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*Politics, Patronage, and Debt Bondage in the  
Pakistani Punjab*

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## **Declaration**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines landlord politics in the rural Pakistani Punjab and contributes to the literature on the state and criminalised politics in South Asia as well as to broader debates on factionalism and violence, class formation, proletarianization and bonded labour. The thesis also examines whether, and in what sense, Muslim saints play a role in legitimising and consolidating a highly personalised and hierarchical political order. The principal aim of the thesis is to document, and to account for, the entrenchment of violent factional politics in the Punjabi countryside and to consider how this may have forestalled the emergence of horizontal, class-based, political assertiveness.

Members of the landed elite still wield considerable power over much of the rural population through tenancy relations, patronage and coercion. This enables them to obtain votes during elections and to command *corvée* labour, as well as to enforce debt-bondage. The thesis illustrates how this remains true despite the growing, although partial, proletarianization of former tenants and of members of menial and artisan occupational groups. One implication of this situation is that in addition to members of marginal landless groups voting for landlords during elections they also frequently fight on their behalf rather than against them.

Competition for political office remains largely restricted to the landed elite and resembles a zero-sum game where winners appropriate the spoils of power for themselves and, to varying degrees, for their clients. The fact that winners take all, combined with the widespread availability of Kalashnikovs and other weapons, means that political competition is intense and involves high levels of violence. The thesis analyses how the regional political coalitions of landlord politicians are often structured

on the basis of pragmatism, kinship, feuds and local rivalries, rather than on that of ideological commitment to political parties.

Acknowledgements removed on request of author.

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## Glossary of Terms

*abadkar*: Migrant settlers.

*ashrafi*: People of noble descent, a category of higher caste.

*astana*: Lodge, abode, threshold.

**Barelvi**: Name of the religious movement in South Asia originated from the city of Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, India, whose members venerate Sufi saints and shrines.

*begaar*: Corvée

*bhai*: Brother.

*biraderi*: Agnatic lineage, in-marrying affinal group, Muslim caste, brotherhood.

*chak*: Planned village.

*charpai*: String cot.

*chowdri*: Honorific term for a landlord which indicates chieftainship.

*darbar/dargah*: Royal court, Muslim saint's shrine, tomb, or, by extension, lodge.

*darra*: Men's house

*darwesh*: A religious mendicant, a beggar, a Muslim Saint.

**Deobandi**: Islamic school of thought that began in North India during the nineteenth century. It is generally associated with the rejection of aspects of Sufism and of the cult of Sufi saints.

*dera*: A single farm house or a farm house with a small settlement around it.

*dunya*: the present world, world of creation.

*dushman*: Enemy

**Eid**: Islamic festival. Eid-ul zoha marks the last day of the Hajj, Eid-ul Fitr, celebrates the end of Ramadan.

*fakeer*: An ascetic on the sufi path, mendicant, saint who practices asceticism needy of God's mercy.

*ghairat*: Shame, decency, honour, control.

*ghar*: House, household.

*ghar-wale*: Members of a household.

*goonda*: Gangster, muscleman.

*gyarvi sharif*: Communal meal held on the 11<sup>th</sup> of the month, commemorating the birth/death of Abdul Qadir Gilani of Baghdad.

*hafiz-e Qur'an*: A person who has memorised the whole Qu'ran.

*halal*: Lawful, meat of an animal slaughtered in a ritually appropriate way.

*haqiqat*: Truth, ontological reality.

*haram*: Forbidden, taboo, sacred and protected life.

*hayaa*: Female modesty.

*hookah*: Waterpipe.

*ilm*: Knowledge, scholastic religious knowledge.

*imam*: Leader of prayers in the mosque, founder of a Sunni legal school.

*izzat*: Honour, respect.

*jamaat*: Congregation, community, fellowship.

*jangal*: Jungle, areas outside human habitation.

*jangli*: Wild person from sparsely populated areas, uneducated, ill mannered.

*Jat*: Dominant landowning caste/tribe of the Punjab.

*Julaha*: Weaver.

*Juma*: Friday.

*kabza*: Capture, illegal land grabbing.

*kaffir*: Unbeliever, an infidel, a non-Muslim.

*kala*: Black.

*kalma*: Islamic profession of faith.

*kammi*: Kammis are traditional artisanal and menial occupational groups.

*khandan*: Family.

*khu*: Well.

*Kumhar*: Potter.

*lakh*: 100,000.

*lambardar*: Generally a landowner who acts as an intermediary between the village and the state in terms of revenue collection and governance.

*langar*: Place where food is cooked and distributed freely at a Sufi lodge in South Asia.

*Lohar*: Blacksmith.

*lota*: Jar with a curved spout that is used for ablutions and for cleaning oneself after going to the toilet. The term is also used to refer to people who frequently shift their political allegiances.

*Machi*: Breadmaker.

*Makhdoom*: Head of a shrine, descendant of a saint.

*malang*: Wandering sufi ascetic, renouncer, mendicant.

*malik*: Literally the owner of an estate. Also refers to status as a chief.

*masjid*: Mosque.

*maulvi*: A muslim religious expert on legal matters, cleric.

*maund*: A measure that is equivalent to forty kilograms.

*Mirasi*: Bard.

*mochi*: Cobbler.

*mullah*: Religious prayer leader or dignitary.

*munshi*: Manager of a landlord.

*mureed*: Lover and desirer (of God), disciple of a Sufi saint.

*Mussalli*: Sweeper.

*nafs*: Carnal, vital soul or spirit, seat of desires.

*Nai*: Barber.

*nalka*: Hand pump for extracting water from the ground.

*napak*: Impure.

*nazim*: Elected representative at the union, *tehsil* or district level.

*pagal*: Mad.

*pak*: Pure.

*patwari*: Revenue officer in charge of keeping land records.



*pir*: Saint, spiritual guide, founder or head of a religious order.

*pir-bhai*: Fellow initiate or spiritual brother of the same saint.

*Purdah*: Veil, curtain, female seclusion.

*qaum*: People, nation, tribe. The term can also be used to refer to endogamous lineages and occupational groups.

*rassagir*: 'Holder of the rope,' patron who protects thieves (buffalo thieves in particular).

*roti*: Flat bread.

*sajjadda nishin*: Successors, those who sit on the seat of a departed sheikh or saint.

*savaab*: Merit, religious merit.

*seyp*: An informal contract in which village artisans and menials provide services to zamindars in exchange for payments in kind.

*sharia*: Body of Muslim jurisprudential law, including the Qur'an and Hadith, along with later interpretations.

*sharif*: Noble, good, of noble descent.

*silsilah*: A spiritual genealogy.

*takat*: Strength.

*taliban*: Seekers.

*Tarkhan*: Carpenter.

*tauheed*: Belief in the unity of God.

*tehsil*: An administrative division smaller than the district and larger than the union council.

*thana*: Local police station.

*thanedar*: Local police officer.

*ulema*: Learned scholars and religious leaders, especially in matters of Islamic jurisprudence, plural of alim.

*urs*: Religious ceremony held annually to commemorate the death/unification with God of a Muslim saint.

*wali*: Friend of God, Muslim saint, intimate of God.

*zaildar*: Zaildar's assisted the colonial administration with revenue collection and administration within a set of villages.

*zamindar*: Landowner.

*zat*: Species, caste, lineage.

*zikr*: Rememberance of God's names through repetition done either alone or in company in order to purify the heart.

### **Note on the use Urdu and Punjabi words, Exchange Rates, and Names**

The first instance of all Urdu and Punjabi words is italicised, thereafter italics are dropped. For the sake of simplicity, the plural of Urdu and Punjabi words is denoted by the addition of an 's'. English translations have been used where they were deemed adequate to convey the meaning of the original.

The exchange rate at the time of fieldwork was roughly Rs.100 for £1

The name of the village, the names of villagers and the name of the dominant caste within it have all been changed in order to protect the identity of informants.

## Chapter One: Introduction

In his collection of short stories entitled *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, Daniyal Mueenuddin describes a feudal world reminiscent of that described by nineteenth century Russian novelists. It is a world inhabited by absentee landlords with vast rambling estates in the Southern Punjab, large retinues of servants, peasants, cattle rustlers, criminals, peasant girl mistresses and unscrupulous farm managers and politicians. Like their counterparts in nineteenth century Russia, these Punjabi feudal lords belong to a class of cosmopolitan elite that looks up to the cultural achievements of Europe. While their Russian counterparts spoke French and spent their winters in Paris and the South of France, they speak English and spend their summers in London. Their mansions in Lahore are staffed with valets, butlers, drivers, cooks and maids, all brought from the villages on their estates. Here parties are hosted where high ranking military officers, politicians, businessmen and civil servants gather and drink smuggled Black Label Scotch whisky. Their children study in prestigious universities in the United Kingdom and, increasingly, the United States.

However, the world that Mueenuddin describes is changing. Members of this landed aristocracy are no longer necessarily the wealthiest or the most politically influential people in the country. The more wealthy aristocratic (*ashrafi*)<sup>1</sup> landlords whom the British once used to rule the Punjab, and who remained politically prominent after independence, are in many cases being overtaken both politically and economically by members of a prosperous Punjabi yeomanry as well as by industrialists. These changes, however, have not represented a transition from a feudal

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<sup>1</sup> The term *ashrafi* in South Asia generally refers to people of noble descent. Amongst the Muslims the ashrafi landlords were predominantly those claiming Arabian and Central Asian descent.

order, where the economic realm is subordinate to the political, to a bourgeois social order. Political influence and the capacity to mobilise force remain central to the rise and fall of individual fortunes. The landlord class continues to wield disproportionate power in Pakistan, but there have been power shifts within it. As Mueenuddin's short stories and this work document, aristocratic feudal lords who grow complacent, and who shy away from the feuds and from the violence of rural Punjabi politics, are overtaken politically and economically by traditionally less wealthy and influential members of the landed classes. Those who overtake them then adopt similar lifestyles to theirs. They buy or rent property in Lahore, send their children to elite English medium schools and to universities abroad, and invest in properties abroad, particularly in Dubai.

In Mueenuddin's short stories this trend is illustrated through the case of the absentee landlord K.K. Harouni. Harouni, who lives in a large air conditioned mansion in Lahore and who only occasionally visits his vast estate, is oblivious to the fact that he is being swindled by the manager, a local landlord, to whom he has delegated the estate's management. When K.K. Harouni needs money to invest in unsuccessful business ventures—in order to keep up with upstart industrialists and to plug holes into the leaky finances of his Lahore mansion—he trustingly gives his manager Jaglani powers of attorney to sell some of his land. Since Harouni doesn't even know the value of his lands, Jaglani buys the plots himself at prices far below market value and soon owns several hundred acres. Jaglani runs the estate with an iron fist, more for his own benefit than for his master's. Although villagers and servants Jaglani, to them Harouni is a distant figure, and they exploit his careless attitude towards his finances by stealing from him whenever they can. While Harouni leads a cosmopolitan lifestyle in Lahore and abroad, it is Jaglani who deals with the grittier aspects of life on the estate and in

the surrounding area. He supervises labourers, deals with village disputes, and works with local toughs to achieve control over the area's inhabitants. Eventually Jaglani's local influence allows him to become a provincial minister. Although Mueenuddin does not say so, political office probably allows him to further consolidate his landholdings through the multiple opportunities for enrichment it offers.

The present work is interested in landlords that resemble Jaglani more closely than they do K.K. Harouni. Focussing on an extended patrilineal clan of *Jats*,<sup>2</sup> the *Gondals*, the central aim of this thesis is to account for the landed elite's continued stranglehold in the rural Punjab and for the persistence of hierarchical political alignments whereby members of poorer communities either willingly or unwillingly continue to provide political support to powerful landlord patrons. The thesis explores some of the implications that this has for the political assertiveness of labourers. Moreover it aims to illustrate the central role that control over the local state institutions played in consolidating and augmenting the political and economic fortunes of landlords. It illustrates how members of a patrilineal clan (*biraderi*)<sup>3</sup> of prosperous Jats not only overtook members of an aristocratic lineage of landlords, often more concerned with polo and hare-coursing than politics, as the political overlords of a region of the Sargodha District but also directly challenged and fought them. These Jat landlords had no qualms about the use of force and involvement in corruption and crime in their efforts at achieving upward social mobility. Around this focus, this thesis describes and accounts for the entrenchment of violent factional politics in the Punjabi countryside and examines how this has forestalled the emergence of horizontal, class-based politics.

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<sup>2</sup> Jats are the dominant landowning group of the Punjab. The Gondals, with whom this thesis is primarily concerned, are a sub-clan of the Jats.

<sup>3</sup> In the Pakistani Punjab the terms *biraderi* and *qaum* are often used interchangeably to refer to the patrilineal clan although the latter is more frequently used for more inclusive forms of identity such as ethnicity (e.g. Pathan, Baluch, Punjabi) or nationality (Pakistani, Indian, etc.). The term caste (*zat*) is not very frequently used. See especially Chaudhary (1999: 11)

Whereas India's formal commitment to democracy has allowed for the growing political assertiveness of formerly disenfranchised lower caste groups, military rule and a powerful landed elite in Pakistan have effectively prevented similar groups from becoming politically assertive. This has meant that political competition and conflict in rural areas largely remains a contest between elite-led factions, who lack a common political ideology save that of appropriating the spoils of power and gaining ascendancy over rivals and enemies.<sup>4</sup> There is little evidence to support an argument that the rural masses were somehow content with their lot and that they voluntarily aligned themselves with powerful leaders on a transactional basis.<sup>5</sup> Rather, this work will show that labourers and tenants were often compelled to participate in a system that reproduced their own subordination. Members of the landed elite continued to wield considerable power over much of the rural population through tenancy relations, patronage and coercion. This enabled them to obtain votes during elections and command *corvée* labour, as well as to enforce debt-bondage.

### **Contrasts Between the Indian and Pakistani Experiences**

In both India and Pakistan the local colonisation and personalisation of state institutions by prosperous peasants and merchants contributed to the emergence of what Harris-White has called 'shadow states' (2003: 77), wherein people, principally from intermediate classes, nurture webs of useful social connections "primarily based on ascribed criteria (such as caste, gender and class) and maintained through face to face contact" (Jeffrey 2000: 1018). Individuals use these networks to reinforce their power.

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<sup>4</sup> F.G. Bailey defines a faction in the following way: "There are two connected characteristics which mark out a political group as a faction: firstly the members do not co-operate because they have a common ideology which their co-operation will serve; secondly they are recruited by a leader with whom they have a transactional relationship." (Bailey 2001 [1969]: 52). When Bailey claims that factions lack a common ideology he means that they lack a social programme beyond the narrow goal of appropriating the spoils of power for members of the faction.

<sup>5</sup> As was argued by Bailey (2001 [1969]) and Barth (1959) in their respective works on Indian and Swat Pathan politics, as well as by Wiser (1939) in his description of the Indian *Jajmani* system.

Through their influence with the police and other branches of government they are able to get involved in a variety of criminal activities and to emerge as local political strongmen.<sup>6</sup> In places like Uttar Pradesh the result has been widespread rural violence as political strongmen compete to control the local police and civil services. For Paul Brass the decline of the Congress Party organisation in Uttar Pradesh led to the increased political clout of local strongmen with control over the police force, meaning that “rule in the countryside is not based on abstractions but control over resources and safety. It is a Hobbesian world in which security and safety are not provided by the state, but are themselves values—that is valued objects—integral to and inseparable from the struggle for power and influence (Brass 1997: 92-93). Similarly, this work will demonstrate that politicians, the police and the civil services do not serve the ‘public’ in rural Pakistan. Instead they have often pursued their own predatory agendas in collusion with local strongmen.

Prosperous peasants in the Pakistani Punjab became increasingly assertive in the 1960s roughly around the same time that prosperous Jat peasants in Uttar Pradesh in India became politically assertive under the banner of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Brass 1997, Gupta 1998, Jeffrey 2000). In both cases the growing political assertiveness of prosperous peasants was aided by the increase in their disposable incomes following the green revolution. However, while in Uttar Pradesh they organised under the banner of a political party, their counterparts in the Pakistani Punjab were first supported by General Ayub Khan on a non-party basis under military rule when severe restrictions

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<sup>6</sup> The now classic work of Anton Blok (1974) on the Sicilian Mafia illustrates similar themes. Blok shows how the abolition of feudalism under Bourbon absolutism led to the rise of a land-owning bourgeoisie that became allied with the former feudal barons against the poor peasantry. Together these two groups functioned as “brokers between the community-oriented peasants and nation-oriented groups” (Blok 1961: 163) and emerged as what eventually came to be referred to as the mafia. In this vision, as in Harris-White’s and other works including this one, crime and banditry are intimately linked to the state rather than occurring outside of it. This goes against Hobsbawm’s (2000) depiction of what he terms ‘social banditry’ whereby peasants act outside of the state and challenge it in order to redress social injustices, often by stealing from the rich in order to give to the poor.

were placed upon political parties.<sup>7</sup> Nasr (2001) argues that they were supported in order to weaken the political power of the old landed elite. Thus, while prosperous peasants in Uttar Pradesh were able to colonise state institutions in what was for the most part a formally democratic polity, their counterparts in the Pakistani Punjab were able to colonise state institutions in an often formally authoritarian polity.

The fact of authoritarianism in Pakistan and formal democracy in India led to divergent social and political trajectories in the two countries. However, in both contexts the colonisation of the local state by strongmen and their networks cannot be fully understood in isolation from higher level national politics. In other words, it isn't only local factors that account for the formation of shadow states whereby informal networks of individuals interact with and come to control the police and the local civil services. With respect to the Indian context Kohli (1991) has argued that Indira Gandhi's personalised authoritarianism did much harm to provincial institutions, and strongly contributed to the politicisation of the police and of the civil services. In Pakistan, where authoritarian rule in either civilian or military guise has largely been uninterrupted, the politicisation of the civil services and of the police was arguably far more comprehensive. As this thesis will illustrate, authoritarian central governments in Pakistan frequently carried out the mass transfer and dismissal of recalcitrant officers in order to replace them with more pliable ones. Having done this, authoritarian governments used the police, the intelligence services, the judiciary (including newly created prosecutorial bodies) and the civil services to marginalise, intimidate and harass political opponents. Whereas in India the higher level judiciary remained somewhat independent, the higher level judiciary in Pakistan, along with the constitution itself, were manipulated by almost every government that came to power. It therefore appears

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<sup>7</sup> See chapter two for a further discussion. Also see Wilder (1999:74).



that authoritarianism at the centre played a role in the personalisation and politicisation of government institutions in both countries. Nevertheless, central authoritarianism was far more persistent and comprehensive in Pakistan than it was in India, where a formal commitment to democracy and constitutional rule was retained.

India's commitment to democracy meant that although state policies could often be subverted locally as a result of local strongmen and their networks of influence, elections redistributed "opportunities to colonise and co-opt state institutions caste-wise" (Jeffrey 2000: 1033). Thus Jeffrey and Lerche's (2000) work on Uttar Pradesh illustrates how the rise of the Dalit-based Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP) allowed a segment of society traditionally excluded from the state to colonise local state institutions (such as the police) and thereby curb the abuses traditionally perpetrated against them by the upper and middle-ranking castes. To a certain extent this signified the decline of a factional style of politics (Alavi 1971, Bailey 2001[1969], Brass 1983, Nicholas 1965) whereby lower castes aligned themselves vertically with members of higher landed castes, and the rise of more horizontally constituted political alignments based on caste and class. Political competition and conflict ceased being solely a contest between members of the upper castes as members of intermediate and lower castes started to compete in order to gain political power and office. Political power and access to state institutions allowed individuals from groups that were traditionally excluded from politics and state institutions to emerge as members of a new political and economic elite. Thus the BSP's colonisation of state institutions gave the Dalits their turn to engage in strongman politics.<sup>8</sup> Put bluntly, in places like Uttar Pradesh democracy and a formal commitment to promoting equality at least served to

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Luce reports that within her first year of office Mayawati ordered the transfer of 1400 IAS officers (Luce 2006: 128). Her opponents accused her of seeking to humiliate upper caste civil servants and trying to raise money from IAS officers who were prepared to pay bribes either to stay put or to move back to where they had been stationed before.

redistribute the opportunities for corruption.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, successive Pakistani governments' lack of commitment to democracy and the promotion of egalitarianism greatly restricted the redistribution of opportunities to colonise the state, such that political competition largely remained a contest among the elite.

