Did you come through the Chowk?' I answered, 'no, Sir, I was afraid to come that way, I came through the Sona Phalia Street'. I then said to the Nuwab, in a respectful manner, 'Sir, I inform you of what I have seen, you know, Sir, that the Company's Surrafs and other English Gentlemen's Surrafs as well as Number of the most wealthy Merchants live in that part of the Town. In Aditram's house there is considerable Property, belonging to himself, and also to the Sur Soubah which he just now showed me. You, Sir, are the Governor of the Town, it is incumbent on you to send People to check the Plunderers and protect the other Inhabitants. You will thereby give much pleasure to my Master, Mr. Spencer, to the Chief and other Gentlemen, and gain the Esteem of your Subjects'. The Nuwab was pleased to answer, 'Don't be afraid, Siyud Ismael and the other People have just been here, and I have forbade them to make any Disturbance and told them to come tomorrow and their grievances shall be redressed'. I then represented further, 'What do you say, Sir, is true, but those People are going away, and the Mischief I apprised you of, I have seen and
is now committing, for which reason, I humbly beg leave to say, it will be better if you will send sepoys directly'. Seedee Mossah was then told by the Nuwab, 'go send a proper Person to put a stop to this Business', on which he asked, 'what man shall I send?' Seedee Nasur then said, 'send Namdar Khan' who was called for. I then addressed the Nuwab, saying, 'Sir, those People are not respectable enough to hear reason, what will Namdar Khan do against their Numbers, they are gone there to plunder. Forgive my freedom, but permit me to say you ought to send somebody immediately'. The Nuwab answered, 'don't be alarmed, no mischief will happen'. I could not help thinking this, in my own mind, strange, that he should repeat that nothing will happen, when I had declared that it actually had taken place and that I had seen them plundering, and on this paid my Respects and came away. He called me back, and seeing me agitated, said, 'don't go till you take some Beetlenut', which was given me, and I was coming out, accompanied by Seedee Moossah and Seedee Nasur, when the Ameen, Mirza Jan's Brother, came running in and informed the Nuwab that a Hurkareh had just brought intelligence, that a shop in the Corner of the Kelapeet had been broken open, that other places were plundering, and that some of the subjects had suffered violence and were wounded. I then addressed the Nuwab and said, 'See, Sir, I was not trifling with you, one of your own people confirms what I have said'. Meer Nussurud Deen, on this called out, 'See take care, send People directly!' The Ameen said, 'shall I send ten sepoys?' The Nuwab replied, "no, don’t send sepoys, this is not a business for them, send Namdar Khan". Observing this indifference, after what I had seen and represented, the warmth of my feelings got the better of me, I said many things which I do not recollect, or perhaps it would not be prudent for me to mention, and then came away. Seedee Moossah, Seedee Nasur, the Ameen and I came out from the Nuwab's Presence together. The two first desired me to sit down on one of the two seats or Banks which are on each side of the inner Gate of the Durbar where sat Ahmed Koordee and Khushalboy. At this time Khushalboy, called out, 'they have brought me here to do me justice, and have confined me under four sepoys', whom looking round I saw. One of the English Collector's sepoys came to me, while I was sitting there, and told me, 'they have plundered the Castle Bazar, and one Man is wounded'.
Another Hurkareh of the Nuwab's also came in and confirmed that report. One of the sepoys whom the Nuwab had stationed at Aditram's House, likewise arrived and said to Seeedee Moossah, "many People have come through the Musjid, to plunder and break open the Houses, in spite of all I could say to prevent them, for which reason I am come to inform you". On which I observed, "Meah Moossah, do you hear this? Go and acquaint the Nuwab, and send People immediately". Seeedee Moossah went in and returned and sat himself down, without sending People or taking any other notice of what passed. I thought my remaining there was needless and got up to go to the Chief's. The two Seeedees laying hold of my Gown, said, 'what's your hurry? sit down, wait a little!' I complied, and, again another Hurkareh came in and said 'the Green Bazar has been plundered, and many People are wounded'. On this the servant who had just then brought Water for Seeedee Moossah to drink, exclaimed, 'Shooker Ruheem Allah, Deen ka Bhoat B[h]allah. Thanks to God's Mercy! and Success to the Faith. Kafir ka Mooh Kallah, and Black be the face of the Infidels'. Observing that the People assembled there, who were to the Number of from 50 to 60, looked at me with such countenances as alarmed me, I called out, 'Lak wuckut Bhoat ballah tomarra Deen ka', and was glad to get away safe. I went towards the Chiefs, finding it unsafe to go another Road. When I came to the Nanpoorah I met a Hackery, in which were Ruttonjee Manockjee the Chief's servant and the Chief's two Purboos, Luximon Bawajee and Luximon Ransoor, accompanied by eight or ten of the Chief's Police Peons, and eight Garrison Sepoys, and finding on enquiry, that they were going to the Durbar, I returned thither with them. The three Persons I have first mentioned went into the inner part of an hour afterwards, Namdar Khan, who had been sent to the Hing Pole, returned, (at which time I was sitting down in company with Mohummud Shaw, the Cazi's Naib and the Ameen) and said, 'I have been there, but what could I do? there are many thousands of People plundering, and fighting, and I hear two or three People have been wounded near Turwaddy's House'. Just as he had said this Mirza Jan came out from the Nuwab's Presence to call Muhammad Shaw, and I went with him, saying, come you in also, and tell this to the Nuwab. On going in, I spoke in English, to Ruttonjee and the two Purboos (who were sitting on the Carpet before
the Nuwab) saying, "what are you sitting here for receiving sweet words at this time, when the whole City is plundering, if you don't believe it, ask Namdar Khan, the Nuwab's own Man, who is just come from thence and he'll inform you." On which the Nuwab asked him "Well Namdar Khan, you have come back, what have you have done". He answered in the same words as I have before related. Hearing this the Chief's Purboos and servant got up and Luximon Bawajee addressing himself to the Nuwab said, "Well, Sir, I am going, recollect you will have to answer this, it is a very bad Business". The Nuwab said, "Take some betelnut, some betelnut", which they did, and the Nuwab then desiring Luximon Bawajee to give his Compliments to the Chief and tell him he was employed in this Business, we retired. As we were going away, I heard the Nuwab call out, "Chhokra ao! Chelah ao! Call Seede Zumrud, and tell him to order Seedee Siyud's Company to be got ready. I then observed to Kirparam Metta, "what's the use of giving People now? You would not send them when I came here, now it is too late!" and went out. On coming to our Hackeries I said to Luximon Bawajee, "What orders has the Chief given you?" He answered "to wait on the Nuwab and take notice of what was passing in the City". I then said, "let us go, you have got all these Sepoys with you, we can see what is doing". [sic] We left the Durbar and passed by the Nukhass road in front of the Castle, where I met my Master Mr. Spencer's Hurkareh who told me that his Master had sent him information regarding Choneelal's Street and other Places where the Tumult was, and that he also sent a Choabdar belonging to the Collector's Office to the Chief's to give him notice of what he had seen". On the Road I saw numbers of poor Hindoos wounded and beat, and heard them say, they had never suffered such oppression as this. When we came to Luximon Bawajee's House, I observed to him, "we are now near the Hing Pole, let us go and see what has been done there", but Lalla Surraf who was there with many other Persons, said, "what will you see there? Nothing remains there but the Dust. They have plundered the Houses and God knows even [sic] what has become of the People, they have taken their Books also and accounts and thrown them into the Tanks".119

