INTRODUCTION

The disintegration of Mughal Empire, rise and growth of the regional states and the gradual expansion of the British on the political map of India were the most important developments of the eighteenth century. Though the regional kingdoms that emerged have been studied, the primary theme in the historiography of eighteenth century had been an enquiry into the subject of 'decline and decadence' that set with the fall of the Mughal Empire. The formation of the 'succession states', like Awadh, were traditionally seen as acts of selfishness and political ambitions of the decadent nobility of an already weakened Empire. The Empire that had grown to its utmost physical limits, spreading to almost the entire subcontinent was seen as incapable to hold the authority of the central administration. A series of challenges to the Mughal authority corroded the base of imperial power, visible on a number of fronts, leading to the decline of the Mughal Empire¹.

Awadh was one of the important succession states to have emerged in the wake of the Mughal decline. In one of the significant study of the state, Richard Barnett finds Awadh emerging into prominence on the strength of

¹ Decline theories discussed in great detail by Barnett in his introduction.

its economic, strategic, demographic and cultural assets. The state grew in expanse to almost double its size from the time of its formation, comprising of territories with Himalayas in the north and Ganges as its southern boundary, extending even beyond it (in 1748) and Itawah and Benaras-Ghazipur being its western and eastern limits in the eighteenth century. It attained great economic and military power, and began to develop its own identity. He however looks at the political formation at Awadh, only against the backdrop of imperial decentralization.

Muzaffar Alam’s major study on Awadh in his Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India, speaks of the chaos and anarchy in some regions that might have been symptomatic with the ‘breaches and chasms’ in the imperial edifice but ‘an emerging political order tended to be constituted in the form of virtually independent principalities, which nevertheless continued broadly with the Mughal institutional framework’. His work on Awadh challenges the concept of decline. Both Punjab and Awadh, according to him, witnessed unmistakable economic growth in the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century, he had covered. In

\[^2\] Ibid, p.2
Awadh especially the governor could mobilize local social groups around his banner and thus was able to place nawabi rule on firm ground. The Eighteenth century has interested a number of scholars from the vantage point of the formation of British Empire. It had been claimed that the technical efficiency and commercial expansion by the British produced devastating irruptions into the Empire. C.A. Bayly speaks of range of intermediate entities that were cajoled, enticed and manipulated by the incoming colonial power and European traders. ‘British conquest often meant no more than slow drift to the East India Company of soldiers, merchants and administrators, leaving the Indian rulers with nothing more than a husk of royal grandeur’. This appears in line with the arguments of scholars who have tried to emphasize the role of ‘indigenous banking firms’, merchants and bankers in the political formation of eighteenth century, who were seen redirecting their economic and political support from the Empire towards nascent regional polities and rulers, including the British East India.


The success of regional states on the debris of Mughal Empire is seen mainly in terms of alignment of these classes with the British for the opportunities provided of the prosperous trade and commerce.

A major concern for historians studying Awadh has been the impact of the British. The gradual expansion of British East India Company in the second half of eighteenth century in Awadh has also been examined by Barnett who is otherwise primarily looking at the process of transition of an imperial province to sovereign state and then to a subsidiary ally of the British. He has looked into the manner in which the regime managed to postpone major territorial losses until the turn of the nineteenth century. However his account ends at 1801, the year Awadh became a subsidiary ally of British, ceding large parts of its territory in order to discharge his tributary obligations.

The final annexation of Awadh in 1856, provided one of the main grievances of the people in the region fuelling the great rebellion. T R Metcalf studies the changes in the structure and functioning of rural society owing to British policies. He examines the first revenue settlement, 'the Summary Settlement of 1856-7 of the region and the revolt in so far as it

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affected the British policy towards the taluqdar and the latter’s subsequent history. Rudrangshu Mukherjee makes a path breaking study of the revolt of 1857, looking in its popular character certain commonality of interest and mutual dependence between the taluqdar and the peasants, in-built in the structure of rural society that was disrupted by the revenue prescription of the British.

Veena Talwar Oldenburg, looks at the strategic policies of British after the revolt to restore them back to power in *The Making of Colonial Lucknow 1856-77*. The British had redesigned the city to make it safe, orderly, clean and loyal etc.

Most of the works on Awadh focus on the political developments and the economic changes to a relative neglect of other aspects of development in the region. A few scholars have indeed covered aspects of the culture of Awadh. Michel Fisher’s work looks at the cultural formation in Awadh and

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refers to the consolidation of Shi’a *asabiya*\(^{10}\). J R I Cole in his work, *The Roots of Northern Shi’ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859* similarly discusses Shi’ism in Awadh and the roots of conflicts between Shi’i and Sunni\(^{11}\). However, the Awadh culture also had integrative and inclusive components and spaces as well that have not received the attention they deserve.

My study of the state of Awadh attempts to re-examine some of the issues already examined by the modern scholars, within a relatively indigenous forms of reference. I have, in my work, made use of several indigenous sources, in particular those in Urdu and Persian, that have largely been neglected by the historians of the history of Awadh. Most studies on the post-annexation Awadh tend to rely exclusively on the English sources, and one of the consequences of this is the loss of the indigenous perspective on the developments of the period. Though not as extensive as the English sources, contemporary writings in the indigenous languages do exist. *Tilism*, an Urdu weekly\(^{12}\) started after the annexation of Awadh is a valuable source


\(^{12}\) The editor and publisher of *Tilism*, Muhammad Yaqub belonged to the well-known theological house of Firangi Mahal in Lucknow. Forty two issues of
for the period and needs an in depth study. Though the Urdu newspapers have been studied by Iqbal Hussain and Anjum Taban Farooqui, certain important aspects of annexation evaded their attention.13

My study re-examines some of the central issues in the history of Awadh, on the basis of the evidence found in the Urdu and Persian sources of the period. The corpus of English sources, abundant for the period, is examined but is cross-checked with the indigenous accounts of the period as well.

The study attempts to examine the process through which the resources of the region were channalised in the formative stages to create a viable, autonomous state. The important aspects of agrarian economy: agricultural produce and productivity, price of agricultural production and its trade are covered. A chapter explores the land revenue demand, incidence

the Tilism, beginning from 25 July 1856 and ending with 8 May 1857, with one issue (No. 37) missing, are preserved at the Centre of Advanced Study Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

of rent, and its relationship with the agrarian classes that led to growth of different tenures in the region. The growth of trade and commerce has been discussed with its impact of trading communities and their relationship with the state. The impact of the British and the adjustments of the state and commercial classes in the face of British competition have been discussed. In study of the state and urban classes, the policies of the state towards the merchants, traders, mahajans, baniyas, and their relationship with the state are examined which appears crucial for the sustenance of urban centers in Awadh. The chapter on the cultural formation in Awadh speaks of the different dimensions of the distinctive regional identity of Awadh; the various components of the culture, its class-base and social composition. It examines the nature of the conflict between groups, traditional aristocracy and new emerging social classes etc. and the role of culture here. The spaces provided to women in Awadh culture are studied. Lastly, the impact of annexation on different social groups is examined.