### Context and Background

The Punjab is home to the five rivers that give the province its name.<sup>10</sup> The river Jhelum serves as the Punjab's Western boundary with the Sutlej serving as the region's Eastern boundary. In between these two rivers lie the Chenab, the Ravi and the dry bed of the Beas River.<sup>11</sup> The areas between these rivers, known as *doabs*,<sup>12</sup> constitute some of the most fertile land in all of Pakistan. The research for this thesis was carried out in the village of Bek Sagrana in the central Punjabi district of Sargodha located in the Jech doab, demarcated by the Chenab River to the East and by the Jhelum River to the West. According to Wilder, the Central Punjab is the Punjab province's

...political, economic and cultural centre. It is the most urbanised, industrialized, agriculturally productive, and densely populated of the four regions of the Punjab. The sixty-one National Assembly Seats of central Punjab comprise more than half of the total seats of the Punjab and more than a quarter of the entire country's seats. The key to success in Punjab politics and to a considerable extent Pakistani politics lies here. (Wilder 1999:34-37).

Sargodha is one of the districts that comprise the central Punjab, with five national assembly seats and eleven provincial assembly seats.<sup>13</sup> Subsequent to canal colonisation

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<sup>9</sup> Corbridge et al. (2005) argue that there are reasons for greater optimism than this and that there is reason to believe that "an exclusive emphasis on the shadow state, or on a relentlessly 'vertical' political society, sometimes fails to point up the spaces of citizenship that are being created, or perhaps widened, in the wake of the good governance agenda and the popular mobilizations to which it can give rise (*ibid*:5).

<sup>10</sup> Punjab derives from *panj ab* meaning five waters.

<sup>11</sup> The water of the river Beas along with some of the water from the Sutlej and Ravi rivers was diverted to India as part of the Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan in 1960.

<sup>12</sup> The term *doab* literally means 'two waters.'

<sup>13</sup> These districts include Gujranwala, Gujrat, Sialkot, Narowal, Lahore, Kasur, Sheikhpura, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Toba Tek Singh, Sahiwal and Okara.

<sup>17</sup> See Imran Ali (1988) for a comprehensive account of canal colonisation in the Punjab.

that began in 1885, the area became one of the most agriculturally productive areas in Asia<sup>17</sup> as well as the most densely populated area of the Punjab.<sup>18</sup> Fertile land and an extensive irrigation system contributed to making the central Punjab the centre of Pakistan's green revolution. In addition to being the richest region of the Punjab agriculturally, it is also the most industrialised one. In 1989, 71.9 per cent of the Punjab's industry was located in the central Punjab, principally concentrated in the cities of Lahore, Faisalabad and Gujranwala (*ibid*: 40).

Prior to canal colonisation, most permanent settlements on the Jech doab were around the banks of the Chenab and Jhelum rivers. Here irrigation was principally carried out through the use of wells (*khus*) and occasionally through inundation canals. Away from the rivers, scant rainfall made the Jech doab largely unsuitable for settled agriculture despite its rich alluvial soils. These inland areas were sparsely populated by semi-pastoral people (*charaghs*) who kept livestock and practiced limited single cropping agriculture. Near the banks of the Chenab River in the Eastern part of the Jech doab, where the research for this thesis was carried out, the two dominant semi-pastoralist Jat clans were the Gondals and the *Ranjhas*.<sup>19</sup> Once canal colonisation was underway the colonial administrator Malcolm Darling reported that these pastoralists, or *janglis*<sup>20</sup> as he pejoratively referred to them, were poor cultivators

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<sup>18</sup> In 1993 the population of the central Punjab was 34,500,000, more than half the Punjab's population (Wilder 1999: 38).

<sup>19</sup> Both the Ranjha and Gondal populations were spread across a large geographical area that spanned from the district of Gujrat to the east and across the Jhelum River to the west. Within both of these Jat clans there sub-clans that often acquired their names from a patrilineal ancestor. Thus, for example, the descendants of a man called Kala Gondal were known as the Kaliana Gondals. Alongside the Gondals and *Ranjhas* other dominant landowning clans in the area of Sargodha included *Pathans*, *Rihans* and *Nissuwanas*. To the West of them, in the Jhelum valley, the dominant landowning clans in the district included *Bhattis*, *Khokars*, *Mekans* and *Jhammats* as well as *Baloches* and *Sayyids*. *Tiwanas*, *Noons* and *Awans* were other important landowning clans to the East of the District.

<sup>20</sup> The term literally refers to 'people of the jungle' and pejoratively indicates savagery and lack of education. In Urdu the term *jangal* is used not to refer to tropical rainforests as in English but to any wild and uninhabited area of land.



Figure 1: Map of Pakistan<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Courtesy of <http://geology.com/world/pakistan-satellite-image.shtml>

“like all primitive folk who have an abundance of land” (Darling 1934: 14). He claimed that “if the jangli is not a good farmer, he is at least a good sportsman. Faction and feud are rife in his villages, and he likes to settle his quarrels in old fashioned ways without recourse to court and police” (Darling 1934:15). Moreover he claimed that “once there was hardly a zaildar who was not in the cattle-thieving business, and even now it would be difficult to find anyone of any prominence who had not a relative or two connected with it” (*ibid*). Canal colonisation made perennial agriculture possible and transformed these sparsely populated doabs into the agricultural heartland of the Punjab. Settlers (*abadkars*) were brought in from other areas of the Punjab and were given titles to canal-irrigated land. Most of these people settled in newly built, planned villages known as *chaks*. The geometry of these villages was one of squares and straight lines, and reflected the colonial government’s self-professed civilising mission which aimed to create modern and enterprising farmers (Gilmartin 2004). Groups that were native to the region such as the Gondals and the Ranjhas were also given titles of land-ownership over the newly irrigated land and became settled agriculturalists. However, many of them, including the Gondals, continued to live in the old, unplanned village settlements.

As a result of colonisation the Sargodha district became a major producer of cotton, wheat, barley, maize, millet, rapeseed and pulses. By 1947 the Sargodha district had become one of the largest agricultural hubs in Asia, with a major market for grain

(particularly wheat) and ten large and well equipped cotton ginning factories. At the time of independence, when Pakistan emerged from partition with a poor industrial base, the district was a major contributor to Pakistan's tax revenue and a major focal point of foreign exchange. Agriculture in the district received a further boost during the green revolution starting in the 1960's. In the 1970's the extensive irrigation system of the district made it possible for many landlords to start substituting citrus orchards, requiring significant amounts of irrigation, for cotton cultivation. By 2004 the Sarghoda *tehsil* of Bhalwal, where the research for this thesis was carried out, came to have the highest density of citrus orchards in the district and was often referred to as the 'California of Pakistan.' The production of citrus was not only more profitable than cotton, and boosted the district as a centre of foreign exchange, but was also significantly less labour intensive. As chapter four will illustrate, this allowed wealthy landlords to spend less time supervising agricultural activities and more time in cities such as Sargodha and Lahore, where their children could obtain a better education than in their home villages.

Given the highly unequal distribution of land and access to formal state institutions (which were to a large extent the legacy of the colonial practice of indirect rule through landed notables), the benefits from both the green revolution and the introduction of citrus orchards accrued principally to the landed elites. The World Bank (2002) estimates that less than half of rural households in Pakistan own any land and that more than half of rural farm holdings are of less than five acres (ADB 2006: 46) and account for 16 per cent of Pakistan's total farm area. On the other hand, Malik

(2005) reports that in 2000 only 5 per cent of farms were 25 acres or more in size but that they accounted for 38 per cent of all land owned. Moreover statistics for the Punjab from 1976 show that landowners with more than 50 acres of land accounted for more than 18.2 per cent of all land owned. Hussain (1989) and Zaidi (1999) point out that during the green revolution it was principally the large farmers who could get credit to finance the use of new inputs and technologies. These farmers not only possessed substantial collateral in the form of land but also had privileged access to the state distribution of inputs and technologies through their personal connections. On the other hand, tenants and smallholders had to obtain credit through informal institutions, often through landlord farmers, who required them to repay in kind and who often valued their produce at rates that were below market rates. In addition, access to the market in remote areas was often controlled by landlords who owned trucks and marketing outlets, and who could thereby extract a surplus from local smallholders and tenants. The net result was that smallholders derived little benefit from the green revolution and that many even ended up highly indebted and were forced to sell their land. This trend continued well after the initial onset of the green revolution. Hussain (2003) claims that many such smallholders were increasingly being forced to sell their land, and that between 1990 and 2000 as many as 76.5 per cent of the extremely poor and 38.9 per cent of the poor had done so.

Sharecroppers were also negatively affected by the green revolution. Saghir Ahmad (1977) reported that prior to the green revolution and to the tractorisation that came with it, landlords in the Sargodha village of Sahiwal begged tenants to cultivate as

much land as they could in exchange for 50 per cent of the harvest. The reason for this was that many landlords were unable to organise the cultivation of their lands themselves due to the vast number of bullock teams and workers that this would have required. Chakravarti's (2002) work on Bihar shows that whereas a single bullock team was able to prepare 0.42 acres of land in six hours, a tractor could prepare twenty five acres in twenty hours. Thus, tractorisation meant that landlords could replace a large number of tenants and their bullock teams by a single tractor driver. Tractorisation also meant that a lot of land dedicated to the cultivation of fodder for the bullock teams could be turned over to other crops, which dramatically speeded up the turnover of crops in single fields. Lastly, tractorisation allowed wealthy landowners to do away with tenants who, under both General Ayub Khan's and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's land reform programmes, might have decided to claim legal title to the land they cultivated. The result was that between 1960 and 1990 the total area of land in the Punjab cultivated by sharecroppers declined from 37.2 per cent to 14.2 per cent (Zaidi 1999: 42). Finally, in districts like Sargodha, the introduction of citrus orchards also played a significant role in displacing agricultural tenants.

In this way many former smallholders and tenants, as well as village artisans whose goods were to a large extent replaced by mass produced ones, joined the ranks of the mass of "unorganised and unprotected workers" (Breman 1996: 2) bogged down in the transition from agrarian to industrial production. Workers pushed out of agriculture and cottage industries by mechanisation were not formally incorporated into a growing industrial sector. Instead the majority of this work force was employed in a variety of petty trades, services and casual labour in the agricultural sector, the industrial sector and in construction work. Construction work was a particularly important source of employment. The 1998 Government Census claimed that 35.8 per cent of the district's



population was employed in construction, followed by 31 per cent who were employed in agriculture. What the census statistics do not show, as will be described in chapter four, is that the majority of labourers were casual, and moved between agriculture, construction and industry principally located in neighbouring districts.

### ***Upward Mobility and the Changing Balance of Power***

As noted above, the world that Daniyal Mueenuddin evokes in his fictional accounts of Punjabi life is changing. While some members of the old aristocratic elite continue to wield enormous power and wealth, the fortunes and political influence of many others have been substantially eroded. Those who were careless about their estates, who stayed clear of gritty local politics, and who didn't diversify their sources of income lost land through sales, land reform, subdivision through inheritance and the encroachment of local strongmen from among the middle and gentry landholders. As in Chakravarti's account of Rajasthani politics control over the land was insufficient to guarantee political power in the face of "political entrepreneurs" (Chakravarti 1975: 210).

It is from among the ranks of the middle and gentry landholders that the Gondals of the district of Sargodha, the principal subject of this thesis, emerged to political prominence, and it is they who filled the power vacuum caused by the absentee lifestyles of the old ashrafi elite. It should be noted that although the middle and gentry landholders did not individually possess the vast tracts of land that the ashrafi landlords did, they generally owned between a dozen and hundred acres. Moreover, they generally possessed significant political influence in their villages and localities rather than at national and provincial levels like the ashrafi landlords by virtue of the status and powers granted to them under British rule. Thus, they were often local chiefs

(*chowdris*) and revenue collectors (*lambardars*) possessing significant ties with the local authorities, including the courts and the police, and they typically spent much of their lives in their home villages. Members of the old anglicised feudal elite were often educated in British colonial establishments like Aitchison College in Lahore or Lawrence College in Murree. In contrast, these middle gentry were mostly educated in village schools together with villagers from different class backgrounds. Even though they might have known some English, they spoke Punjabi rather than English at home. Their attitudes with respect to matters of honour (*izzat*) and female modesty (*hayaa*) were often more conservative than those of the older, more cosmopolitan, feudal elite. For example, the women of the feudal elite didn't necessarily maintain strict seclusion (*purdah*) outside their villages, were sometimes sent to study abroad, and even went to parties in Lahore where men and women mingled freely and alcohol was served. In contrast, the women from this upwardly mobile landlord class maintained strict *purdah*, and it was unthinkable that they would go to parties or be sent to study abroad.

People like the Gondals—the Jaglanis of Mueenuddin's Punjab—knew the value of money and closely scrutinised the everyday operations on their farms. Unlike the aristocrats of Harouni's ilk, they controlled labourers and servants with a firm hand and frequently tied them down with debts. Aristocratic landlords like the fictional but accurately portrayed Harouni had such great wealth that they could afford to be charitable towards villagers and dependants. In the district of Sargodha for example, the extremely wealthy and politically influential Noon family built schools and hospitals in their villages.<sup>26</sup> In the village of Nurpur they set up a small flour mill where villagers

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<sup>26</sup> The grandfather of the current head of the Noon family was Firoz Khan Noon, Chief Minister of the Punjab from 1953 to 1956. He was then foreign minister between 1956 and 1957 and Prime Minister of Pakistan between 1957 and 1958. Firoz Khan Noon's eldest son wasn't extensively involved in politics but successfully diversified the family's sources of income by investing in a large sugar mill, milk processing plants and cement factories. His grandson was once a member of the national assembly

could turn their wheat into flour for free.<sup>27</sup> But those aristocratic landlords who failed to be vigilant could find themselves overtaken politically or even directly challenged by this ambitious and forceful class of landlord farmers, as was the case in Mueenuddin's fictional account. Even the Noons of Nurpur faced challenges from Jat cultivators in their own village. Although the Noons still possessed powerful political connections and their wealth remained undiminished, the fact that they didn't reside in Nurpur, and that they preferred to keep their distance from corrupt and often murderous rural politics, created a space for local toughs to start flexing their muscle.

A good illustration of differences in attitudes and approaches between some members of the old aristocratic elite and the forceful class of landlord farmers is provided by Malik Sahib,<sup>28</sup> a man in his forties and the present day heir to the wealthiest branch of the Noon family of Nurpur. He had become a member of the national assembly in his early thirties. Because of his young age he had dropped his clean-shaven urban look and grown a moustache in order to appear older. His moustache also helped him to blend in better with his rural constituents and with fellow politicians, for whom the moustache was a sign of virility. Politicians were expected to be virile in order to defend the interests of their clients and constituents better. Malik Sahib's family's vast estate and sugar mill, which employed around ten thousand people on a seasonal basis, meant that he had a virtually guaranteed seat in the national assembly regardless of his age and lack of experience. Having been brought up in Lahore and at a boarding school in England, he hadn't found rural Punjabi politics to his taste and had subsequently decided to avoid it. He complained about how, while he was a member of

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and virtually had a guaranteed seat in it because of the vast vote bank he commanded through his landholdings and his local factories.

<sup>27</sup> I was able to visit Nurpur and meet members of the Noon family in 2006. I was put in contact with them through an Argentinian agronomist who was working in Pakistan.

<sup>28</sup> The term Malik, like the term chowdri was an honorific. In the Punjab it was generally used to refer to members of families who had received the largest land grants from the British during canal colonisation (see Ali 1988).

the national assembly, many prosperous farmers who had mobilised votes on his behalf had incessantly assailed him with requests to remove uncooperative police officers and local land registration officers (*patwaris*). Other landlords requested that he obtain government jobs for their servants so that the government would pay the servants' wages while they continued working for them. He also complained about how supporters frequently asked him to arrange release from jail for relatives of theirs involved in criminal activities and acts of violence.

After abandoning politics Malik Sahib resumed his urban lifestyle and only occasionally visited Nurpur. His lack of attention to village affairs created a power vacuum which eventually allowed a set of brothers from an intermediate ranking Jat family to gain power. They started to grab poorer people's land and to harass and intimidate villagers. When, acting on the requests of numerous villagers, Malik Sahib decided to take them to court, they responded with threats of violence, and Malik Sahib and his family were compelled to take hired gunmen with them each time they visited Nurpur. It took four years for this situation to be resolved, but in the meantime several people were killed and injured. The leader of the Jat brothers was himself killed when he and his brothers attacked a car in which Malik Sahib's gunmen were travelling. The remaining siblings later launched a second attack on Malik Sahib's gunmen who were drinking tea at a roadside stall, and an innocent bystander was caught in the crossfire and permanently crippled as a result of a bullet through his spine. Immediately after the shootout Malik Sahib's lawyer, a man extensively involved in rural litigation and conflict, told him that he needed to quickly fabricate some evidence to prove that his men had been attacked, and that otherwise the troublemakers might themselves file a case against him and his men. The lawyer told Malik Sahib that one of his gunmen needed to shoot himself in the arm in order to show the police evidence of an attack.

Malik Sahib, who had little experience with this type of conflict and litigation, thought the suggestion was absurd. It was only once his local friends and allies, to whom the fabrication of evidence in cases in which the police got involved was a well known practice, also insisted on the necessity of it that he gave one of his gunmen the order to shoot himself in the arm.

Malik Sahib told me that he had no experience or taste for practices such as these, which came naturally to many local landlords and politicians. It took him four years to finally have the troublemakers jailed, and he admitted that people who were brought up dealing with these sorts of disputes would have dealt with the matter faster and more brutally. For example, he could have ordered his gunmen to kill the troublemakers, or could even have organised a fake police encounter to have them eliminated. However, both options would have involved mobilising the support of politicians, judges and police officers. Indeed, high ranking provincial politicians and police officers had offered their help but, since accepting it would have meant having to return the favours at some point, Malik Sahib refused so as not to be indebted to them later. Such indebtedness might have involved giving political support to, or mobilising votes on behalf of, a particular politician, for example. Moreover Malik Sahib disapproved of violent methods and preferred to do things through the courts. His case clearly illustrates the fact that even the wealthiest landlords could at any time find their authority challenged by individuals willing to use force and had to be constantly vigilant. It also illustrates the fact that absentee aristocratic landlords who were more at ease in a cosmopolitan crowd in Lahore (let alone abroad) were often unwilling to dirty their own hands with corrupt and violent rural politics.

The domestic and farm servants of the leading Noon family in Nurpur earned at least twice as much as the servants of the prosperous farmers who are the subject of this

thesis and who have become increasingly dominant in Punjabi politics. Although they were prosperous these landlords still did not have sufficient wealth to remain idle, so they pursued careers in the legal profession, in various branches of local government including the land revenue departments and the police, and in politics at various levels. But education, careers and measures of cosmopolitan respectability notwithstanding, they didn't shy away from the use of force in order to pursue criminal ventures in cattle theft, heroin trafficking and bootlegging, as well as to fight rivals and intimidate unruly villagers. The links that they cultivated with the local authorities, particularly the police, played a crucial role in determining how successful they were in these pursuits. Through these activities they were able to consolidate their local influence, enrich themselves through crime and corruption and emerge eventually as powerful strongmen and power brokers, and even as parliamentarians and ministers, beginning in the 1960s.