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119 Ibid. ff. 88-95.
Rioting in Hing Pol is copiously recorded, an obvious reason being, perhaps, that a substantial number of the witnesses came from the locality. But also because Hing Pol was a special focus of hostility, the originary site of the conflict. [...] We could begin by summoning the two sepoys of the Nawab who were guarding the house of Aditram against possible mischief...] Since the early hours of the morning Muslims had been gathering at the mosque to which the accused muezzin belonged. When rioting broke out the crowd was by several accounts a thousand strong. It then surged into Hing Pol with the cry of 'Deen Deen'. The government sepoys guarding the house of Aditram could hold them at bay only momentarily but, as some witnesses aver, sections of the crowd giving the Dohai of the Nawab and the Bukhshi soon swept past them. Shutting their doors most of the Hindus fled to their terraces from where they initially tried to fight back the attacking mobs by flinging tiles and stones at them. One of them was the old and infirm Aditram Bhat himself. This proving to be ineffective many fled over the terraces to safety. Breaking open the doors (at times with wood axes) the mob forced its way into the houses subjecting them to general plunder - their annual stock of grain, copper utensils, and clothes are specially recorded as the objects of loot in addition to the ornaments the women were wearing which were brutally torn off them. But, what is singular, without violating the women themselves. In the deposition of just one family, that of Parmanandas Shamdas and of his son is there a claim of insult to the women of the house.120 The testimony of Bhana Laldas is typical of the violence the riot had let loose:

Bhana Laldas, Banian Servant to a shopkeeper, appeared and shewed the Committee his left Ear from which he says the People who plundered his House tore the Earring for the sake of a Pearl which was fixed to it. He gave them one, but they had not patience to wait till he could get out the other. They tore the ornament his Wife had about her Neck, and cut her Sister on the head with a stick because she opposed their taking away the Dishes, their Victuals were standing ready in.121

120 Ibid. ff. 76, 79.
121 Ibid. ff. 80.
But instances of overt religious aggression, apart from the use of the slogan ‘Deen Deen,’ though rare are not absent.  

Rioting came to an end almost abruptly at about noon without any perceptible exertion on the part of the Siddis who arrived in Hing Pol on their hackeries at the Nuwab’s behest to enforce peace. In the event, the English overtures of deploying troops against the rioters also remained unimplemented.

**Collective violence: crowds, mobs, and community**

Who are the people who participated in the riot? Witness accounts reveal the involvement of a wide swathe of Muslims encompassing status groups, service gentry, occupational castes, along with the preponderance of, relatively speaking, a more non-descript mass conveyed by terms such as “rabble” and “multitudes” often used by witnesses to describe the crowds in action. Another distinguishable segment which participated was of youths, the category “boys” comes coupled with “rabble” is in a few testimonies.

If the Nawab is to be believed, at its peak the mob could have been some 20,000 strong. Allowing for an element of exaggeration here, he may not have been far off the mark. The English were deeply intrigued and perplexed by the numbers that had taken to the streets, and it became expedient for them to probe and determine the sources of leadership and inspiration behind the mob. In particular, their suspicions were roused by unconfirmed reports about a “Jhoondah” (a flag) that apparently did the rounds of the city during these frenzied moments. Almost every witness was asked to testify if he had seen such a flag, in the hope that this may

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provide the Committee of Inquiry a clue about the leadership of the crowds. Barring six, all other witnesses answered the query in the negative. But the few who replied in the affirmative provide us an opening into a discursive field which had shaped the riot.

Mirza Jan, the muhtasib, in response to a general query regarding “how this disturbance arose”, referred to having seen amidst the crowd assembled at the Durbar “two Waizees or Preachers with the Green Flag”. Likewise, Purshotumdas Hejaramul, a Hing Pol resident, alluding to the mob gathered at the mosque to which the accused muezzin belonged, noted: “I saw them come through the Mosque with a Green Flag on which there were some Persian Letters”. Namdar Khan, the vaiz of a mosque sent in the first instance to quell the disturbance), denied he had seen one personally, but stated quite categorically he “understood People prepared one among themselves”. This, perhaps, is a good enough clue that the flag in question was an emblem people identified with. Sayed Abdul Wali, trying to (wash) clear the blame off his friend, Siyud Ismael, furnished more definite information:

Siyud Ismael took no Flag with him. There is the Damad, or son in law of one Shaw Murad deceased, who lives in a small Mosque in the Rampoorah, he has a Flag, and having heard the word of the Chehar Yaree, he joined those that were passing this Dewaye, with his Flag.