### *Social Setting*

As was generally the case throughout the rest of the Pakistani Punjab the principal social distinction among people living in the village of Bek Sagrana and its surrounding area was the one between the landowners, (or *zamindars*), and the landless menial and artisan biraderis referred to as *kammis*.<sup>29</sup>

Among the zamindars in the area of Bek Sagrana the Gondal biraderi of Jats was dominant in terms of status, political influence and wealth, principally in the form of land dedicated to citrus orchards. They made up fourteen out of the 120 households in the village and owned most of the land surrounding it. They all shared a common apical ancestor four generations back and generally married endogamously among themselves with first and second cousin marriage being very common (see Alavi 1972). In the cases

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<sup>29</sup> See Ahmed (1977) for whom the principal social distinction in Punjabi villages is that between zamindars and kammis. Throughout this work I will follow both Alavi (1972) and my informants who generally use the term biraderi, referring to the patrilineal clan, rather than the term *zat* for caste.

where they married outside the Gondal biraderi it was generally with members of other Jat zamindar biraderis of roughly equivalent socio-economic standing. Some Gondal households, for example, had intermarried with members of allied *Ranjha* households for more than two generations. The status of the Gondals was reflected by the fact that they were usually referred to with the honorific term chowdri indicating chieftainship,<sup>30</sup> but could also be referred to as *Mian Ji* or *Sufi Sahib* if they had a reputation for piety and saintliness. One very wealthy Gondal landlord in the village even managed to establish himself as a saint (*pir*). It was in fact not uncommon for major zamindars in the Punjab to be hereditary saints (*pirs*) thereby giving them particularly high social status.

On the other hand the kammis, who constituted the majority of the population in the area of Bek Sagrana, largely owned no land and had low social status in relation to the zamindars.<sup>31</sup> I was frequently told by chowdri, including impoverished ones whose means of subsistence had little to differentiate them from labouring kammis, that the very term kammi indicated scarcity.<sup>32</sup> This suggested that kammis not only suffered from scarcity in terms of material resources but also in terms of their physical, mental and moral stature. Some informants went so far as to tell me that the abusive term '*kamina*,' referring to poor, dirty and, above all cowardly and stingy people, derived from the term kammi. Both terms indicated lowliness and scarcity. The kammis included carpenters (*Tarkhan*), potters (*Kumhar*), blacksmiths (*Lohar*), cobblers (*Mochi*), breadmakers (*Machi*), weavers (*Julaha*), barbers (*Nai/Hajaam*), bards

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<sup>30</sup> The term chowdri will be used frequently throughout this thesis to refer influential zamindars, particularly the Gondals.

<sup>31</sup> In the village itself kammis made up 35 per cent of the population but this proportion was much higher in clusters of houses surrounding farmsteads known as *deras*. In the *deras* all houses other than that of the landlord were kammi households. On the dera where I lived sixteen out of eighteen households were kammi households. See the tables in Appendix One.

<sup>32</sup> Whether there is an etymological relationship between the terms kammi and the term for 'little' or scarcity (*kam*) is unclear. Nevertheless informants did make a link between them.

(*Mirasi*), drummers (*Pirhain*), and sweepers (*Mussalli*) among others. Members of these groups traditionally carried out a variety of tasks for several village patrons who paid them in kind with wheat following the yearly wheat harvest. These exchange arrangements were known as *seyp*. The payment usually consisted of a couple of *maunds*<sup>34</sup> of wheat depending on the amount of work that was carried out by the kammi. In addition to payments in wheat the patrons of kammis customarily allowed them to occasionally gather fodder and firewood from their lands as well.

Although there was a clear status distinction between zamindars and kammis there was no clear cut ranking between most kammis, though there was a general consensus about which ones among them ranked highest and which ones ranked lowest. Thus it was generally agreed that Tarkhans and Lohars ranked highly while Mussallis, Mirasis and Pirhains ranked the lowest. On the other hand there appeared to be no consensus about the ranking of the biraderis in between these including Machis, Julahas and Kumhars. The reason that people gave for the ranking of certain kammis generally made reference to the perceived quality of the occupation that they pursued. Thus Tarkhans and Lohars were considered to be skilled artisans that were indispensable to the village economy and who could frequently make a decent living out of their trade. In contrast, the occupations of the Mirasis, Pirhains and Mussallis were considered to be somewhat demeaning and their members tended to earn a meagre livelihood from them.<sup>35</sup> In Bek Sagrana the village Tarkhans and Lohars were among those who had managed to turn their traditional occupations into successful businesses. But those

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<sup>34</sup> One maund is equal to forty kilograms.

<sup>35</sup> The Mirasis, for example, were traditionally associated with singing and with reciting the genealogies of their chowdris for whom they often also served as domestic servants. Singing, other than of religious songs, was generally frowned upon as un-Islamic. Moreover the traditional occupation of reciting genealogies for landlords was also considered demeaning because the flattering that it involved was thought to be debasing. As a result of this Mirasis were stereotyped as being flatterers (*khushamad*). See Ibbeston (1993[1916]) for detailed accounts of the various traditional occupations of Mirasis in the Punjab.



artisans who had for some reason or another been unable to transform their occupation into a successful enterprise increasingly turned to wage labour in order to subsist.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, and although it was generally the case that, like the zamindars, kammis also married endogamously (so that, a Lohar wouldn't marry a Tarkhan, for example), unlike in Hindu India there were no explicit purity based rules governing the interactions between members of different kammi qaums or, for that matter, between zamindars and kammis.<sup>37</sup> Thus kammis and zamindars smoked from shared *hookahs* and occasionally ate together. The most common occasions when kammis and zamindars ate together were on religious occasions when the brotherhood of Muslims was asserted.

The landowning Gondal chowdris held all of the significant economic power, and they buttressed it with political power by also controlling access to various state institutions. Their entry into provincial politics had allowed many to secure an upwardly mobile path, and the generation now between the ages of twenty and forty was more educated than that of their parents. Members of this generation were frequently brought up in cities such as Sargodha or Lahore and were fluent English speakers. As noted above, many of them were becoming lawyers, politicians and civil servants while others

<sup>36</sup> For a sociological account of this trend in the district of Sargodha see Rouse (1983:320).

<sup>37</sup> Certain scholars, including Barth (1960), Ahmad (1973) and Dumont (1980), argue that Muslim forms of social stratification should be seen as akin to the Hindu caste system. Ahmad, for example, has argued that even though Muslims themselves deny that they have a caste system, in reality caste or an analogous system of stratification does indeed exist among Indian Muslims. According to Ahmad this is a result of the fact that Muslims in India have historically lived among, and are largely descended from, Hindus. Similarly, Dumont (1980: 207-08) has echoed this point and argued that even with respect to questions of commensality and intermarriage, Indian Muslims imitate Hindu codes of caste purity when it comes to forms of interaction between ashraf and non-ashraf groups (although he concedes that these 'caste-like' codes are less rigid given the influence of Islamic laws). However, according to Islamic law there are no rules of ritual purity governing the interactions between Muslims as these contradict the egalitarian tenets of Islam. Neither does Islam acknowledge the division of society into four *varnas*—priests (Brahmins), warriors (Kshatriyas), artisans and merchants (Vaishyas) and servants (Shudras)—and notions of untouchability for people outside this fourfold classification. It is for this reason that so many former untouchables in South Asia converted to Islam. However in modern day Pakistan rules of purity do frequently apply for interactions with non-Muslims. Moreover there are notions of female pollution and gender inequality which, as pointed out by Vatuk (1996) are specifically set out in the Sharia (1996:257).

joined the police and the armed forces. As a result of this the Gondals were becoming increasingly established within the highly personalised institutions of the Pakistani State thereby further enhancing their capacity to act as political patrons for the local population.

In stark contrast to this, members of the kammi biraderis were largely excluded from politics, and the highest status that they were likely to achieve within state institutions was as low ranking school or hospital guards (*chowkidars*) with the patronage and good will of a chowdri being the only way they could obtain such positions in any case. In fact, villagers relied almost exclusively on personal contacts with Gondal patrons for most of the things they needed to do involving state and other major institutions such as the police, the courts, public and private hospitals and even schools. Kammis and poor zamindars were unlikely to have such connections and for them to personally approach the police was at best futile and at worst costly and dangerous. The Punjabi police was and remains notorious for extortion, torture and extra-judicial killings, and villagers greatly feared them accordingly. Fear of the police was in fact a pervasive theme of village life and was important because it consolidated the villagers' need of well connected chowdri patrons to protect them from predatory police officers. This fear was illustrated in a variety of ways. In exchange for such protection, as will be further illustrated below, chowdris demanded political loyalty as well as labour. It was often in this way that individuals who were being pursued by the police for actual criminal offences ended up becoming the gunmen of chowdris. The predatory nature of the police therefore made the chowdris indispensable to villagers and also served the purposes of the chowdris more generally. It was a situation that effectively resembled a protection racket because the chowdris protected villagers from a predatory force over which they personally exercised a certain degree of control. As

will be discussed throughout this thesis, like their leverage over the police their leverage over other state institutions also gave the chowdris a high degree of control over villagers.

### *The Village*

The village of Bek Sagrana is situated to the east of the district towards the banks of the river Chenab. For the village landlords the trip by car to the city of Sargodha takes around forty minutes, while the trip to Lahore, along the Korean-built motorway completed in 1997, takes about two hours. For poorer villagers without cars or motorcycles, the trip to Sargodha takes an hour and a half on a cramped bus with a deafening musical horn.<sup>38</sup>

Villagers claim that Bek Sagrana had once been on the banks of the river situated to the east of the village. With time the shifting course of the river had moved further east, and what was now left of its former course formed a marshland (*buddhi*). Some villagers claimed that the river had moved east as a result of the prayers of a local village pir whose shrine lay to the east of the village cemetery facing the lowlands. Many landless villagers used these lowlands as pastureland for their livestock. The extremely wealthy and formerly politically influential *Makhdoom*<sup>39</sup> landlords from the neighbouring village of Nawabpur had once used the area for hunting wildfowl. Elderly villagers recalled how the Makhdooms had brought Europeans along during their hunting excursions. However, like other erstwhile powerful aristocratic families, the fortunes of the Makhdooms had steadily declined since the 1970s and they were no longer seen hunting. As observed above, the Makhdooms had been absentee landlords more concerned with hunting and sport than with village affairs and the everyday running of their estates. Their failure to defend their landed interests through effective

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<sup>38</sup> The bus was owned by the younger brother of one of the village leaders.

<sup>39</sup> In South Asia the term *Makhdoom* is used to refer to families that descend from a saint (*pir*).

involvement in politics meant that they lost significant amounts of land during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's land reforms. As will be illustrated in chapter two, their unwillingness to sully themselves with local politics also meant that the far less wealthy Gondals of Bek Sagrama were able to overtake them politically. After obtaining seats in the provincial and national assemblies, some Gondals came close to being as wealthy as the Makhdooms who, despite land reforms, remained the biggest landowners in the area.

The Gondals claimed that the village had always been theirs but that long ago, when the river had moved east, they had moved with it because of the need for irrigation water. In their absence the *Sagranas*, a local cultivator lineage (biraderi), had overtaken the village. Subsequently one of the ancestors of all of the present day Gondals in Bek Sagrama, around whom a great deal of legend revolved, had managed to re-conquer the village by force. His descendants boasted about how this ancestor, known as *Kala Gondal*, or Black Gondal, had called for a gathering with leading Sagranas and had got his men to ambush and kill them as they were making their way to the meeting. In any case, despite the fact that the Gondals had retaken the village and claimed that it was rightfully theirs, the village retained the name of the Sagranas.

At the time of this fieldwork, starting in 2004, the Gondals owned the majority of the land in the village and were the politically and economically dominant lineage (biraderi) not only in the village but in the surrounding region as well. Even though the Gondals were often resented by other villagers, they showed deference towards the Gondals and spoke of Bek Sagrama as a Gondal village. There were 118 households in the village of which thirteen were Gondal households. Altogether these thirteen households owned 77.5 per cent of the land owned by villagers. The second most important group of landowners were the fourteen *Rajput* households, who owned 9.7 per cent of land owned by villagers followed by fourteen *Lurka* households who owned

4.8 per cent of the land owned by villagers. The *Sagranas*, *Ranjhas*, *Gurus*, *Gogs*, *Khokars*, *Theims*, *Jaras*, *Dhulayas* and *Sayyids* altogether made up seventeen households and accounted for 7.2 per cent of land owned by villagers.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, the *kammis* made up sixty households and owned only 0.8 per cent of the villager-owned land.

Slightly beyond the village proper, in the settlements surrounding landlords' farmhouses (*deras*), land ownership was even more concentrated. These settlements generally emerged wherever a landlord built a farmhouse around which his servants and *kammis* came to settle. In some instances these *deras* had up to two dozen *kammi* households. In the area around Bek Sagrana the largest dera was that of Sufi Ahmed Abbas Gondal, who owned approximately 300 acres of land. As will be shown in chapter six, Sufi Ahmed Abbas Gondal moved out of the village in the early 1980s in response to a spiritual calling to set up a Sufi place of worship, taking several *kammi* families from the village along with him. By 2004 the dera had grown to have twenty-two households. Of these, twenty were *kammi* households, one was the village Imam's and one was Sufi Ahmed Abbas's. Apart from Sufi Ahmed Abbas, only the village Imam's household and one *Mirasi* household owned any land. Within less than a mile's radius of the village there were three other such *deras* owned by the wealthiest Gondal landlords.<sup>41</sup>

Like many villages on the banks of the rivers running through the Punjab, Bek Sagrana was an old settlement (*purani abad*). Unlike the planned *chaks*, its square mud and brick (*kaccha*) houses and its few concrete (*pakka*) ones had been erected haphazardly, so that the narrow alleyways of the village rarely formed a straight line.

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<sup>40</sup> The *Ranjhas*, *Khokars*, *Gogs*, *Jaras*, *Theims* and *Dhulayas* all claimed to be *Jats*. However there were *Khokars* and *Theims* in other areas who claimed to be *Rajputs*. For *Khokars* see Ibbeston (1993[1916]: 172).

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix One for land distribution and occupation by *biraderi*.

The sides of these alleyways had open gutters where dark water covered with black froth flowed out of people's houses towards the village pond (*talaab*), and the alleyways themselves were strewn with litter. Behind the mud and brick walls, and the closed doors facing the alleyways, lay dusty courtyards at the end of which stood the square mud and brick houses of the majority of villagers. Only 37 out of the 118 houses that composed the village were pakka, and all of these belonged to Gondal and other zamindar households. The rest of the houses were built with bricks that were held together with mud rather than cement, while some were built purely with mud and straw. These houses generally possessed two or three rooms in a row. One of these rooms was normally used to keep the bulk of the family's most prized possessions, which often included ornately painted string cots (*charpais*) as well as copper and tin vessels and plates displayed on shelves that covered one or more walls. This room also generally contained large metal trunks where people stored the wheat that they ground and consumed as bread (*roti*) throughout the year.<sup>42</sup> This was also the room that was generally given to valued guests when they came to spend the night.

Other than during the cold and foggy months of December and January, people spent their time at home mostly in their courtyards, where charpais were neatly set out side by side or in a "c" shape, and in such a manner that their ends, where people lay their feet, didn't point westwards towards Mecca. In the mornings the men would sit on these charpais in a cross legged position, and would be served their breakfast by their wives before setting off to work. Breakfast for the poor generally consisted of the warmed-up leftovers from the previous night or left-over roti with a chunk of unrefined sugar (*gur*) and, if lucky, a cup of watery tea. For those who were slightly better off

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<sup>42</sup> There were two small flour mills in the village where people could turn their wheat into flour. One of these mills was owned by the village blacksmiths (Tarkhans) and the other was owned by a potter (*Kumhar*) family. Both mills retained an eighth of the flour produced as their fee.

breakfast might include a glass of buffalo milk, a valued source of nutrition held to be an important source of strength (*takat*) and vitality. For the wealthiest chowdris breakfast might include eggs and *parathas* fried in *desi ghee*, mango pickle (*achaar*), yoghurt and sweet tea prepared in fresh boiled milk. They too ate on charpais placed in their courtyards, although during the devastatingly hot summer months some of them ate their breakfast in air conditioned rooms. While the men sat on charpais, their wives and daughters (and servants in the case of the rich) squatted in a corner of the courtyard, where they prepared the fire and cooked.

During the day the women of the Gondal zamindar households, who maintained strict purdah, spent much of their time in the courtyard attending to household chores while their men were away on business. On sunny winter mornings they laid out their charpais in the sun to warm up, and when the heat mounted they retired under the shade of a tree or to the shade under the gallery. Poorer kammi women, who couldn't afford the luxury of purdah, often had to leave their houses in order to fetch wood for cooking, fodder for the livestock and kitchen provisions. Some of the poorest women also left their houses in order to do domestic work for the Gondals. Afterwards they would return home to prepare a simple lunch for their husbands and children, and a somewhat more substantial meal in the evenings.

During the hot summer months, when temperatures could reach fifty degrees centigrade, entire families would sleep in their courtyards at night. Those who could afford to do so brought out their electric fans and kept them running throughout the night. Those who had a fan but couldn't afford to pay their electricity bills stole electricity and, before sunrise, furtively pulled down their illegal electricity connections. In houses without a fan the men would sleep on the roof in the hope of catching a cool gust of wind while the women, for the sake of modesty (*hayaa*), generally stayed below

in the courtyard. The wealthiest Gondals had air conditioners so, if they were in the village and not away in their town houses, they slept inside and caught colds in mid-summer. They too sometimes stole electricity in order to avoid the massive bills that resulted from running air conditioners.<sup>43</sup> When there was too much strain on the electrical grid, which was largely caused by wealthy people running their air conditioners, blackouts and load-shedding meant that, for some hours, both rich and poor suffered together. Perhaps during these hours the rich, accustomed to comfort, suffered more than the toughened, weather-beaten poor.

Almost all courtyards possessed a hand-pump (*nalka*) for drinking water and washing, with only a few households having running water. Those who could afford to do so erected walls around the hand pump in order to be able to wash themselves with greater privacy. Only the wealthiest Gondals built bathrooms with hot running water inside their large houses. Many people also used their courtyards to keep chickens and tether their livestock overnight, when cattle and buffalo thieves roamed the area. For their part, wealthy landlords had cowsheds where their servants and bondsmen spent the night in order to guard the livestock from thieves. While most households possessed *nalkas*, very few possessed latrines (only about fifteen out of the 118 households in the village did so). All but two of these were Gondal households. Men whose houses didn't possess latrines either used the latrines within the compound of the Friday mosque (*jamia masjid*) in the centre of the village, or went out into the citrus orchards where they could perform their bodily functions out of sight. Because their wives and daughters weren't meant to enter the mosque the women went out into the orchards in groups, either under cover of darkness for the sake of modesty, or in the early morning.

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<sup>43</sup> Running a single air conditioner every night could result in electricity bills of over Rs.10,000 per month. In order to avoid such bills landlords sometimes set up clandestine connections to the electrical grid or bribed the local Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) official to tamper with their electricity meters. The poor couldn't afford the bribes so they simply hoped not to be caught.



Villagers told me that women went out in groups to protect each other in case wandering men, particularly local Gondal chowdris, tried to take advantage of them.

In the centre of the village, towering above the rest of it, were the fortress-like houses of the wealthy and politically influential Gondal chowdris. Unlike all other houses in the village, these houses had two storeys and some even had towers from which their owners could keep an eye on the activities of villagers. All of them possessed a walled courtyard where the women of the chowdris' households often spent their days attending to guests and chatting with the other women of the village, as well as supervising their servants sweeping the courtyard, washing clothes and cooking. Some of the older houses, built or refurbished around the 1950s, had art-deco designs plastered upon their walls and ornately carved heavy wooden doors. Their insides were cool as a result of the thick walls and the high ceilings with small vent-like windows at the top, which were opened with long wooden poles in order to release the hot air that accumulated near the ceiling. The furniture in the older houses was old and often rickety, and the rooms containing it had a musty smell suggesting the decay of long years.

At the time of fieldwork three out of five of these large houses had been abandoned as a result of the violent factional conflict that raged in the village throughout the 1990s (see chapter three). Thanks to the rising incomes that followed from the green revolution and from the introduction of citrus orchards (and in two cases from involvement in formal politics and political brokerage) the houses' owners had been able to move out of the village and build new houses inside walled compounds on their lands within a mile of the village. When they moved they took their servants and kammis along with them. In this way three large settlements were created outside the village. As mentioned above, these settlements were referred to as *deras*. The houses

that the landlords built there were closer in style to the houses with imitation neo-classical features found in the housing colonies of suburban Lahore than to their former village dwellings. As noted, they sometimes had several storeys, and some had entrances that were flanked by tall white columns. Unlike the older dwellings some of these houses had large windows, which were tinted green or black in order for the women to be able to look out without being seen from the outside. Rather than dusty paved courtyards at their centre, these houses had large walled gardens at their back where the women, who now spent most of their time in Lahore, could spend their days in seclusion. The walls around the perimeter of these gardens, which in some cases covered well over an acre of land, had high walls studded with shards of glass in order to prevent thieves and enemies from entering.

The kammis and servants who accompanied the landlords when they moved out of the village settled around the outside perimeter of the landlords' walled compounds. The green lawns and the imitation neoclassical buildings inside the walled compounds contrasted sharply with the traditional flat-roofed mud dwellings that clustered on the outside. The physical distance of these compounds from the village, as well as the stylistic distance between them and more traditional dwellings, reflected the widening social and economic gulf that increasingly separated the Gondals whose fortunes had soared from the majority of villagers. Whereas the previous generation of village leaders, who were now either very old or dead, had lived most of their lives in the village, their sons, and particularly their grandsons, increasingly spent their time in cities such as Lahore or Sargodha. One important factor that had facilitated their move to the cities had been the introduction of citrus orchards which only required minimal

supervision from their owners.<sup>44</sup> The older generation had gone to school in the village, where they had studied and played with poorer villagers whom they had come to know intimately. Later on in life they had assumed village leadership and spent their days attending to village problems in the village men's house (*darra*) next to the Jamia Masjid. Nostalgic old villagers recalled how the village leaders, who at the time weren't divided by factional rivalries, had presided over men assembled at the *darra* and exchanged gossip and jokes with them on a daily basis.

Since the early 1990s the village *darra* had rarely been used as a place where chowdris and other villagers gathered in the evenings. The only people who used it were some disreputable Gondal siblings who owned ten acres of land and who gambled and drank there. They were often abusive towards kammis that walked past. Sometimes they would imperiously send them on errands and reward them with abuse and denigrating jokes when they returned. On one occasion I witnessed them making fun of a kammi by mockingly referring to him with the honorific term of address 'Chowdri Ji,' a term used to refer to zamindars, because he was wearing brand new clothes and therefore putting himself above what they considered to be his true station in life. The kammi in question later told me that they were abusive towards him because it bothered them to see a lowly villager dressing the same way they did. He said that they would rather see him walking around in rags because they wanted people like him to remain poor and dependent so that they could continue to boss them around.

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<sup>44</sup> In a similar manner the Anavil Brahmin landlords described by Jan Breman in *Patronage and Exploitation* (1974) had been able to move to the cities as a result of the introduction of mango orchards. However, because the economic and political fortunes of the Gondals were closely linked to their involvement in politics they needed to maintain control over their constituencies. This meant that if they became excessively urbanised and lost touch with their rural constituents, they risked losing their political clout. Thus unlike Breman's Anavils, whose relationship with labourers had become largely contractual, the relationship between Gondals and labourers and other villagers continued to incorporate political, economic and religious factors. Whereas for the Anavils having large numbers of dependents no longer played an important political function, the Gondals still needed dependants to settle their feuds and to win elections. One of the aims of this work is to explain why political power remained central in guaranteeing the fortunes of Gondal and other landlords.



**Figure 2: View of Bek Sagra with low lying mud houses in the foreground and towering Gondal houses in the background.**



**Figure 3: Abandoned Gondal house in the centre of Bek Sagra.**

When the sons of those who had once presided at the village darra now attended to villagers' needs they did so at their own deras. Even then, however, their availability was limited since they were often away in Lahore where their children were being educated at prestigious English language schools and universities. Some of their children even ended up going to university in Canada and in the United Kingdom. As a result of their upward mobility the distance between leading landlords and their village had grown progressively over the generations. Thus whereas the landlords who were now over seventy had been to school in the village, their sons had gone away to school, and in some cases to university, in Sargodha while their grandchildren had been educated in Lahore. The proximity of Sargodha to the village, and its role as the principal administrative and commercial centre for villagers, meant that the middle generation had been able to maintain regular contact with the village. They had returned to the village on weekends and had frequently met villagers in Sargodha when they went there for shopping or for administrative purposes. In Sargodha they were able to forge friendships as well as enmities with the young members of the district's future political elite. Later on in life when they entered politics, these ties and enmities would play an important role in the formation of local political coalitions (see chapter two).

As members of this middle generation rose to power at district, provincial and national levels they were able to amass large fortunes and to engage in a process of upward social mobility. Members of all leading Gondal families either bought or rented property in Lahore where the provincial and much of the national elite resided. Here they were able to rub shoulders with senior civil servants, judges, politicians, rural magnates and industrialists. Members of the old aristocratic landlord families, such as

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<sup>46</sup> The college was founded in 1886 by the then governor of the Punjab Sir Charles Umpherston Aitchison. Its establishment coincided with the beginning of canal colonisation and served to educate the scions of the leading landed families of the Punjab. Over the years the college produced a large number of prime ministers, chief ministers, senators and judges and continues to do so.

the Noons who lived in Lahore and who no longer wanted to be involved in politics, regarded them as upstarts. Nevertheless, because the Gondals were able to get some of their children into elite schools (such as Aitchison College),<sup>46</sup> they started associating and making friends with the sons of the wealthiest and most powerful people in the country and shedding the more rustic social veneer of their parents in the process. Whereas the middle generation had rubbed shoulders with the district and provincial elite, the third generation did so with the provincial and national elite. The result was that this third generation harboured far greater ambitions than their parents had. They hoped to gain high ranking political office or jobs in multinational companies, banks and law firms, and they saw the village as a backward and violent place that they preferred to avoid. When they went there they felt out of place. They only came to the village three or four times a year and on these occasions they often remained inside playing computer games, watching television and smoking marijuana or drinking alcohol, which had been secretly provided by their servants. I soon realised that after having spent only a couple of months there I knew more of its inhabitants by name than they did. Like the Makhdooms before them, this third generation of Gondals was losing touch with the village and its ways.

Besides the most prominent Gondal households, the other eight Gondal households of the village generally owned between five and twenty acres of land and remained more rooted in the village than the leading families. There were a number of such Gondal landlords who also lived in deras not far from the village. These deras were smaller than those of the leading Gondals and generally had no more than two or three mud houses for kammis and servants attached to the main house. Villagers often referred to them as 'motorcycle-riding chowdri' (*motorcycle wale chowdri*) because unlike the wealthier Gondals who drove around in cars and pickup trucks, they drove

back and forth to Sargodha and around the village on motorcycles. Moreover unlike the leading Gondals who employed people to help manage their farms, most of these Gondals were directly involved in the management of their farms. They were also more involved in everyday village life than members of the leading families who operated at higher levels of politics. When villagers needed to resolve a dispute or required patronage with a government institution, these Gondals were more readily accessible than were the members of the leading families. As will be shown in chapter five, during elections they played an important role as brokers between the more powerful Gondals and poorer villagers.

Within this category of Gondals some of the more hard working and academically gifted youths were studying in Sargodha and some were preparing for provincial and national civil service exams. Others studied law and one, who was middle aged, had become a doctor. In other cases they had acquired civil service jobs through patronage or, as locals put it, through the 'recommendation' (*sifarish*) of one of the more influential village Gondals. Still others became involved in politics at the union council level, the lowest tier of elected government, and acted as brokers for the higher ranking Gondal politicians in the village. Pursuing such occupations was seen as a necessity by those of them who realised that they would otherwise end their lives poorer than when they had been born, since the subdivision of land across generations meant that they would inevitably have less land than their fathers. If they did nothing to compensate for this then they and their children might in some cases end up dangerously close to poverty. However, not all of them pursued further education, and less academically gifted young men generally ended up taking care of their lands. Other young men from within this category ended their studies at a young age and became involved in crime. Such was the case with the young Gondals, referred to above, who

had occupied the village darra. They adopted the swagger and the twirled moustache with the unshaven look that typified the village tough (*badmash*), and they spent their nights playing cards, drinking home brews and smoking hash. One notorious set of four brothers, whose rise and fall will be documented in chapter three, became involved in bootlegging, petty heroin trading and the smuggling of stolen cars. In the process, one of the four became a heroin addict himself. Young men such as these frequently attracted the attention of more powerful Gondals, who made good use of village toughs for political and economic ends. Powerful landlords offered them protection from the police in exchange for a share in their business. They also used them to fight opponents and to intimidate and harass unruly villagers, particularly during election times.

By virtue of the fact that these less prominent Gondals belonged to the dominant lineage and shared kinship ties with the most powerful Gondals, their power and status was superior to that of members of other landholding biraderis (such as Ranjha's, Lurkas and Rajputs) who might own as much or even more land than they did. Their kinship ties with the powerful village Gondals made it easier for them to obtain the patronage necessary to gain certain government jobs and favourable outcomes in disputes that they might be involved in. The result was that even relatively poor Gondals had more influence in the village, and were more likely to have government jobs, than were members of relatively well off non-Gondal zamindar households. The latter had little influence in village matters or in local politics, and they dedicated themselves to running their farms and setting up small businesses. Some of them opened shops in the village or in the nearby market town of Chowki Bhagat, others worked as middlemen during the citrus harvest, and others were involved in the timber business. This suggests that membership of the dominant biraderi made a significant



difference to class positioning because it placed people in a more advantageous position vis-à-vis the state.<sup>47</sup>

### *Fieldwork*

My entry into Bek Sagrana was made possible through Pakistani contacts and friends at the London School of Economics. I sought their advice as to how I might be able to carry out research on what Pakistanis referred to as ‘feudalism’, and they put me in contact with the Gondals of Bek Sagrana whom they knew to be extensively involved in politics at the provincial and national levels. The man who first welcomed me to the village was Mahmood Abbas Gondal. He was the youngest son of the pious Sufi Ahmed Abbas Gondal, and a member of one of the wealthiest households in the village. Mahmood Abbas Gondal spent most of his time in Lahore where he had succeeded in securing places for his two sons at Aitchison College. He was a lawyer by training but had opted not to pursue a career in the legal profession and lived off a handsome yearly income of roughly £70,000 from his citrus orchards. Because he had time on his hands his uncle Chowdri Nawaz Ali, a several times member of the provincial assembly, appointed him to help me settle down in the village.

During my first week in the village Mahmood Abbas Gondal took me around the area of Bek Sagrana in his chauffeur-driven car, in the company of his childhood servant Bilal Mirasi. Bilal Mirasi no longer worked permanently for Mahmood Abbas but occasionally offered his services to him when needed. Mahmood often asked Bilal to accompany him when he went to visit friends and relatives both around Bek Sagrana and beyond. This not only provided him with company but also with the social status

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<sup>47</sup> This finding coincides with Chakravarti’s claim that membership of the dominant *Bhumiar* caste in a village in Bihar played a crucial role in “determining access to the means of production, control over the labour process, and forms of exploitation” (Chakravarti 2001: 106) and consolidated the class position of its members.

that landlords attributed to having servants. As I soon came to know, landlords rarely visited each other without bringing at least one servant with them. Those landlords who couldn't afford a permanent servant would go to the extent of asking random villagers to accompany them when they visited friends in order to avoid appearing socially insignificant. Thus during these first few days Bilal accompanied us everywhere. While Mahmood was introducing me to his relatives, Bilal generally sat in the background in the company of other servants. In the mornings Mahmood would ask him to dust his shoes and then throughout the day he would be called upon to bring glasses of water, snacks, tea or to buy cigarettes in a nearby shop. In the evenings Bilal would often provide Mahmood and his relatives with a bit of entertainment by recounting some amusing local gossip or some unusual event that he had witnessed. He told stories about local cattle thieves, drug addicts, elopements and the Koreans who had come to build the motorway connecting Islamabad to Lahore in the 1990s, whom he claimed to have seen eating turtles and wild pigs.

The first people that Mahmood took me to visit were his maternal uncles Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his younger brother Chowdri Mazhar Ali. Chowdri Nawaz Ali had moved to a nearby village where he had more than half of his lands, and Chowdri Mazhar Ali had moved to a dera a mile to the east of the village. Chowdri Nawaz Ali Gondal was an influential member of the Pakistan Muslim League Noon (PML-N) and his younger brother, Chowdri Mazhar Ali, was the party president for the district of Sargodha. They were once the most powerful Gondals with links to Bek Sagrana, but since General Musharraf's military coup in 1999 they had been in the opposition. Chowdri Mazhar Ali had even been jailed for a year shortly after the coup, and Chowdri Nawaz Ali had had to cease his political activities and temporarily cut his ties with Nawaz Sharif's party (see chapter two). The result was that their local rivals had been

able to gain power at their expense. Most notably, their cousin and fierce rival, Chowdri Abdullah Gondal,<sup>48</sup> had gained considerable ground against them by aligning himself with the pro-government faction. As union council nazim and the local power broker for a larger pro-government coalition, he had become the most influential patron in the village of Bek Sagrana. However, Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Nawaz Ali were confident that the tide would turn, as it frequently did in Pakistani politics, and that they would sooner or later return to power and put Chowdri Abdullah back in his place.<sup>49</sup>

Like Mahmood Abbas, both of them thought it strange that a Westerner should want to research a rural backwater such as theirs. After all, they argued, Pakistanis all wanted to go to England and to America to study and do research and I was doing the opposite. When I explained that I was interested in researching feudalism for my PhD in social anthropology they proudly asserted that I had come to the right people, but they remained doubtful as to what I could possibly gain from it. Rather than reacting defensively to my mention of feudalism they proudly asserted that they were ‘feudals’,<sup>50</sup> and, waving towards the horizon, told me that all of the land in sight belonged to them. They told me that as their guest no one in their area would touch me and that even the local police would salute me. Thus despite their doubts as to the purpose of my stay in the village, they offered me their hospitality and protection.<sup>51</sup> Over the next few months it became clear to me that both Mahmood Abbas and his uncles believed that I was a spy, but this somehow never interfered with their hospitality towards me.

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<sup>48</sup> Chowdri Abdullah was also an affine of theirs by virtue of being married to Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Mazhar Ali’s half sister.

<sup>49</sup> In 2008, two years after the end of my fieldwork, the tide did turn and they regained the upper hand over Chowdri Abdullah.

<sup>50</sup> They used the word in English.

<sup>51</sup> I soon realised that such ‘protection’ was necessary in order to avoid harassment at the hands of the local police and local toughs. Whenever a police officer stopped me, the fact that I was with the Gondals meant that rather than harassing me they invited me to have cups of tea. Moreover local toughs who were initially hostile to my presence in the village accepted my presence there when it became clear to them that I was a guest of the Gondals.

After several long days lounging on charpais, drinking tea, smoking hookahs and meeting a bewildering number of multi-related Gondals, I was eventually dropped off at the place where I would initially lodge in the area of Bek SAGRANA. Mahmood Abbas offered to house me at his father's dera, which was also a Sufi lodge built in the 1980's. This was a place where members of a particular branch of the Qadiri Sufi order (*silsilah*) occasionally gathered to perform *zikr*<sup>52</sup> and where Mahmood Abbas's father, Sufi Ahmed Abbas, held the monthly celebrations of Gyarvi Sharif commemorating the date of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Gilani of Baghdad's union with God. His father agreed to my staying there, and Mahmood Abbas appointed Bilal Mirasi to help me settle down in the village and also to bring me my three daily meals from Sufi Ahmed Abbas's house.

I initially worried that this arrangement and my entry into the village through the Gondals might make it appear to villagers that I was on the side of the landlords. I thought that this might prevent me from winning the trust of kammi and poorer villagers. However, with time my worries on this matter began to subside for several reasons. To begin with, Mahmood Abbas Gondal and his elder brother lived in Lahore and only came back to the village once every two weeks. Sufi Ahmed Abbas, Mahmood Abbas's father, was a pious recluse who tolerated my presence at the lodge but who was suspicious of me and who therefore kept his distance. This all meant that as soon as Mahmood Abbas left the village I spent all of my time with members of the various dependant kammi households that clustered around Sufi Ahmed Abbas's lodge. Bilal Mirasi kept up a degree of formality with me for the first few days but soon started to relax when he saw that I didn't treat him the way that landlords usually treated their servants. Within a couple of days he started openly smoking marijuana in front of me, took me along to meet all of his friends, and freely spoke to me about the problems that

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<sup>52</sup> The word *zikr* literally refers to the act of remembering, and in a religious contexts it refers to the act of remembering God, usually through the recitation of his 99 names.

he faced with his Gondal masters.<sup>53</sup> Moreover because the Sufi lodge was a place where villagers from different social backgrounds gathered to worship, socialise, eat and rest, it was a good place to meet people.<sup>54</sup> A few of Sufi Ahmed Abbas's bonded labourers had breakfast and dinner at the lodge, and by eating with them on a regular basis I not only gained their trust but also their friendship. Living at the Sufi lodge also gave me a chance to closely observe the everyday interactions between Gondal landlords and their servants, labourers and clients. Sufi Ahmed Abbas and his sons would sometimes sit on charpais under a large rubber tree outside the lodge and direct farm operations, resolve people's disputes and dispense patronage to clients.

The fact that the Sufi lodge was neutral territory and Sufi Ahmed Abbas didn't take sides in the factional rivalries and conflicts that raged in the village was a further advantage, since it meant that I was able to meet and talk to the leaders of both village factions while I lived there. Because I was Sufi Ahmed Abbas's guest I was able to meet Chowdri Nawaz Ali's biggest local rival, his distant cousin Chowdri Abdullah Gondal, both at the Sufi lodge and at his dera on several occasions. When I later had to shift to the dera of Chowdri Nawaz Ali's youngest brother, Chowdri Arif, I ceased to have the privilege of neutrality.<sup>55</sup> Chowdri Arif was allergic to Chowdri Abdullah's very name and made it clear to me that he wouldn't tolerate me socialising with him regardless of my research interests. Nevertheless, during the initial months at Sufi Ahmed Abbas's dera I was able to visit Chowdri Abdullah at his dera on several occasions and observe how he dealt with village affairs. Subsequently, even though I could no longer visit him I was able to gather a great deal of information about him and

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<sup>53</sup> After about ten days he asked me whether he could take leave in order to work in the citrus harvest, and assigned one of Sufi Muhammad Hayat's child servants to bring me my meals. Since he lived at Sufi Muhammad Hayat's dera I continued to see him frequently after he left.

<sup>54</sup> The correlative disadvantage was that the place afforded me no privacy, but I eventually got used to this.

<sup>55</sup> Eventually Sufi Muhammad Hayat decided that I should live elsewhere. Friends in the village told me that he had become uncomfortable about lodging a non-Muslim in a place of Islamic worship.

his brothers through his allies and servants as well as through villagers, for whom Chowdri Abdullah's character and activities provided an inexhaustible topic of conversation.

Like Mahmood Abbas, Chowdri Nawaz Ali's younger brother lived off the income from his citrus orchards and spent most of his time in Lahore. This meant that, as had been the case at the Sufi lodge, I spent most of my evenings in the company of his servants. During the day I would either visit the labourers who lived at Sufi Ahmed Abbas's dera to chat with them or to accompany them to the fields and citrus orchards, or I would cycle to the village where I had established a close friendship with the two nephews of the village Imam shortly after my initial arrival. Members of the village Imam's extended family were respected for their learning and piety. They were also respected for the fact that they were charitable towards the poor and that they strove to maintain harmony and peace in the village. My association with them helped me to become accepted by many villagers who were initially wary about the presence of a non-Muslim in their village, especially one who according to rumours might also be a spy.<sup>56</sup> Their interest in and intimate knowledge of village affairs also meant that they were invaluable informants who took an active interest in my research. Their scrupulous commitment to telling the truth (*haqiqat*) and to speaking out against immorality, fraud and injustice meant that they were often willing to provide me with information about which others were more secretive. Thus I quickly came to learn details about the local

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<sup>56</sup> The fact that they became friends with me immediately made me more acceptable to many people. During my initial days in the village several villagers were uncertain about whether it was all right for them to eat with me, or even to become friends with me, as I was possibly impure (*napak*) by virtue of my dietary and moral habits. People's doubts were largely cleared when on the first Friday after my arrival in the village the nephews asked me to attend the Friday (*juma*) prayers. The prayer leader (imam) told me to sit at the far back of the mosque so as not to interfere with people's prayers. After his sermon he told the assembled villagers that Christians such as me were people of the Book (*ahl-e kitaab*) and that as such it was possible for Muslims to eat with me and be friends with me. After this he told the assembled villagers to persuade me to convert to Islam by showing me the superiority of the Islamic faith through their acts.

drug trade, bootlegging, buffalo theft, electricity theft and the various forms of embezzlement of government funds and appropriation of public office for personal use that took place in the village. Moreover whenever I needed to confirm certain facts they were often willing to introduce me to concerned parties who might be ready to impart information to me. They also helped me carry out minor surveys which would have been difficult for me to do without their support.