But he also distinguished this particular flag from the several others which could have been seen fluttering in the city about this time. Those “related entirely to the commemoration of a Peer”.

A little later in his deposition, Sayed Abdul Wali reiterated and elaborated upon these facts more pointedly:

123 Ibid. ff. 116.
124 Ibid. ff. 161.
125 Ibid. ff. 158.
126 Ibid. ff. 119-120.
Quest. What numbers attended the Durbar, and who headed them and had they a Flag with them.

Answ. They were not to be numbered, and they appeared to be acting without any head - when Siyud Ismael went to the Durbar, there was no Flag with him. The Flag was brought from the Rampoorah by Siyud Shuruf ud Deen the son in law of Shaw Murad at the head of a separate multitude assembled in the quarter of his Mosque, consisting of weavers, Mushalchees [i.e., torch-bearers] and the rabble of the Flag carried by the Siyud’s servant.127

Was it Sayed Sharf-ud Deen of whom Kaliandas Lukmidass, the Bania servant of Dadabhai Hirji Parsi who had a fruit shop near the Castle Parade, spoke in his deposition? This is what he records:

[H]e saw an old Siyud with white Beard followed by a Flag and surrounded by other Mussulmans go by his shop towards the Durbar [,] that it was a plain green Flag without inscription and that on returning from the Durbar he saw them beat a Hindoo and being afraid they would beat him also as he is of that Cast he ran away and hid himself upstairs and they plundered all the Fruit from the shop.128

It may well be that there was not just one but at least a couple of similar flags, plain as well as inscribed (as alluded to by Hejaramal), doing the rounds in different quarters of the city.

Sayed Sharf-ud Deen clearly was in the eye of the storm. He was requested by the Committee of Inquiry to depose before it. Significantly, this request was “conveyed to him through the medium of the Nuwab”. The Sayed appeared on 29 August and, in effect, corroborated most of what had been ascribed to him by both Mirza Jan and Sayed Abdul Wali. He also disclosed a few other vital pieces of information which we shall take up a little later.

127 Ibid. ff. 120.
128 Ibid. ff. 179-80.
The Mohummedans of the Rampoorah came to me in a body, and pronouncing the Dewaye of the Chehar Yaree, desired me to accompany them. I replied all the world knew it was not my Rule to go abroad, but on their being more and more urgent I said "very well, let us go". I joined with my Flag which was carried by one of the neighbours by name Mohummad. We came as far as the Durbar Surai and there stopped, when Syed Ismael came out of the Durbar, and we met. I asked him what had been done. He said the Nuwab had told them to go home now and he would give an answer the next day. Separating from him I came home.

Dohai, char-yari, jhundas: defining a social field

With the foregoing testimonies we have come to the heart of the social field in which the conflict had been forged. The Dohai, the Char Yari, and the Flag appear inextricably linked in the formation of a moral community. In the circumstance it seems very likely, if not almost certain, that the flag which had engaged and irked the English so obsessively, was akin to the jhundas, or poles with long banners fluttering atop bearing the words 'char yar', that Freitag describes as characteristic of the Char Yar processions in early twentieth century Lucknow. The flags accompanied the tazias (replicas of tombs), which, too, at times were marked with the names of the four caliphs.130

The unfailing persistence of the English to elicit information about the flag was partly dictated by the real administrative necessity of identifying the fount of mobilization, leaders of the "insurrection" or the "tumult" and of taking them to task if they could. But, one is inclined to think, that this practical preoccupation shaded off into something more inchoate and difficult to define. The "Jhoondah" occupied a wider semantic field, connoting an alien zone of political legitimacy and command over men's loyalties; a terrain unmapped and uncontrolled, beyond the ken of a

129 Ibid. ff. 142.
putative colonial power, and therefore suggestive of dangers lurking ahead? The recurrent queries regarding the flag seem to be, concomitantly, an expression of the anxieties of a foreign group that was poised to capture and yet stood precariously short of it; which had aggrandized in its favour the burden of ruling the city without the requisite instruments of intervening in its affairs and controlling them.