When my Gondal hosts, Chowdri Mahmood Abbas and later Chowdri Nawaz Ali's younger brother, came to the village (roughly every fortnight) I abandoned my daily routine to spend time with them. This was not only necessary because, as my hosts, they expected me to spend time with them when they came to the village, but also because it served my research interests. By spending time with them I was able to gain insights into the political intrigues, rivalries and enmities which often dominated their conversations. My good relations with them meant that they introduced me to their friends and political allies throughout the district. They also introduced me to lawyers, judges and police officers who were sometimes willing to discuss local politics with me. On a few occasions they also invited me to Lahore, where I was able to see how they and the servants that they took with them from the village lived while there. There were times when I also visited Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali to carry out informal interviews with them. Their sons were particularly eager to show me around and to discuss local, regional and international politics with me.

The people I had almost no access to were the women. The Gondals maintained strict purdah with outsiders and only close relatives and dependants from the village were allowed to see the women of their households. When I inquired about marriage alliances, they were willing to tell me about the men that their female relatives had married, but they never referred to the women by name and never spoke about them.

The little information that I was able to gather about them came from servants who told me about which *chowdranis*<sup>57</sup> they liked and disliked. Nor did I even have much access to kammi women who couldn't afford to maintain such strict purdah. Although I often saw them when I visited kammi friends at their houses, it was exclusively the men with whom I spoke. My addressing kammi women when they were on their own, when for example they were out gathering fodder or wood for cooking, would have been considered highly improper and would have been likely to start rumours about my sexual morality.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, although Bek Sagrana was my principal field-site, important aspects of my research were informed through meetings with politicians, judges, bureaucrats, politicians, journalists and NGO workers in both Lahore and Islamabad. My research was also informed by visits where I met people in other villages throughout the district and beyond. Although these people do not form part of the material presented in this thesis, my conversations with them helped me to formulate lines of inquiry and gain insights into the broader relevance of the material that I faced in the village. As Clifford Geertz argued "The locus of study is not the object of study. Anthropologists don't study villages...they study *in* villages" (Geertz 1993 [1973]). The village therefore provided me with a place to explore broader political issues that are relevant to academics and policy makers working on Pakistan.

Starting in July 2001, I spent a total of about twenty-five months in Pakistan over the course of several trips, and I spent twenty of those months in Bek Sagrana. I initially stayed in Bek Sagrana for six months between December 2004 and May 2005.

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<sup>57</sup> A term for chowdri women.

<sup>58</sup> On one occasion, near the beginning of fieldwork, I briefly paused to talk to some women who greeted me on my way to the village and the next day there were already rumours about my trying to seduce village women. My friends promptly advised me not to speak to women unless their husbands happened to be around. The fact that I was a Westerner appears to have made this even more of an issue for me since people initially assumed that I would be sexually promiscuous.



Due to visa problems I was forced to return to the UK and was only able to return to Ben Sagrama in February 2005, after which I spent a further fourteen months there until the beginning of May 2006. During that time I spent periods of up to a week in either Islamabad or Lahore every two months. I spent my first three months in Pakistan (between July and September 2001) working in an NGO in the Hazara district of the North West Frontier Province. I then spent two months between December 2002 and January 2003 travelling around the Punjab looking for prospective field sites.

### **Overview of Chapters**

Chapter two explores in some depth the historical grounds for the consolidation of parochial politics in the Pakistani Punjab, or what in the Indian context has been referred to as 'banal' (Kohli 1991) or 'demand' politics (Rudolph & Rudolph 1987). It also seeks to illustrate how colonialism first, and authoritarian rule in independent Pakistan subsequently, entrenched local landed elites into a political system where politics came to revolve almost exclusively around the exercise of brokerage and patronage. Further, it demonstrates how restrictions on political parties worked to prevent the emergence of popular parties representing the interests of disadvantaged sectors of society. Finally, chapter two also shows how the fact that legislators were often a facade for authoritarian governments reduced them to the role of political brokers with only a limited role to play in legislation and policy-making. The absence of parties that were truly representative of different sectors of society, together with the fact that politicians principally saw themselves as power brokers, meant that for Punjabi landlords different political parties were largely seen as interchangeable routes to power. Their notoriously fickle allegiance to political parties is shown to have been

exacerbated by the fact that loyalty to opposition parties was likely to result in harassment, imprisonment and deprivation of patronage, while joining the ruling coalition could result in significant rewards in terms of patronage. Patronage included not only the granting of funds and building contracts but also help from above in gaining control over the local police and judiciary. This together with the flow of weapons and drugs from Afghanistan into Pakistan gave politicians ample opportunity to enrich themselves and engage in criminal activities.

Having established the changeability of politicians' allegiance to political parties, chapter three sets out to determine what the basis for their political allegiances actually was. More specifically, the chapter addresses the issue of whether the entrenchment of parochial politics by authoritarian regimes meant that *biraderis* had become the central building block of politics in the Pakistani Punjab, as certain commentators, including Waseem (1994), Rais 1985, and Ayesha Jalal (1995), have argued. Although the chapter illustrates that extended households whose members have multiple overlapping kinship ties with each other are often the focus of influential landlords' political loyalties, it shows that the extended *biraderi* is not. I show that a segmentary model along the lines traced by Gellner (1969), whereby feuding individuals at lower levels of segmentation unite at higher levels of segmentation when faced with an external enemy, is not applicable to the Pakistani Punjab. Instead the evidence seems to confirm Barth's (1981) argument that self-interest and agnatic rivalry rather than extended blood ties often structure regional political alliances. Thus the evidence presented illustrates the fact that politicians often make instrumental alliances with non-kinsmen or with distantly related kinsmen against their closer kinsmen and agnates with whom they compete for dominance in their home villages and regions. Following Barth I argue that powerful landlord politicians can rely on the support of

their clients and armed retainers, and that they therefore do not need to unite with members of their extended biraderi in order to have the force of numbers. Following Alavi (1972) I show how on the other hand middle ranking, independent, landlords depend more on their extended biraderis since they don't have enough dependants and clients to act independently in the political arena.

Chapter four seeks to establish the nature of the relationship between patrons and the clients that constitute their political support base. In line with Asad's (1972) critique of Barth's (1959) contractual analysis of Swat Pathan leadership, I argue that the relationship between clients and their landlords is best characterised as one of class domination. I show that the elite's monopoly over landownership and its monopoly over the control and access to state institutions serve to reproduce the domination of landlords over the majority of the landless rural population. Members of the landed elite still wield considerable power over much of the rural population through tenancy relations, patronage and coercion. This enables them to gain votes during elections, to command corvée labour and to enforce debt-bondage. The thesis illustrates how this remains true despite the growing, although partial, proletarianization of former tenants and of members of menial and artisan occupational groups. One implication of this situation is that members of marginal landless groups, in addition to voting for landlords during elections, also frequently fight on their behalf rather than against them. Although villagers can increasingly earn their livelihoods independently of the landlords (predominantly through casual labour) they often have to turn to them for patronage in times of hardship. Patronage may include mediation with state institutions such as the police, hospitals and courts, as well as loans often needed by villagers to cover a family member's medical or wedding expenses. In exchange for patronage, villagers are expected to provide the landlords with political support and labour. Landlords'

monopoly over access to the state, combined with their use of private armed militias, means that they can also use coercion and the threat of it to gain the labour and political allegiance of villagers. It is the threat—and use—of force that allows landlords to enforce debt-bondage in cases where villagers have taken loans from them. The main point to emerge from the chapter is that despite the increasing economic proletarianization of the labour force and widespread resentment towards the landlords labourers have not become politically assertive. Instead, political allegiances retain a vertical factional character, cutting through both ties of caste and class as described by Alavi (1971) in his paper entitled *The Politics of Dependence: a Village in West Punjab*.

Chapter five explores some of the reasons that the electoral process in Pakistan has not allowed for the sort of empowerment of disenfranchised sectors of society that has been witnessed in parts of India. The chapter shows how, on the contrary, elections under authoritarian regimes have actually served to entrench local elites and perpetuate an elitist, factional form of politics. Focusing on General Musharraf's local government scheme (funded by a variety of international donors) I show how elections that allegedly aimed to empower large swathes of the population failed to do so. I argue that the local influence of the landed elite played a significant role in subverting the central government's alleged goal of popular empowerment, and succeeded in capturing the entire local government structure through the exercise of its muscle power and influence. However, I argue that the central government is equally responsible for this failure. Evidence suggests that the devolution programme was in fact an attempt to fragment the political opposition and to create a loyal pro-government constituency. The fact that candidates were banned from running under the banner of political parties ensured that only wealthy and influential candidates were able to gain seats. In order to obtain a loyal pro-government constituency, the central government resorted to

widespread pre-poll and poll day rigging. Therefore, although rigging was carried out by pro-government as well as by opposition politicians, the overwhelming majority of rigging was in favour of pro-government candidates. The chapter concludes with the argument that apolitical programmes such as Musharraf's devolution programme have contributed to preventing the emergence of political movements that represent the interests of disenfranchised sectors of society.

Finally, chapter Six addresses the possibility that the political quiescence of the disenfranchised might be related to their internalisation of their own subordination. This is done by addressing Abdellah Hammoudi's (1997) argument that authoritarianism in Morocco and the Middle East is rooted in a deeply ingrained respect for authority which derives from the personalised and highly authoritarian relationship between Sufi masters and their disciples. This chapter suggests that, contrary to Hammoudi, it is not the social order that is the reflection of a culturally ingrained model of religious values but rather that the opposite is closer to the truth. The material does not demonstrate, as classical Durkheimian sociology argues,<sup>60</sup> that people's religious categories are the reflection of the social order as a whole, but it does illustrate that the emphasis that individuals place on aspects of the vast Islamic tradition that they can draw upon reflects, or at least relates to, their own position within the social order. I argue that this is because individuals emphasise aspects of Islam that help them understand as well as justify and give value to life experiences which are shaped by their position within the political and economic order to an important degree. Thus I show that the local form of Islam espoused by dominant groups within the village reflects aspects of the existing personalised and hierarchical social and political order, not only because it legitimises their dominance within it but also because it helps them to make sense of their

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<sup>60</sup> See Durkheim and Mauss (1963 [1903])

experiences. On the other, the form of Islam espoused by poor kammiss inverts that of members of the dominant class and turns it against them through accusations of hypocrisy and the claim that true Islam is about inner feelings and sincerity rather than about formal ritual and ideology emphasising hierarchy. To them the exoteric Islam of the religious and political elites is the Islam of power; it isn't the true Islam of love and devotion exemplified by the great figures of the faith who, according to them, were often persecuted and oppressed by the powerful.

Finally I briefly explore the broader implications of this research for understanding political instability in Pakistan. There I explore whether militant Islamic movements represent a viable opportunity for expressing of the class grievances of the rural poor.

## Chapter Two: The Politics of Power and Enmity

### Overview

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the political history of Pakistan, and of the Punjab in particular. This will provide a background against which to situate and understand the nature of the political careers of two influential Gondal landlord politicians from the village of Bek Sagrana. While the historical section of the chapter seeks to account for the consolidation of parochial, landlord-dominated politics in the rural Punjab, the remainder seeks to illustrate some of its consequences on the ground. What the consolidation of parochial politics entailed is examined through the political careers of two influential Gondal siblings. Their cases are instructive, illustrating what parochial politics entailed for political party affiliation, the delivery of public infrastructure and services, and the criminalisation of politics.

Another concern of this chapter is to analyse the way that authoritarian governments contributed to the personalisation of political office, and how in the process the political clout of landed elites was entrenched in the face of popular resentment against them. It also explores how, by rewarding supporters with patronage and by punishing opponents (either by withholding patronage from them or harassing them), authoritarian governments exacerbated rural politicians' notoriously fickle loyalty towards political parties. This was so much the case that, in Pakistan's parliamentary system, floor-crossing came to take place on such a large scale that the political system came to be popularly seen as afflicted with '*lotatism*.'<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Wilder (1999) writes:

Through the cases of the two Gondal politicians I illustrate how politicians often shifted their political allegiances in order to join the ruling coalition to gain access to the spoils of power and to avoid harassment at the hands of both the central government and of their local rivals and enemies. These cases also illustrate that when landlord politicians didn't shift their allegiance to the ruling coalition it was rarely due to a commitment to the ideology of their party or to a commitment to particular social agendas. Instead I show that the limits to *lotaism* are principally the result of three factors: (a) that there is only a limited number of people that the ruling coalition can accommodate, (b) that loyalty to the party leader can result in significant rewards upon the latter's return to power, and (c) the fact that personal enmities with members of the ruling coalition often prevent the possibility of floor-crossing.

Finally, the chapter explores what the significance of the landed elites' entrenchment in politics meant for the delivery of public services and for the criminalisation of politics. In their role as local, provincial and national level politicians, landlords generally served as a democratic facade for authoritarian regimes. Policy making and legislation were often decided by presidents, often military ones, who ruled through ordinances rather than by consulting the legislative assemblies. The role of legislators and other politicians was thereby largely reduced to that of consolidating central power through their capacity to mobilise votes. In exchange for votes, landlords were the recipients of central government patronage in the form of development funds

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On several occasions MNA's and MPA's have had to virtually be put under lock and key to prevent them from being lured by lucrative promises into crossing the aisle. In the spring of 1993, for example, a situation arose that reached farcical proportions. After the National Assembly was dissolved and Nawaz Sharif's government was dismissed from office, he was forced to sequester his party's Punjab MPAs in Islamabad's luxurious Marriott Hotel for nearly a month for fear that with their patron no longer in office, they would look for a new patron. (Wilder 1999: 204-205).

The *lota* is most commonly a metal jar with a curved spout that is used for ablutions and for cleaning oneself after going to the toilet. A single *lota* is generally used by several people. I was told that the reason why politicians were like *lotas* was that they were constantly switching hands.



as well as through the politicisation on their behalf of the police, the judiciary and almost every other branch of government. So long as politicians mobilised support on behalf of the ruling coalition and its president, they were effectively given *carte blanche* to do as they wished in their dominions. This together with the inflow of weapons and drugs from Afghanistan and from Pakistan's tribal areas in the 1980s allowed politicians to enrich themselves, and thereby further increase their local political clout, through a wide array of criminal activities. The result was that politicians increasingly became "lawbreakers, rather than lawmakers" (Wilder 1999: 204).

### **Parochial Politics and Military Rule**

In modern day Punjab the importance of factional politics, characterised by elite-led coalitions whose membership cuts across ties of caste and class, is in part a colonial legacy that has been sustained by successive authoritarian governments. Imperial rule in the Punjab was premised upon the idea that political stability was best ensured by securing the support of rural notables.<sup>62</sup> To this end the British went about co-opting rural elites by establishing a "loyal class of 'hereditary landed gentry' by awarding pensions, titles, and land grants in the developing canal colonies, and by confirming ownership of large semi-feudal estates in Western Punjab" (Wilder 1999: 69). Selected notables from within the rural elites were entrusted with key aspects of the delivery of public services within their villages and areas of influence, including administration, revenue collection, policing, dispute resolution and intermediation with the state. The position of these rural notables as intermediaries with the Imperial authorities entrenched them within the administrative and political structure of the Punjab both at

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<sup>62</sup> The bias towards rural notables by Imperial authorities is clearly illustrated by the passing of the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900, which prevented the transfer of land from indebted members of 'agricultural tribes' to money lending members of the 'trading classes.' Because of the importance of land in determining social and political status Imperial authorities wished to ensure that it would not be transferred to the 'trading classes', whose loyalty to British rule was in doubt. See Van den Dungen (1972).

the expense of urban constituents as well at the expense of their subordinate clients, who became dependent upon them for all forms of mediation involving state institutions.

Under late Imperial rule the urban constituencies in the Punjab were composed predominantly of Hindu traders and a Muslim middle class that was becoming increasingly involved with the expanding colonial government as lawyers, physicians, engineers and teachers. As urban Muslims became increasingly involved in government their expectations for greater political influence started to grow, leading many of them to join the All-India Muslim League founded in 1906. However, in the politically dominant rural Punjab, where the majority of the population still lived, the Muslim League largely failed to establish a popular base of support. Rural notables joined forces on a non-communal basis under the banner of the Punjab Unionist Party largely in order to protect their landed interests which they perceived to be threatened by the political agendas of both the Muslim League and the Congress Party (see Jalal 1995). As a result, the overall support for the Muslim League in the Punjab was insignificant until 1946, when Jinnah obtained the support of opportunistic rural notables who perceived that independence was imminent, and that it was therefore in their best interests to join the League.<sup>63</sup>

The fact that the rural notables of the Punjab took over the local leadership of the Muslim League on the eve of independence meant that the party was unable to establish a rival structure of power that bypassed the rural elite. Thus, Punjabi rural notables remained in their position as local intermediaries and patrons, and the Muslim League never established itself as a disciplined political party with a direct base of

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<sup>63</sup> Ayesha Jalal notes that desertions from the Unionist camp “had little to do with the Punjab League and its invisible organisation, and more to do with men anxious to win tickets... ‘Sensational stories of conversion to the League’ took the provincial League leaders by surprise since their workers had ‘not yet reached the village in adequate numbers’ (Jalal 1995: 145).

popular support.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the fact that the national leadership of the Muslim League had no base of support in the national territory (because it hailed predominantly from within the territory that became independent India) further hampered the party's efforts to establish itself. The Muslim League leadership's lack of popular support meant that it became increasingly reliant upon the civil-military bureaucracy to retain its hold on power, and it succeeded "in maintaining the facade of parliamentary democracy without holding national elections from 1947 to 1958" (Wilder 1999: 18).

This facade of parliamentary democracy gave way to martial law in October 1958 shortly before the nation's first parliamentary elections were scheduled to take place. Lacking popular support the ruling Muslim League feared defeat at the hands of political parties demanding greater regional autonomy in both West and East Pakistan. In 1954 the Muslim League had already suffered a humiliating defeat in East Pakistan as a result of its failure to consolidate democracy and adopt a political formula representative of the Bengali majority. Fearing that the Bengali majority would rise to power the Muslim League, backed by the West Pakistan dominated civil and military bureaucracies, nullified the results and imposed central rule on East Pakistan, suspending all political activity there. By 1958, when national elections were scheduled to take place, demands articulated by the National Awami Party for greater democracy and provincial autonomy were also growing in West Pakistan. This time the Muslim League and its allies within the civil and military bureaucracies thwarted democratic forces through the imposition of Martial Law by President Iskander Mirza, which shortly lead to a takeover by Army commander General Ayub Khan.

In a pattern that was to be replicated by future Military rulers in Pakistan, Ayub Khan banned political parties, passed legislation that was selectively used against

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<sup>64</sup> See A.H.Syed (1989) for an account of how factionalism amongst powerful landlords in the Muslim League created a great deal of political instability between 1947 and 1955.

political opponents, and erected a local government scheme that was to serve as a democratic facade for his rule and an easily controlled electoral college for the presidency. He also modified the constitution in order to replace Pakistan's parliamentary system with a strong presidential one that severely curtailed the powers of elected assembly members. Furthermore, Ayub Khan tried to ensure strong economic growth and rapid industrialisation by adopting neo-liberal economic ideologies according to which the key to rapid industrialisation was cheap rural migrant labour. This meant that restrictions already in place against labour unions were strengthened. According to this model of economic growth significant land reforms would keep the rural population on the land and therefore restrict the flow of migrant labour into the cities (see Candland 2007: 48). Thus, the ceiling that General Ayub Khan imposed upon landownership was aimed at breaking the power of the minority of extremely powerful aristocratic (ashrafi) landlords rather than towards a significant redistribution of the land. It was also designed to encourage commercial agriculture by forcing large landholders to increase their productivity as a result of reduced landholdings. The political clout of the large ashrafi landlords, and their ownership of land, were disproportionate to their total numbers, and General Ayub Khan sought to curb their influence in order to enhance state power (see Nasr 2001). To this end he sought to create a rural constituency from amidst the ranks of the middle and gentry landholders who constituted the majority of landowners in the Punjab.

As noted in chapter one, it is from among these ranks that the Gondals of the district of Sargodha emerged to political prominence. Under Ayub Khan the representation of this class of landholders in the national assembly "went from 9.5 per cent in 1955, up to 44.7 per cent in 1962, and then back down to 29.8 per cent in 1965" (Wilder 1999: 74). Both the entry of this class into formal politics under Ayub's regime

as well as the substantial economic gains that they made as a result of Pakistan's first green revolution during this period turned them into a significant force in Punjabi politics.

Over the decade during which General Ayub Khan was in power, Pakistan witnessed rapid industrialisation and economic growth. The rewards of this growth, however, were highly unevenly distributed. According to one estimate from 1968 "industrial ownership was concentrated in twenty-two families" (Jones 2003: 145). For the masses that had moved to the cities as a result of the rapid mechanisation of agriculture during Pakistan's green revolution, and from the eviction of tenants that this entailed, the rewards of growth were far less tangible. Moreover, General Ayub Khan's decade in power had failed to provide sufficient resources for the country's human development. As a result, when the Ayub era came to a close only fifteen per cent of the population could be classified as literate. The country also had one of the lowest ratios of doctors per rural inhabitant in the world with one doctor for every 24,200 people (Burki 1980: 47). The failure of such growth to benefit the masses, together with the severe restrictions on political freedoms, eventually resulted in widespread agitations. In East Pakistan it resulted in the rise of Mujibur Rehman's Awami League demanding provincial autonomy and democracy, while in West Pakistan it resulted in the rise of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) advocating a socialist revolution with a programme for the nationalisation of industry and major land reforms.

The principal support for Bhutto initially came from urban left groups such as organised labour, and students but also from middle class professionals and the intelligentsia. The promise of land reforms together with the promise of homestead reforms<sup>65</sup> and the abolition of corvée labour (*begaar*) also enlisted the support of

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<sup>65</sup> Homestead reforms were aimed at ensuring that house tenants could no longer be arbitrarily

tenants, landless labourers and village artisans (kammiss). Furthermore, the poor rural voter hoped that the PPP would pursue its interests against “the classes and institutions that had weighed upon him so heavily and for so long—the zamindari, the police, the bureaucracy and the courts” (Jones 2003: 362). As Jones (*ibid*) has convincingly shown, the 1970 elections—the first national elections based on universal adult franchise, which saw Zulfikar Ali Bhutto rise to power—were the first time in the country’s history where the have-nots erupted onto the political scene. According to Jones these elections not only saw the emergence of horizontal, class-based ties of allegiance among urban voters but also among rural voters, where historically the masses had “been politically quiescent, conditioned by tradition and the local structure of power to follow their customary leaders—ashrafi-gentry zamindars, pirs, and clan biraderi heads” (Jones 2003: 356). Because of the importance given to land and homestead reform in the PPP’s electoral campaign, party support patterns during the elections were often divided horizontally along class lines between those who owned land and those who did not.

In one case study, Jones examines voting patterns in a village in the Punjabi district of Gujranwala that was divided into two factions of Tarar Jats whose leaders had chosen to support opposing candidates from two different parties that were running against the PPP. He shows that while one of the factions successfully delivered votes to their candidate, the other faction split into two with tenants, kammiss and middling zamindars opting out of the faction and giving their vote to the PPP. Jones shows that even though many of the tenants in the village belonged to the dominant Tarar Jat biraderi their voting behaviour was determined by the prospect of political and economic empowerment at the expense of ascribed biraderi-based loyalty. Moreover, landless labourers and kammiss of this faction also broke off their traditional ties of

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evicted from their homes in the villages that belonged to landlords.

allegiance with their factional leaders. Although one of the factions remained intact, the fact that one of them became horizontally divided was itself a significant development that was repeated throughout the Punjab. In other instances Jones reports that the PPP encouraged significant numbers of rural tenants “to form their own organisation to support the PPP, despite threats and economic pressure from landed interests” (Jones 2003: 365). Thus, for example, Jones recounts that in one instance in a village 15 kilometres southwest of Lahore tenants under the leadership of a man called Sandhu Jat secretly and by consensus decided to vote for the PPP. Furthermore, although several elite landlords—including a branch of the influential Noon family in Sargodha—voted for the PPP, several others forgot their differences and allied in a horizontal elite pattern against the threat presented to their landed interests by the PPP. Jones relates another instance, once again in the district of Gujranwala, where the two *biraderis* united against the threat of the PPP.<sup>66</sup> Such patterns apparently became very common during the National Assembly elections “when parochial elite candidates made desperate (and occasionally successful) horizontal alliances in order to defeat the unexpectedly strong pro-PPP vote produced in the NA election” (Jones 2003: 366).

Despite a start that promised political empowerment for the masses, Bhutto’s regime soon revealed itself to be just as authoritarian as its predecessors. Many of his policies, including his reform of the civil services and his nationalisation of large and middle sized industries, served to extend his personal powers and his capacity for patronage. Rather than strengthen the PPP into a coherent party organisation with established internal rules and procedures Bhutto increasingly concentrated power in his own hands. His regime created a paramilitary force known as the Federal Security Force, which Bhutto used to openly intimidate, harass and even allegedly to murder

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<sup>66</sup> This was a significant departure in Gujranwala, where *Awans* and *Chathas* had consistently supported opposing candidates as a result of a longstanding enmity,

regime opponents.<sup>67</sup> Bhutto's violent suppression of political opponents, including his violent military intervention against Baluch insurgents demanding greater provincial autonomy, galvanised his opponents and led to the creation of the Pakistan National Alliance. Also, Bhutto's policy of nationalisation had alienated influential industrialists as well as sectors of the middle class that had initially supported him, and as a result Bhutto increasingly sought support from the landed elites that he had once so vehemently denounced in his public speeches. When elections took place in 1977, leading to a victory for the PPP, there were widespread reports of rigging which resulted in large-scale popular discontent. This eventually led to the military coup by the Chief of Army Staff, General Zia-ul Haq.

Despite the Bhutto regime's serious flaws it did manage to further the interests of the poorer segments of rural society somewhat, through tenancy, land and homestead reforms. The effectiveness of some of these reforms is contested, however. For example, during his time in power reports suggest that landlords found that the judiciary had become very receptive to suits brought by tenants seeking redress for eviction. Thus, Herring reports that in seventy per cent of all cases of eviction, judgements ordered the restoration of tenants (Herring 1983: 117). With respect to land reforms it appears that landlords found loopholes in the new legislation, which set the land ceiling for irrigated land at 150 acres and that for rain-fed land (*barani*) at 300 acres. Chief among these loopholes was the fact that the ceilings were set for individual holdings rather than family holdings, allowing many landlords simply to transfer their lands to close family members. As a result the impact of the land reforms remains unclear to this day although it appears that some of the largest estates were affected. For example, I was told by a prominent member of the Noon family that he had lost a significant

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<sup>67</sup> Under General Zia-ul Haq's regime it was one of these murders allegedly carried out by the Federal Security Force that led to Bhutto being given the death sentence and to his eventual execution.



amount of land to tenants but that despite this he still controlled more than a thousand acres. Similarly the Makhdoom lineage of pirs, who were once the most prominent ashrafi family in the area where I conducted my fieldwork, also lost land to their tenants and several kammi families, who now possessed legal title to it. Nevertheless, the Makhdooms still possessed land far above the ceiling imposed under Bhutto's reforms.<sup>68</sup>

Another set of reforms implemented during the Bhutto era whose impact is contested (see Rouse 1983) was that of homestead reform. In rural areas villagers usually lived in houses and on land that belonged to a local landlord. In exchange for a place to live, house tenants were expected to provide corvée labour (*begaar*) and political support to their landlord. Bhutto's reforms aimed to free house tenants of such ties of dependence by granting them legal titles of ownership over their houses. Another related programme was one where colonies were created on state-owned land, and five *marla*<sup>69</sup> plots of land were granted to people who had previously lived on land that belonged to a landlord. With respect to the first programme Rouse has noted that "legal titles do not seem to guarantee ownership by the resident" (Rouse 1983: 323), which she goes on to illustrate with a case from 1979 in which a domestic employee in the village of Sahiwal who had quarrelled with her mistress was summarily ordered to vacate her house. More than twenty-five years later most kammis in Bek Sagrana believed that the Gondal chowdris could still arbitrarily evict them from the houses they occupied in the village. In the case of housing colonies it appears that house tenants did manage to obtain a certain degree of independence from the landlords. During local body elections in 2005 I was told by chowdri politicians that colony residents didn't simply follow

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<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, the Gondal landlords whom I studied, and who possessed several hundred acres of land, had not been similarly affected by some loss of land under the reforms.

<sup>69</sup> A *marla* is a traditional unit of land measurement in South Asia. One Marla is equal to 25.3 square metres.

their dictates as to whom they should vote for, but had to be wooed through patronage and cash. Moreover, colony residents were freed from having to carry out begaar for any landlord. Nevertheless, in 2005 in a colony named Sikander Colony after the Gondal chowdri who owned most of the land adjacent to it, people still gave their vote to the faction supported by Chowdri Sikander for fear that he might evict them.

Despite the highly imperfect legacy of Bhutto that persists to this day, most landless villagers in the Punjab and elsewhere consider the PPP to be ‘their’ party, and those who lived through Bhutto’s time in power recall it as an era of hope and empowerment. Nowadays however the PPP is largely known to be the party of large landlords who control blocks of voters through their local power and landholdings, and who sometimes still deploy its populist rhetoric to swing votes their preferred ways. Despite this both kammis and former tenants told me that if they could freely choose they would vote for the PPP (which at the time was still headed by Benazir Bhutto) because of what Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had done for the poor.

Although land, tenancy and homestead reforms were never perfectly implemented under Bhutto’s regime, much of what had had been achieved was reversed by General Zia-ul Haq. The need for a constituency meant that Zia-ul Haq, like his British and Pakistani predecessors, reached out to the rural notables whose property he pledged to protect from a second round of land reforms that had been planned by the Bhutto government. Landlords were given the green light to add to their existing holdings and even to recover some of the land lost under Bhutto. Moreover, the judiciary ceased to be sympathetic to the claims and issues of tenants and their cases were ignored by the courts, who once again sided with the rural elites. Ever since Bhutto the issue of land reform has never resurfaced and Musharraf’s government actively encouraged the consolidation of large landholdings by incentivising the

corporatisation of agriculture.

On the political front General Zia-ul Haq's regime ensured that the sort of mass mobilisation which had occurred in Bhutto's time could not take place. He did this through the large scale repression of the political opposition spearheaded by the PPP and by holding non-party local body elections. Like his predecessor General Ayub Khan and like his successor General Pervez Musharraf, Zia encouraged candidate-based as opposed to party-based electoral campaigns. According to Muhammad Waseem,

Zia attempted to revert to the early colonial mode of district politics in which local influentials got elected into the legislatures on the strength of their respective support bases in the locality characterized by the ties of tribe, caste, faction or tenurial relations. The obvious target of this policy was the PPP which had continued to enjoy mass popularity...The 1985 non-party elections localized politics, reinvigorated biradri, cut across the potential—though non-active—lines of party support and decisively shifted political initiative towards electoral candidates” (Waseem 1994: 15).

In this manner the parochial political issues and factions that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had temporarily succeeded in overcoming returned to dominate Pakistani politics.

Zia-ul Haq's regime did not simply return things to the status quo however, and various new features drastically altered the nature of politics and resulted in unprecedented levels of violence. Among these new features were drugs (mainly heroin) and cheap weapons. General Zia-ul Haq played a major role in the cold war by supporting the Afghan Mujahideen's resistance against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and Pakistan received substantial amounts of aid from the United States for this participation. As a result of this policy three million Afghan refugees entered Pakistan (Jalal 1995: 108) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) emerged as a major hub for the production of weapons to supply the deadly commerce of the Afghan war. Weapons including cheap Kalashnikovs became widely available

throughout the country. In 2005 a Kalashnikov could easily be purchased on the open market for as little as Rs.3000. Moreover, a parallel drugs economy based predominantly upon the traffic of heroin, widely believed to be linked with the army's notorious Inter-Services Intelligence wing (ISI), emerged. Thus while heroin addiction was negligible before 1979, estimates suggest that by the year 2000 there were between 1.5 million and four million heroin addicts in Pakistan.<sup>70</sup> As will be shown later, both the arms and the drug trades made for increasing levels of violence and the widespread seepage of crime into politics when politicians, in collusion with the police, became involved in these lucrative trades not only in the cities but also throughout areas of the rural Punjab. Furthermore, even though control over local toughs (*goondas*) was already an integral part of politics prior to Zia's time, as Hamza Alavi (1971) has shown, evidence seems to suggest that it came to play an even more central role during and after the Zia years. During fieldwork, politicians openly told me that in order to control their locality and to win elections it was imperative for them to have strong ties with local *goondas*. These *goondas* constituted heavily armed groups who were frequently involved in various forms of trafficking and who could be called upon to intimidate opponents and voters as well as to occupy land illegally.

General Zia's period in power is also widely recalled for the 'Islamisation' of Pakistan's laws and the implementation of the Hudood Ordinances, which have been widely condemned by human rights groups for causing increased violence towards women, minorities and other powerless groups. Under these laws the relatives of a murdered person were entitled to settle their case with the offending party through the payment of blood money (*diyat*). This resulted in an increase in 'honour killings'

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<sup>70</sup> See New York Times article by Bearak (2000) who reports the difficulty of obtaining accurate figures on the number of heroin addicts due to the low priority given to social science research in Pakistan.

whereby wives, daughters or sisters who were suspected of tarnishing the honour (*izzat/ghairat*) of their families were put to death by relatives. Under these laws a woman's legal guardian, usually her father or husband, was entitled to forgive that woman's murderer. What often happened as a result was that husbands who suspected a slight to their honour could get a relative to kill their wife and then forgive them. Moreover, although less has been written on this issue, the possibility of settling murder cases through the payment of blood money meant that powerless individuals could be pressured into forgiving a murder with minimal compensation. Thus, for example, a landlord might kill a tenant or a servant and then pressure his family through threats of eviction or even violence into agreeing to a settlement.

General Zia's rule came to an abrupt end on the seventeenth of August 1988 shortly before the non-party elections scheduled for November of that same year, when he died in a mysterious plane crash along with several of Pakistan's top generals and the United States Ambassador. The Supreme Court subsequently declared that General Zia's stipulation that elections should be held on a non-party basis was unconstitutional, and elections were held with the full participation of political parties. The 1988 election was essentially a contest between the supporters of General Zia, who united in a coalition under the banner of the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI), and the PPP. Although the PPP under the leadership of Benazir Bhutto won the elections with 38.5 per cent of the national vote, it won only 93 seats in the Punjab Provincial Assembly against the IJI's 108 (Wilder 1999: 31). In the Punjab the IJI obtained much of its support from the conservative urban middle classes, urban traders and industrialists, who had been alienated by the PPP and had greatly benefitted from state patronage and from economic liberalisation under General Zia. Following the death of General Zia the man at the head of this constituency was Mian Nawaz Sharif, who had held various influential positions

in the Punjab government including that of Finance Minister from 1981 to 1985 and Chief Minister from 1985 until 1990, when he became Pakistan's Prime Minister. Nawaz Sharif's rise to power was significant because he represented the growing political clout of the Punjabi urban middle classes to which he personally belonged. His time as Finance Minister and Chief Minister had allowed him to develop strong ties with the provincial bureaucracy, which he had succeeded in making subservient. He achieved this by filling thousands of government jobs with his supporters and by transferring officers who showed excessive independence. As a result, Nawaz Sharif put himself in a position to dole out patronage on a "scale never before witnessed in Punjab politics" (Wilder 1999: 138) thereby firmly entrenching his power at the expense of the PPP. Consequently, when Benazir Bhutto became Prime Minister in 1988 her government was essentially powerless in the country's most powerful province. This situation resulted in a great deal of political acrimony and instability, the eventual premature dismissal of Benazir Bhutto's government twenty months later and in the eventual rise to power of Nawaz Sharif in 1990.

Over the next nine years leading to the military takeover by General Pervez Musharraf in 1999, power went back and forth between the PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) without any government ever completing its complete term in office and with no government lasting for more than three years. After Benazir Bhutto's fall in 1990, Nawaz Sharif held the reins of power for only three years before being himself unseated by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan on charges of mismanagement and corruption. In 1993 Benazir Bhutto returned to power, only to be unseated again in 1996 by President Farooq Leghari, once again on charges of corruption and mismanagement. In February 1997 Nawaz Sharif returned to power and

was superseded two years later by General Pervez Musharraf who broke the pattern of his civilian counterparts and held on to power for approximately nine years.

Wilder has attributed the political instability of this decade of civilian rule to patronage politics, arguing that the “problem with patronage politics is that there is never enough patronage to keep the majority of voters happy” (Wilder 1999: 235). In a system of factional patronage politics where winners take all, political opponents are denied access to patronage and are often victimised. As a result, they resort to agitation and other techniques in order to overthrow the incumbent government. At the level of the Punjab province as a whole this is reflected in the fact that, for example, Nawaz Sharif provided particularly generous levels of patronage (principally in the form of licences and tax breaks) to traders and industrialists in the central Punjab largely at the expense of the southern Punjab.<sup>71</sup> While the central Punjab is the most densely populated, industrialised and agriculturally productive area of the Punjab, the southern Punjab has little industry, low overall levels of literacy and a largely agricultural economy that is predominantly dependent upon the production of cotton. Nawaz Sharif’s pro-industry policy of setting artificially low ceilings on the price of cotton and other crops contributed to a central-versus-southern political rivalry in the Punjab and consolidated the PPP’s hold among the ashrafi notable families of the Southern Punjab. In this manner the PPP increasingly became the party of large landlords, who resented the fact that industrialists and politicians in the central Punjab, whom they considered to be upstarts, were obtaining coveted government positions at their expense.

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<sup>71</sup> As will be discussed, many of his supporters amongst the landed elites of the central Punjab also received substantial amounts of patronage from him.

Following this decade of unstable civilian rule, General Pervez Musharraf imposed military rule once again in October 1999.<sup>72</sup> General Musharraf's policies and his stance towards political parties were similar to those of his military predecessors, Generals Ayub Khan and Zia-ul Haq. Like them he attacked political parties and implemented a devolution programme that once again localised politics and reduced it to the dispensation of patronage at the expense of policy making and implementation. Under Musharraf many of the leaders of the PML-N and the PPP were exiled, imprisoned and disqualified from elections. He created a parliamentary facade to his rule through the establishment of the Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-i-Azam (PML-Q), which was forged principally through defections from Nawaz Sharif's PML-N and to a lesser extent from the PPP. Although in many cases these defections simply reflected the time-honoured opportunism of political leaders, they also reflected an active policy on the part of Musharraf's government whereby political leaders were both cajoled and coerced into defecting. Political leaders were cajoled through promises of lucrative positions in government and coerced by threats of prosecution on the basis of both real and fabricated charges. In order to weaken political opponents and rig elections, the judiciary was widely manipulated through the posting of pliable judges and the transfer and dismissal of judges who showed excessive independence. In addition, the National Accountability Bureau, though ostensibly created as anti-corruption watchdog, was in practice selectively used to prosecute political opponents. Although in all likelihood a great number of politicians could have been liable to prosecution on real corruption charges, only those who were in the opposition were prosecuted and those who decided

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<sup>72</sup> It is widely perceived among the general public that meddling by the military and the intelligence services also played a role in destabilising civilian governments during this period.



to defect to the ruling coalition were exonerated of all charges.<sup>73</sup> Other tactics used in order to encourage defections included harassment and physical intimidation by the police and by the intelligence services (ISI). Finally, as will be shown in a later chapter, through his devolution programme General Musharraf was able to create a constituency that allowed him to bypass opposition provincial politicians and mobilise support for a rigged referendum, extending his term for five years based upon a 95 per cent approval rating

In 2008, at the time of writing, General Musharraf was forced to resign as a result of growing agitation by members of the judiciary and by the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy, which included both the PML-N and the PPP, and as a result of the growing Taliban insurgency in the North West Frontier Province. The PPP eventually took power nationally and the PML-N regained power in the Punjab, thereby placing the PPP in a similar situation to the one it faced in 1988 when Benazir Bhutto was prime minister of Pakistan and Nawaz Sharif was the Punjab's Chief Minister. The results of this situation are still unfolding, but a continued emphasis on narrow factional interests and patronage politics is likely to plunge the country once again into the instability that was witnessed from 1988 through 1999.