Before taking up other important features in Sayed Sharf-ud Deen’s deposition we may take a look at the brief diagnosis of the riot tendered by Mirza Jan. Here the three elements of Dohai, Char Yari, and the Flag co-habit a single stretch of thought posited on a disarming forthrightness from a leading official of the Nawab’s government about the social agency involved in the riot.

**Quest.** Can you tell how this disturbance arose and who were the instigators.

**Answ.** On the inquiries that have taken place I understood there are in the Town say about 100 Bengalee Fukiers who live in the Mosques some as Criers. I have seen 15 or 20 of them, and they have a Muckadum [muqaddam] or head of their own. On the seizure of the Mu-ezzin in question who is one of those Bengalees, the others or some of them gave the word of the Chehar Yaree to the Mohummedans, by saw with them at the Durbar Siyud Ismael, Namdar Khan a Puttan [Pathan] and two Waizees or Preachers with the Green Flag. When the Nuwab ordered these two, [and?] Mohummad Shaw and Seedee Moosah to tell the Mob that the execution of Justice was his business, that he was then inquiring into what had passed, and to go home quietly and trust to him - They still persisted in having an immediate justice, when the Nuwab repeated his injunctions with anger to them. As fas as I know the Siyud with the Flag went straightforward by the Moghallai Serai and those who plundered were I hear a rabble of the lowest orders. I understand that the Flag was taken from a small Mosque in the Rampoorah near Rustam’s Garden, where resides a Siyud whose name I
know not but whose Father was called Shaw Murad, and was of a sect called I believe Chishtie.\textsuperscript{131}

The Chehar Yari as we can see from this account had a \textit{trans-local} appeal with actual potential for generating solidarities across narrower divides of caste segmentation and hierarchy in the city. Its mobilizational efficacy comes out clearly in Sayed Sharfud Deen’s answers to specific questions put to him by the Committee. These reveal the Siyud’s clientele and the circumstances in which he joined the protest.

\textbf{Quest.} How many people first came to you?
\textbf{Answ.} About twenty or thirty and numbers joined on the way, I cannot specify how many.

\textbf{Quest.} Can you give us the names of any of the 20 or 30 who first came to you?
\textbf{Answ.} Some of them are my Disciples. They are weavers and poor people and will be alarmed if they are called upon.

\textbf{Quest.} Did they give any reason for passing the Dewaye?
\textbf{Answ.} No, those who first gave the Dewaye passed on while I was in the Musjid, and the neighbours hearing it left off their work and came to me requesting I would accompany them.

\textbf{Quest.} Did you ask them what the cause was?
\textbf{Answ.} No I had no occasion to ask them. As we went on we learnt the quarrel was about a Mosque.

\textbf{Quest.} How did the Flag return.
\textbf{Answ.} With me, it was brought straight from the Durbar by the same person who carried it from my Mosque, without stopping anywhere and accompanied by seven or eight of the neighbourhood.

\textbf{Quest.} Do you know any thing of the riot that ensued or who were there?
\textbf{Answ.} On getting home I heard of it, but how should I know who were there.\textsuperscript{132}

The Chehar Yari represented a kind of compulsive, \textit{normative} force. Its call evinced instant and unquestioned compliance among the believers. It was precisely this which the Committee of Inquiry in its

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Ibid.} ff. 116-17.
\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Ibid.} 142-3.
concluding report found culpable in the attitude of what it deemed to be responsible individuals:

Syed Shuruf' ud Deen acknowledges the Flag to have been his, that he joined with it at the desire of his Neighbours the Bandarees and that it was carried by one of them. He declined mentioning any names, and by his own confession, did not even ask the cause of their assembling, from which we were left to conclude, that with him, Necessity and Inclination went hand in hand.133

The Committee found it worthwhile to specially underline this peculiar feature of Chehar Yari in the report it finally submitted to the government. Referring to the testimony of a witness, whose identity is not disclosed, it records:

...a Mahommedan confessed to us that whenever the Dewaye of the Chehar Yaree is given, let the pretense be what it may [i.e., irrespective of cause or circumstance whatever may be the so-called ‘cause’ they may choose to advance], it is not lawful for any Mussulman of that persuasion to withhold his assistance - if he does he is esteemed Bee Imaun [beiman]. This confession, however, he desired might be erased from his declaration, and we complied with his request, although we do not [illegible...] should warrant our concealing from Government information of such a nature as we sincerely believe, from the present and past experience, that is the mainspring of all similar Commissions in this City.134

Going by this account, as well as the roots it had demonstrably struck in popular culture, exhibited for one by the rapidity of its social reflexes, the Char Yari, as a set of ceremonial and ritualistic observances, may have been around in Surat for quite some time. Implicated with ‘Dohai’ which announced a realm of the political defined by patron-client relationships, the Char-Yari signified an alternative domain of the same with the distinction of being broader in its social scope, and also deeper being imbued with a compelling religious symbolism.

133 Ibid, ff. 43
134 Ibid, ff. 43.
A good deal of its social force was a reflection of its capacity to cut across divisions of class, caste and ethnicity. Networks of discipleship were not a small factor in the resurgence of solidarities around Char Yari. Sayed Shurfud Deen and his clientele are a pointer in that direction. He belonged to the Chishti order of Sufis and had his following among the Muslim lower orders, chiefly the weavers. Similarly, after the riots the weavers had applied to the Nawab for permission to hold a religious-cum-social gathering of three to four thousand weavers to which they had invited a preacher. This preacher was no other than Sayed Ismail. The Nawab felt constrained to withhold this permission so soon after a riot in which the weavers had played a principal part.

The association of Sayed Shurfud Deen with the Chishti sufic order assumes greater significance in the light of C.A. Bayly's observations on the development of what he has termed "Muslim revitalization," a category under which he locates "a range of purist movements which had emerged during the eighteenth century in north India." The Chishtis represented an important strand of this. Although Bayly cautions that the differences between such strands were too critical for them to be regarded "as a single stream of revitalization," he points out a common feature: "All these movements reacted against the eclecticism of the Mughal ruling class and the loss of Muslim political power in the eighteenth century. Shah Waliullah [the well-known eighteenth century militant alim] and his followers wished to purge Muslim practice of lax habits which he thought had become more common as Hindus and Shias (always regarded as more latitudinarian by Sunnis) achieved power at the declining Mughal court." 135

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Although no specific Shia-Sunni issues cropped up in 1795 A.D. the assertion of Char Yar was predicated on the exclusion of Shias. This is borne home by the fact that the large and prosperous community of Bohras not only did not form part of the Muslim mass involved in the riot, they felt threatened by the animosity of the mob on the occasion and sought protection against its possible ravages from the English. A note in the Surat Factory Diary records that the Bohras “are numerous and rich and carried on Trade to the Gulph of Mockha”, and that they are threatened by Muslims as much as are Hindus. In fact, in the wake of the riot, the Mullah of the Bohras asked the English for a guard of 10 sarkar sepoys for the protection of his life and property. The record goes on to say: “The Bohras are Rafzees, [i.e., Shias] and, therefore, received by the Mahometans of the City with as much detestation as the Hindus themselves”.

The Char Yari then, as a marker of religious boundaries, had comparable salience to what it came to be in twentieth century Lucknow. The difference, however, is that occurred in a context that was not yet colonial.

To conclude, left to itself the theft as an ‘event’ involving the Muezzin and the Banias of Hing Pol would have remained a relatively simple affair which the routine ‘law and order’ machinery of Surat, such as it was, would have settled in due course. However, enmeshed in pervasive tensions over civic jurisdiction and a previous history of violent conflicts between communities, supported and backed by religious discourses and rituals, it acquired the dimensions of a riot, polarizing the population and paving the way for the establishment of colonial rule in the city.