What this brief overview of the political history of Pakistan and of the Punjab in particular has attempted to show is that authoritarian rule has strongly contributed to turning politics into an arena where politicians compete on the basis of factional interests. It was argued that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's democratic rise to power in 1970 briefly succeeded in overcoming parochial biraderi and factional political allegiances

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<sup>73</sup> Faisal Saleh Hayat, for example, an influential landlord in the central Punjabi district of Jhang, had been a major defaulter on bank loans and General Musharraf's National Accountability Bureau prosecuted him until all charges were dropped when he accepted to join the government in order to be made interior minister. See the International Crisis Group (2004a) report on Pakistan's judiciary for an account of this case and of how the judiciary has been used by successive governments in Pakistan to prosecute political opponents.

through his appeal to national issues that were significant to the masses. However, the military takeover by General Zia-ul Haq, by banning political parties and by once again diverting the attention of politicians away from national policy issues to local issues of patronage, reversed whatever progress had been achieved towards popular empowerment. As a result, the vital issues of land and homestead reform—as well as the reform of local governance structures, including the police and the judiciary—were never seriously addressed. As chapter five will demonstrate, contrary to its stated goals of reforming local governance structures and empowering the masses, General Musharraf's devolution programme was in fact an attempt to maintain the status quo by once again localising politics and preventing the consolidation of large scale political opposition, in the same manner that General Ayub Khan and General Zia-ul Haq had done in the past. This meant that rural notables, including ashrafi, middle, and gentry landlords, were able to extend their stranglehold over rural areas. Moreover, the politics of patronage, where winners take all, arguably condemned Pakistan to perpetual instability leading to the repeated intervention of the military in politics. In this manner a self-perpetuating cycle was generated whereby civilian governments characterised by the factional politics of patronage alternated with military governments who further entrenched factional politics by stunting political development.

### **The Chowdris**

Before situating the Gondal chowdris against the national background described above, it will be helpful to sketch a general picture of the chowdris' power and their use of it a little further. At the local level, the chowdris maintained and benefited enormously from what was effectively a monopoly of influence. This monopoly ran precisely on the rails laid down by the winner-takes-all politics of patronage. Here influence consisted in the effective brokering of benefits of a variety of sorts, both

economic and political. The 'commerce' of this brokerage directly determined the most fundamental realities of the labouring classes already most poorly served by Pakistan's political and economic realities in ways that were both exploitative and demoralising. As such, it entrenched more deeply a combination of economic deprivation and sustained political impotence that further enhanced its own durability.

The chowdris' monopoly of influence touched almost every aspect of kammis' lives, but one of the most critical was that of the relationship that ordinary people had with the police. As such, it makes an excellent place to begin looking at the practical aspects of chowdri influence, and for the same reason it will recur as a focus of discussion throughout this thesis.

It was noted in the preceding chapter that the chowdris ran what was effectively a protection racket from the feared and predatory Punjabi police inasmuch as the chowdris offered protection to villagers from a force over which they themselves exercised a certain amount of control. That the generally justified fear of the police allowed chowdris and others to extract resources from people can be illustrated by the following case: On one occasion a fraudster from Sargodha playing on people's fear of the police had driven around various villages announcing through a loudspeaker that the police were going to come around and confiscate all copper vessels in people's homes.<sup>74</sup> He claimed that General Musharraf had decreed that the copper vessels were needed by the government in order to mint new copper coins. As an alternative to this uncompensated confiscation, the fraudster was offering to buy the copper vessels instead. Taking the fraudster's word for the situation several villagers in Bek Sagrana, fearing that the police would imminently turn up and confiscate the things from them,

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<sup>74</sup> People frequently owned a large number of copper and brass plates and pots that they received as a part of wedding dowries.

decided to sell their copper pots to the fraudster. Put under pressure they sold the copper ware below its actual value and the fraudster amassed a small fortune from his scheme.

The chowdris' leverage was not limited to relations with the police, however, but extended to other state institutions as well. For example, villagers knew that they were unlikely to win court cases unless a powerful patron could influence the judiciary on their behalf. The patronage of chowdris was also necessary for managing a wide variety of situations such as obtaining an identity card, a school certificate, or in order to get treatment in a hospital. With regard to hospitals patronage was necessary because many doctors in rural areas claimed their monthly wages but didn't actually attend to their duties (this will be seen in Bek SAGRANA below). This was also the case in the big hospitals in town where many doctors who were meant to be working for the state spent most of their time in private clinics of their own where they could charge for their services while they continued receiving a state salary. This meant that many poor people who couldn't afford private fees didn't have access to basic healthcare and had to rely instead on local healers who practiced Islamic medicine (*hikmat*), and local doctors who allegedly practiced allopathic medicine but whose qualifications were often dubious. Additionally people often relied solely on local pirs who had acquired a reputation for producing effective amulets to protect and cure them from various ailments, some serious. The result was that people frequently died from ailments that were otherwise preventable or curable.<sup>75</sup> If, however, people decided that they needed treatment in a hospital often the only way to obtain it was through a chowdri. In Bek SAGRANA the chowdris would direct people to Chowdri Muzaffar Abbas who was the absentee doctor at the village Basic Health Unit (BHU. See below). Whenever he was actually there he

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<sup>75</sup> For example, throughout my stay in Bek SAGRANA two people in the area died of rabies. Following dog bites they went to a local pir for an amulet instead of going to a local hospital for an injection.

would write chits for clients to present to his friends who were doctors in town. These chits greatly increased people's chances of obtaining treatment either in public or private hospitals.<sup>76</sup>

The perception, and the realities on which it fed, that the chowdris basically were the State meant that villagers were largely at the mercy of the chowdris when it came to getting anything done that involved public institutions. Consequently most villagers were aware of the need to retain the favour of the chowdris should they have to approach them for patronage in the future. Thus most villagers, and kammis in particular, at least played lip service to the public norms of deference and obsequiousness required when dealing with the chowdris. If an influential chowdri was known to be in the village people who knew that they might need his help in the future, or who had received a favour from him in the past, would go to his dera and sit with him for a couple of hours as a sign of their loyalty. Sometimes showing loyalty involved no more than this, but other times it could involve performing labour services or being sent off on errands. Furthermore it was not uncommon for the chowdris to demand that villagers seeking their favour accompany them on trips to visit friends, which could last for several days. In this manner the chowdris could temporarily—sometimes permanently—acquire a new servant to show off their influence and wealth to their friends. Clients in this situation frequently complained that they had to spend many idle days hanging around with a chowdri simply because the chowdri wanted to show off that he was a man of importance. Certain chowdris even demanded that random clients who approached them act as their gunmen for a few days. As a result it was not uncommon for people with little experience with weapons, and who had no particular

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<sup>76</sup> Politicians often used their influence and contacts with doctors to enlarge their client base. In Sargodha one doctor with political ambitions had set up a private practice and began treating many of his poorer clients for free when he saw that this would provide him with a chance to gain votes.

desire to possess any, nevertheless to end up carrying weapons for a chowdri. This led many villagers to claim that the chowdris wanted them to remain dependent upon them so that they could ask them to take up arms and fight for them when necessary. They argued that the possibility of their getting well paid jobs posed a threat to the chowdris because it meant that they would become independent from them. They also claimed that it was because of this that the chowdris only helped a small number of people obtain government jobs even though they had the power to get such jobs for many more people if they wished to.

Both the perception and the reality of the chowdris' privileged access to the state also meant that they could largely get away with a wide range of coercive practices towards servants and kammis. Kammis and servants were often subjected to both humiliating verbal and physical abuse. The sexual abuse of Mussalli women and female servants by young Gondal men was widely known to take place. The notorious four siblings discussed in the next chapter were, for example, known to have taken Mussalli women by force at night when the women went out into the fields to go to the toilet. Other chowdris were widely rumoured to have sexually assaulted their female servants. Less brazen chowdris were more discrete and obtained sexual favours from female kammis and servants through a mixture of cajolements and partially veiled threats. They cajoled kammi and servant women by offering gifts of money but these very gifts were threatening because refusal to satisfy the chowdris desires could result in eviction and the loss of employment. It was in fact quite common for such chowdris to boast about their sexual exploits with their female servants and other village kammi women.<sup>77</sup>

It must be said that not all chowdris were involved in this type of behaviour and

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<sup>77</sup> Ahmed Salim (2004) reports from a village close to Bek Sagrana that chowdri elders who knew that their children were having sex with female Mussalli servants didn't condemn them for it. Salim reports that they believed that only marriage would put a break to their sons' sexual urges.

many of those who were pious Muslims severely frowned upon it. Nevertheless, as will be illustrated in the discussion on pirs of chapter six, even pious chowdris found ways to be exploitative and abusive towards servants and kammis. They beat their servants, arbitrarily deducted money from their wages and sometimes even refrained from paying them altogether. It was also common for chowdris to make random kammis who happened to cross their path perform all sorts of odd jobs and errands free of charge, despite not being their paid servants. Refusal by a kammi to perform a task was likely to incur the anger of the chowdri. As a consequence, rather than face a chowdri's anger and be subjected to various forms of humiliation, kammis tried their best to avoid places where chowdris might be assembled unless they needed something from them.

Additionally chowdris had the power to forcefully evict labourers or servants from their homes, to confiscate livestock or impose fines on the basis of offences real or perceived. Although Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's reforms in the 1970s had granted villagers the right to legal ownership over their homesteads, landlords around the Punjab nevertheless continued to evict house tenants arbitrarily.<sup>78</sup> House tenants were still expected to support their landlords during elections as well as to provide them with occasional labour services. In Bek Sagrana a Gondal chowdri evicted a servant and his family from his dera after the servant decided to take up more profitable employment as a driver in Sargodha. While the servant was away in Sargodha the chowdri cut off the servant's family's electricity supply and forced it to vacate the house. The family was only allowed back into the house after the servant returned to work for the chowdri. Subsequently the same servant faced the threat of eviction for seeking patronage from the factional rival of his master in a case involving the police. Additionally, house tenants who weren't permanent servants of the chowdri upon whose land they lived

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<sup>78</sup> See Rouse (1983:323) for an account of the impact of homestead reforms in another village in the district of Sargodha.

knew that refusing to carry out certain tasks for their chowdris could result in eviction. For example, a family of carpenters (Tarkhans) told me that they had to do electrical work for which they would normally have received up to Rs.5000 free of charge for their chowdri who was organising an *urs*<sup>79</sup> to commemorate the death of his pir. They told me that if they hadn't done it he would probably have threatened to evict them from their house.

Chowdris also had the *de facto* power to evict people from houses that weren't technically on their land. Since Bhutto village land had been designated property of the state, assuring that villagers could no longer legally be evicted from their houses. Although I heard of now specific instances of its happening in the recent past, people widely believed that the chowdris could still kick them out of the village if they chose to despite the law. Even the village Imam, who had relatively high status in the community and owned several acres of land, told me that his family's stay in the village depended upon the goodwill of the chowdris. Although he was aware of the law he said that the law was irrelevant to the Gondals.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the law the chowdris could also evict people from the housing colonies built during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto reign, and from the land that bordered both sides of government-built metalled roads. Although people who lived in these locations possessed a greater degree of independence from the chowdris than others, they weren't totally exempt from having to provide occasional services to the chowdris in their neighbourhood. This was the case despite the fact that inhabitants of the housing colonies possessed legal titles over the five marla plots of land on which their houses

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<sup>79</sup> An *urs* is a religious festival held annually to commemorate the unification with God of a Muslim saint upon his death.

<sup>80</sup> The one event that I recorded which illustrated that eviction from the village by the chowdris was a real possibility involved a certain chowdri who threatened to evict some the Rajputs, who were descendants of immigrants from India at partition (*Mohajirs*), from their communal hall during the local council elections of August 2005. This is related fully in Chapter Five.



were built. As chapter five will show they too could be pressured to vote for the candidate that the dominant chowdri in their neighbourhood was supporting. The same situation held for people settled on government land around main country roads. Even here people often had to ask for permission to settle there from the neighbourhood chowdris, who had no legal claim to or control over it whatsoever. It was frequently the case that chowdris used this land themselves in order to plant the tobacco used in *hookahs*, which sometimes made them reluctant to have people to settle on it. Although those who were allowed to settle on it weren't generally expected to provide labour services for the neighbourhood chowdris they were often expected to align themselves politically with them.

Finally chowdris also had the power to impose fines upon kammis and other villagers. One elderly Gondal chowdri was known to frequently impose fines of up to Rs.500 if he saw a kammi's cattle (*mavaishi*) trampling or feeding upon his fields. The same chowdri once imposed a fine of Rs.30,000 on three young carpenters and humiliatingly beat them with the soles of his shoes<sup>81</sup> for stealing large quantities of citrus during the night to sell in the local market town.

From the above accounts it emerges that—unlike in the case of Gujarat where according to Breman (1993) the Anavil Brahmins landlords only retained the coercive power inherent in wage relations—in Bek Sagrana the Gondal chowdris retained both significant private coercive power and significant political power as patrons through their privileged access to state resources. Their virtual monopoly over access to state institutions meant that they continued to play an indispensable role as local patrons for the inhabitants of the area such that their relationship with labourers and tenants retained strong political element to it. Additionally the chowdris could still publicly

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<sup>81</sup> In South Asia beating someone with a shoe was considered particularly humiliating.

justify their social prominence through a paternalistic ideology of protection and patronage that often made reference to their higher moral and social status as Muslims.<sup>82</sup>

### **The Gondal Politicians of Bek Sagrana**

The political history of a set of influential Gondal siblings from Bek Sagrana broadly illustrates some of the trends in national and Punjabi politics that were discussed in the opening section of this chapter. It also illustrates how the Gondals came to wield the power that they do. This section's principal focus is upon the political and economic fortunes of two brothers belonging to a sibling set of five. The sibling set in question can be broadly characterised as belonging to the class of wealthy Jat landlords whose rise to prominence in Punjabi politics began during General Ayub Khan's regime. The father of the five siblings, Chowdri Muhammad Ali, had been one of the four most influential chowdri in the village of Bek Sagrana and had owned approximately 350 acres of prime canal-irrigated land distributed between the villages of Bek Sagrana and Kot Gondal. Because Muhammad Ali held a bachelor's degree in Law, he was one of the most educated Chowdri in the area of Bek Sagrana. Nevertheless, his political influence did not extend very far beyond the locality. Until the 1970s it was the ashrafi Makhdoom lineage of pirs in the neighbouring village of Nawabpur that had dominated the local political scene by producing members of both the provincial and the national assemblies. They are known to have possessed above a thousand acres of land and to have lived the lordly lifestyle typical of their class. I was told by elderly villagers that they had owned many horses for the sports of tent pegging and pig sticking, and that European guests had frequently joined their hunting parties. Prior to their political and economic decline the Makhdooms had been the principal political rivals of the Gondals.

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<sup>82</sup> See Chapter Six.

The political decline of the Makdoods roughly coincided with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's rise to power. This period also marked the rise to political prominence of Chowdri Nawaz Ali Gondal who was the eldest of the five sons of Muhammad Ali. Prior to entering politics in the early 1960s, Chowdri Nawaz Ali had obtained a law degree from the University of Sargodha sometime during the 1950s, which he had completed in jail as a result of his involvement in the killing of a fellow student. According to one version of this incident the student in question had been taunting Chowdri Nawaz Ali by calling him Gondali instead of Gondal thereby feminising his name. According to another version the student had actually been taunting one of Chowdri Nawaz Ali's best friends. In any case the result was that Chowdri Nawaz Ali lost his temper and started beating the student with the help of some of his friends and a servant. One of the attackers was armed with a cricket bat, which dealt a fatal blow to the skull of the young man. According to some versions of the story Chowdri Nawaz Ali struck the fatal blow with the cricket bat, while according to others it was his servant. The student in question was the brother of Zahid Iqbal Awan who, like Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his younger brother, would one day also become a powerful regional politician. As will be shown below, both the killing and the fact that Zahid Iqbal Awan eventually rose to political prominence later played a role in determining the political allegiances of both Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his younger brother Chowdri Mazhar Ali. The murder also played an important part in establishing Chowdri Nawaz Ali as a forceful and hot tempered person. Later both of these character traits would contribute to the muscular style of politics that Chowdri Nawaz Ali practiced. This muscular style became the hallmark of the successful and effective Jat political leaders that began to enter high level political office during General Ayub Khan's era.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> For an account of muscular politics in a different setting see Michelutti's (2008) study of

Chowdri Nawaz Ali only spent one year in jail before launching on his legal and political career. He and his relatives explained that the reason he got such a light sentence was because of his father's contacts in the judiciary and the police. An alternative explanation offered by villagers suggests that his sentence was light because his servant, who had been present during the attack, bore the full weight of punishment in his place. The servant, whose father was Muhammad Ali's tenant, was eventually sentenced to death for murder.<sup>84</sup> After having completed his law degree, which he managed to study for while in jail, Chowdri Nawaz Ali began to work in the legal profession upon his release. Law was an ideal entry route into politics in a situation where voters and clients most commonly approach their leaders to help them with cases involving the local police station (*thana*) and the local courts with their associated lawyers' offices (*kacheri*). Individuals who have experience working with these institutions, as well as contacts within them, are in a strong position to help their clients and thereby to win their votes. It is therefore very common for leaders wishing to maintain or strengthen their local position to obtain some sort of experience in the legal profession. Having such experience, and having acquired a reputation for being effective, forceful and astute in his handling of cases, Chowdri Nawaz Ali was eventually noticed by local PPP leaders. A member of the influential Noon family (mentioned in the introduction), who at the time was still a kingmaker in the district, offered Chowdri Nawaz Ali a party ticket to run for a provincial assembly seat.

Although during my interviews with him Chowdri Nawaz Ali claimed to have

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Yadav politicians of Western Uttar Pradesh who take pride in their forcefulness and physical strength. They display the latter through wrestling competitions and their politics is often marked by violence. The Yadav's described in her work are somewhat like the Gondals described in this thesis in that they too have relatively recently risen to political prominence.

<sup>84</sup> It was frequent for servants and gunmen to end up in jail for their masters. Several months after my departure from the village I learnt that a young Gondal had run over someone in his car and that his driver is the one who ended up going to jail.

been a socialist and still to be one,<sup>85</sup> various factors seem to indicate that his commitment to the PPP, and to its ostensibly socialist programme, hadn't been purely ideological. In addition to any ideological commitment he may have had to the PPP, his rivalry with the Makhdooms and an opportunity to gain power seem to have played an equally important role in his joining the ranks of the party. As will be illustrated in this and the next chapter, local rivalries and personal feuds played important roles in determining which party people decided to join. It was usually the case that if a person obtained a ticket from one party his rival sought to obtain a ticket from the opposing party. In this instance the Makhdooms joined the coalition of parties that was opposing the PPP because land and tenancy reforms threatened their landholdings. Since Chowdri Nawaz Ali and the Gondals of Bek Sagrama were the rivals of the Makhdooms they joined the PPP, whose programme of land reform didn't pose a significant threat to their landholdings.<sup>86</sup> Most individual Gondal zamindars in Bek Sagrama owned land below the ceiling that was being proposed by Bhutto. Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his five siblings, for example, had each inherited 70 acres of canal-irrigated land, far below the ceiling of 150 acres.

In 1970 Chowdri Nawaz Ali won the provincial assembly seat in his constituency and the Makhdooms faced the prospect of losing much of their land. Both close relatives of Chowdri Nawaz Ali and villagers attributed his victory to his closer ties with the common folk (who were inclined to vote for the PPP in any case) and with the middle sized Jat zamindars that constituted the majority of landholders in the area. I was told that the

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<sup>85</sup> His understanding of socialism appeared to be one revolving around the dispensation of patronage rather than around the building of equitable and accountable institutions.

<sup>86</sup> In the history section above I showed that the 1970 elections witnessed several instances of rivals uniting in face of the threat to their landholdings posed by the PPP. In this instance there was no need for the Gondals to unite with their Makhdoom rivals since they weren't particularly threatened by the possibility of land reform.

Makhdooms, who spent most of their time in leisurely pursuits and in Lahore, lacked such ties. Moreover, I was told that their leisurely lifestyles meant that, despite their great wealth, they lacked the muscle power and the will to be constantly involved in the thana and kacheri issues that concerned the vast majority of the electorate. Their eventual loss of land to tenants and kammis during land reforms, as well as to Gondals who forcefully captured some of it (*kabza*) over the decades that followed, was also attributed to their lack of muscle power. Many villagers argued that if the Gondals had been in the position of the Makhdooms they wouldn't have ceded any of their land because they were hard (*sakht*) and would have fought to retain every inch of it. Several kammis and tenants in Nawabpur, as well as others who lived very close to Bek Sagrana, were granted land that had formerly belonged to the Makhdooms. What's more, over the decades that followed Bhutto's rise and fall from power several members of the Gondal biraderi encroached upon their land and cultivated it without legal title. Thus, although during fieldwork between 2004 and 2007 the Makhdooms were still the largest landholders in the area, it appears that they had lost significant amounts of land. They had also largely ceased to play a role in politics, opting instead for a more urban and even cosmopolitan lifestyle, with some of their younger members going to university abroad and then proceeding on to business and finance. Their lack of interest in the care and cultivation of their lands was further evidenced by the fact, frequently commented upon by villagers, that their land was carelessly cultivated and that their servants and managers stole from them. Many kammis from Bek Sagrana also stole citrus from their orchards at night and sold it in the nearby market town of Bhagtanwala. Villagers told me that thieves had little to fear from the Makhdooms.

Chowdri Nawaz Ali Gondal's term in power concluded abruptly in 1977 with General Zia-ul Haq's military takeover.<sup>87</sup> In the aftermath of the coup Chowdri Nawaz Ali was among the many PPP supporters who were harassed and persecuted by General Zia's military government. He was sent to the infamous jail at Attock without trial and spent six months there. Twenty-eight years later he would recall the intense hardships he had suffered during that time. In the long run General Zia's takeover meant that the Gondals had to reconsider their political allegiances if they were to maintain their power and continue to benefit from political office. After repeatedly delaying elections General Zia finally decided to hold non-party provincial elections in 1985. General Zia's principal motivation for holding elections on a non-party basis was to prevent candidates from the PPP from regaining office. This meant that Chowdri Nawaz Ali, who had played a significant role in the PPP locally and who had ended up in jail as a result, was effectively barred from standing in the 1985 elections. In order to circumvent this it was decided that Chowdri Nawaz Ali's younger brother, Chowdri Mazhar Ali, would contest the provincial assembly elections in his place. In this manner Chowdri Mazhar Ali obtained a seat in the provincial assembly under the very government that had not only ousted and jailed his brother, but whose ideology was diametrically opposed to the PPP's. General Zia-ul Haq reversed land legislation, re-privatised many industries and eradicated left wing movements from the political scene. Furthermore, as indicated above, General Zia also succeeded in orienting politics to local issues of patronage at the cost of the national issues that had initially been at the forefront of the PPP movement. Retrospectively, the fact that Chowdri Nawaz Ali supported his brother's entry into a government whose ideals were strongly opposed to those of the PPP is further evidence that ideological commitment may not have been at

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<sup>87</sup> I was unable to collect much information about Chowdri Nawaz Ali's term in office but many villagers claimed that during the early years of his political career he had been very popular.

the forefront of Chowdri Nawaz Ali's decision to join the PPP initially.

Over the years that followed this shift in political allegiance proved highly beneficial to the political and economic fortunes of leading Gondals including both Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali. From 1985 onwards both Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Nawaz Ali were to benefit greatly from the unprecedented levels of patronage that characterised Nawaz Sharif's several terms in power.<sup>88</sup> Chowdri Mazhar Ali first became a provincial minister in 1985 when General Zia was still in power and when Nawaz Sharif was Chief Minister of the Punjab. Following the death of General Zia, and after a two year period with Benazir Bhutto as Prime Minister, Chowdri Mazhar Ali became a Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) during Nawaz Sharif's two terms as Prime Minister, from 1990 to 1993 and 1997 to 1999. In the meantime, Chowdri Nawaz Ali also joined Nawaz Sharif's PML-N and came to play a prominent role in its district organisation.

Over almost fourteen years the Gondals intermittently benefitted from substantial amounts of patronage when Nawaz Sharif was in power, either as Chief Minister of the Punjab or as Prime Minister of Pakistan. This provided the Gondals with a wide variety of opportunities to further their personal economic and political standing. This is most dramatically illustrated by the fact that by 1999 Chowdri Mazhar Ali owned almost 400 acres of land and several Pakistan State Oil (PSO) petrol stations throughout Sargodha district, whereas when he began his political career in 1985 he had owned no more than 70 acres of land. Patronage included a variety of lucrative contracts (*thekas*) and a steady flow of development funds. It also included help with maintaining

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<sup>88</sup> Wilder (1999) reports that during his time in power Nawaz Sharif was able to fill thousands of government jobs with his supporters: "...he appointed hundreds of loyalist police officers, particularly into the lucrative positions of Assistant Sub-Inspectors and Station Head Officers. This was especially significant as the police play a central political role in Pakistan because of their ability to selectively apply laws in order to harass opponents or to turn a blind eye to the misdeeds of political allies" (Wilder 1999: 139).



crucial control over local police stations through the transfer of uncooperative officers and their replacement with more malleable ones.<sup>89</sup> Such control over the police was crucial for politicians, whose supporters expected them to solve their problems with the police. Supporters frequently approached politicians for help in withdrawing a complaint (*parcha*) lodged against them with the police<sup>90</sup> or, conversely, for help in making the police lodge a complaint, either real or fabricated, against an opponent. Various informants explained that this style of politics strongly contributed to its susceptibility to crime, because politicians frequently helped supporters to get away with a wide range of criminal activity including murder, drug trafficking and cattle rustling. Finally, as in North India (Brass 1997) control over a reputedly predatory police force is considered crucial by voters who expect their politicians to protect them from police harassment.

Together the combination of development funds and contracts, coupled with the politicisation of the police and of the judiciary on their behalf, provided a spectrum of opportunities for the Gondals to enrich themselves and to consolidate their political grip over their constituencies. It must be noted here that personal enrichment itself often played a role in consolidating a politician's political power. Wealth in the form of land and businesses, which might include citrus polishing plants and petrol stations, were seen as a way for politicians to enlarge their client base. Wealth and cash were also necessary during election times when politicians often had to finance their own campaigns because of the poor finances of political parties. Among other things, election campaigns involved expenditure in the following among others: fuel for the transport of politicians during their campaign, and of voters on the day when elections

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<sup>89</sup> Although rules for the transfer of Station House Officers (SHOs) at local police stations (*thana*) change now and then it was usually the Chief Minister who ordered transfers. Good relations with the Chief Minister of the Province were therefore important for politicians.

<sup>90</sup> The term *parcha* is used to refer to a First Instance Report (FIR).

were held; food for visiting clients; and the buying of votes with cash and small scale infrastructure projects.<sup>91</sup> As a result it was not uncommon for politicians to have to sell land in order to finance their campaigns. It was therefore in the interest of politicians to obtain wealth themselves and also to improve the economic standing of close relatives and faithful clients. In this way they strengthened not only their own client base but that of their close supporters and relatives.

During his three terms in office Mazhar Ali Gondal obtained a variety of lucrative contracts and a steady flow of development funds for his factional constituency and for his home village. For example, during his latest term in office, from 1997 to 1999, Chowdri Mazhar Ali obtained several lucrative contracts relating to the construction of stretches of the motorway from Lahore to Islamabad that was being engineered by the South Korean Daewoo Company. He appears to have not only personally taken advantage of these contracts but to have granted contracts to his relatives including his younger brother, who became extensively involved in the project, and other factional supporters. His younger brother was even somehow able to place one of his domestic servants onto the payroll of Daewoo without the servant ever having actually to work for them. According to the servant in question this arrangement basically allowed his master to have a servant for free.<sup>92</sup> Chowdri Mazhar Ali's younger brother, as well as other relatives and supporters, were also granted several local road construction projects.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, Chowdri Mazhar Ali was granted several

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<sup>91</sup> This might include a small bridge over an irrigation canal, a small stretch of road or a small mosque.

<sup>92</sup> The servant even told me that because the Daewoo salary was quite high, his master kept part of it for himself.

<sup>93</sup> The state of many of these local roads only a few years after completion suggests that the contractors in charge of their construction spent far below what they had invoiced. The metal road running alongside the canal from which the village of Bek Sagrana could be accessed had only been built seven earlier, but in 2004 it was already badly pockmarked with potholes and large parts of it had collapsed into the canal.

franchises to build Pakistan State Oil petrol stations along the main roads leading into Sargodha.

During Chowdri Mazhar Ali's time in office the village of Bek SAGRANA also received a large number of development projects. The village gained a post office, a water tower, a basic health unit, a new school and a community centre for the Mohajir section of the village. Of these, neither the water tower nor the post office were ever used and the basic health unit was barely operating. The water tower was part of a scheme originally destined to connect households to a water-supply system in areas where there were problems with water scarcity and salinity. Bek SAGRANA suffered from neither of those problems, and most people obtained fresh water by the means of a hand pump (*nalka*) located in the courtyard of their house. In the whole village, there was no one who opted to get connected to the new water system. The main reason cited for declining was the fact that they currently obtained water for free and that it would be foolish to exchange that for a system whereby they would have to pay monthly bills. The post office was never operational and was used as the house of one of Mazhar Ali's ex-employees.

The basic health unit was a similar case. Like many other health units that I visited throughout the district, it wasn't properly operational. The unit included a hospital building with two operating rooms for minor operations such as appendicitis and childbirth, and a medical dispensary. It also had housing for hospital staff and a large two-storied residence for the doctor. The doctor, a wealthy Gondal chowdri who had managed to get a position in the basic health unit of his own village thanks to the patronage of Chowdri Mazhar Ali, never attended to his duties there and only occasionally went to enter false entries into the attendance register. The residence of the basic health unit was occupied by his maternal cousin who was also the head of the

village Ghulam Baksh Ke faction. A few of the rooms meant for hospital staff were occupied by the former's servants, one of whom used another of the rooms to keep broiler chickens which he sold in the village. The clerk in charge of the medical dispensary allegedly made money selling off the basic health unit's medical supplies. As a result villagers continued to rely almost exclusively on local healers (*hakeems*) and on others with highly dubious qualifications as practitioners of allopathic medicine.<sup>94</sup>

To make sense of the fact that so many unnecessary and poorly built projects were implemented by politicians it is necessary to understand that in the patronage politics of the Pakistani Punjab the winning faction appropriates all of the spoils of power and uses them to strengthen its local political and economic position at the expense of its opponents. Consequently, office-holding politicians grant development funds and contracts not only to themselves but to their supporters as well, regardless of whether the projects are actually necessary or whether they will be properly implemented by the contractor. At the same time, factional opponents who have failed to get the sufficient number of votes necessary in order to obtain political office are largely deprived of patronage and of development funds by the winners, even though their areas may be in greater need of certain projects. Hence a widespread saying asserts that in order to know whether a local landlord politician is in power a person need only look at the state of the roads in and around his home village. Apart from contracts and development funds, Chowdri Mazhar Ali also obtained coveted positions in government and in elite schools for his relatives, supporters and faithful clients and servants. During his first term in office Nawaz Sharif, who was then the Chief Minister of the Punjab under General Zia's government, personally ensured that Chowdri Mazhar Ali's son

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<sup>94</sup> This sort of thing was very common in the public health sector. Most Basic Health Units that I visited in rural areas weren't fully operational and doctors meant to work in them only came to collect their pay once a month. See Asian Development Bank (2005) for an account of poorly motivated and absent staff in hospitals as well as in schools.

gained entry into Aitcheson College. A place at Aitcheson College was, and remains, highly coveted and represents the best way for a son to establish contacts with members of the wealthiest and most powerful families of Pakistan. Chowdri Mazhar Ali was also able to obtain several low ranking yet secure and well paid government jobs for his servants. He obtained jobs for both his driver and for his agricultural manager (*munshi*) in the Ministry of Agriculture. Neither of them ever attended their government job and both continued working for Chowdri Mazhar Ali who, through this arrangement, was spared the expense of having to pay their monthly wages out of his own pocket. In addition, three more village kammis were granted coveted government jobs as cleaners and guards in the newly built village school and the basic health unit.

Political office and influence over the local police also allowed the Gondals of Bek SAGRANA to enrich themselves through a variety of other means that were blatantly criminal. Some villagers that I spoke to claimed that Chowdri Mazhar Ali himself had made much of his money in the heroin trade although this was not the consensus view. On the other hand, it was absolutely clear that many of his close relatives in the village were involved not only in the heroin trade but in bootlegging, cattle theft and even in the trafficking of stolen cars. Chowdri Rafiq Gondal, the younger brother of the head of the Lambar Ke faction in the village of Bek SAGRANA,<sup>95</sup> was singled out as the man who introduced heroin into the area in the 1980s, when the drug started flowing copiously into Pakistan from Afghanistan. Later, two more Gondal families in the village became involved in the trade. As a result Bek SAGRANA soon became a major converging point for the numerous heroin addicts in the area, and Bek SAGRANA itself came to have a significant number of addicts both among chowdris and kammis. Although for obvious reasons it was difficult to investigate how this trade worked, several conversations that I

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<sup>95</sup> The next chapter will deal more specifically with factionalism at the village level.

had both with Gondals and ex-retainers of the chowdris involved in the trade indicated that the individuals involved received ‘protection’ from politicians, who ensured that the police would turn a blind eye to their activities. I was told that in exchange for such protection, politicians and policemen received a share of the profits. Politicians also thereby obtained the muscle power of the local toughs, whom they often used to weaken opponents and keep unruly villagers in their place. During fieldwork it became apparent to me that at least two of the families involved in the trade were, or had formerly been, closely aligned with Chowdri Mazhar Ali’s political faction. One of these families in particular had received active support from Chowdri Mazhar Ali in an attempt to weaken the faction that opposed him. I will return to this case in chapter three, but for now it is sufficient to note that Chowdri Mazhar Ali provided not only political support for them in their fight against the increasingly powerful opposing village faction, but also weapons bought from contacts in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas bordering Afghanistan.

Finally, political office and the patronage of heavily armed criminal elements also allowed several Gondals to take by force land that belonged to the Makhdooms as well as other land belonging to politically powerless smallholders. With respect to the Makhdooms it appears that some Gondals simply occupied their land and cultivated it without legal title. The moral justification that the Gondals offered for this was that the land had once been donated to one of the Makhdoom saints (pirs) more than a hundred years ago but that because the latest pir had no legitimate offspring the land thereby reverted to them. The Gondals proudly explained to me that the Makhdooms could do nothing about it because the Gondals had greater power (*takat*)<sup>96</sup> than they did. It appears that Chowdri Abdullah Gondal, the head of the faction opposing Chowdri

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<sup>96</sup> The word *takat* was used to refer to a combination of forcefulness and political influence.

Mazhar Ali, even succeeded in having some of the Makhdooms' best land transferred to his name. The Makhdooms had apparently decided to sell some of their poor quality rain-fed land and Chowdri Abdullah had taken up the offer. The way he had ended up with some of their best land was that the agreement had apparently involved the sale of a share in the Makhdooms total estate without specifying the actual plot of land involved. So even though the agreement was about a plot of poor quality land, Chowdri Abdullah Gondal took over a piece of prime land covered with citrus orchards. In the case of politically weak smallholders it was much simpler to obtain legal title to their land. The simplest way was to use a small quarrel as a pretext to send gunmen over and threaten a farmer into selling his land at a price below going market rates. Alternatively contacts with the police and the judiciary could be used to lodge a fabricated complaint against a landowner and thereby entangle him in a court case. Because court cases could be ruinously expensive and drag on for decades, the defendant could be offered out of court settlement in exchange for selling his land at a price far below its market value.<sup>97</sup>

During their time in office Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his younger sibling also personally took over government property. Both Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his youngest brother occupied wedding halls that had been built for the poor during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's time in power. The wedding halls had been built to provide a place where poor people could celebrate their weddings. In Bek Sagrama the wedding hall ended up as the weekend bungalow of Chowdri Nawaz Ali's younger brother, and in the village of Kot Gondal the wedding hall became Chowdri Nawaz Ali's guest house.

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<sup>97</sup> The method of entangling an opponent in a court case is widely reported to be used against people belonging to religious minorities through the use of the blasphemy laws put in place by General Zia-ul Haq. According to this law a person accused of blasphemy could be sentenced to death. Therefore a person with an eye to obtain a plot of land belonging to his Christian neighbour could accuse him of blasphemy and thereby force him into ceding his land.

When Nawaz Sharif was overthrown by General Pervez Musharraf in 1999 this situation would be used by General Musharraf's government and his local supporters to prosecute Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his siblings on corruption charges. Thus, the military takeover brought a significant, albeit temporary, reversal in the political and economic fortunes of Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his siblings and close supporters, a reversal that clearly illustrates the costs that finding oneself in the opposition could entail, and also the reason that political leaders often shifted their allegiances when governments changed. Once Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali were removed from power when General Musharraf dissolved the national assembly in 1999, they not only ceased to receive government funds and patronage but were even actively persecuted. In 1999 Chowdri Mazhar Ali ended up in jail as his elder brother had twenty years earlier. Although he was ostensibly jailed on corruption charges, evidence suggests that, like his elder brother, he was actually jailed for being an active supporter of the defeated former government.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) prosecuted Chowdri Mazhar Ali Gondal on the grounds that he had occupied government property and that he had embezzled hundreds of thousands of rupees that had been destined for several local infrastructural projects. After Musharraf's takeover, the NAB was established as a parallel set of courts free from superior court oversight, and judges were appointed by the president himself. The NAB's declared objective was to fight corruption, but in practice it worked as a prosecutorial apparatus to harass and intimidate political opponents in much the same manner that Nawaz Sharif's anti-corruption watchdog had worked.<sup>98</sup> Chowdri Mazhar Ali was jailed and then put under house arrest over the course of a year. Although no one in the village, including the Gondals themselves,

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<sup>98</sup> This was known as the Accountability (*Ehtesab*) Bureau.



doubted or even denied these charges, everyone believed that the actual reason that he was jailed was because he was in the opposition. It was taken for granted that while in office Chowdri Mazhar Ali Gondal, like most other politicians, had taken a share of the spoils of power for himself and his supporters, but this also meant that there were any number of examples of politicians who had done exactly the same thing and against whom no corruption charges had been brought. As in the case of Faisal Saleh Hayat, some of them had even joined General Musharraf's government. Although Chowdri Mazhar Ali was released after a year, he and his siblings were forced to pay the government for the full cost of the land and of the buildings that they had occupied. Chowdri Nawaz Ali Gondal, who had been the president of the Pakistan Muslim League for the district of Sargodha while his brother was a member of the provincial assembly, faced even more serious corruption charges and was accused of embezzling millions of rupees in addition to having taken over government property. In order to escape charges Chowdri Nawaz Ali temporarily defected from Nawaz Sharif's PML-N and joined a minor party known as the Millat Party headed by Farooq Leghari, which was aligned with General Musharraf's PML-Q. Chowdri Nawaz Ali's nephew explained that his uncle had not sought to gain office in Musharraf's government with this shift, but had simply wanted to place himself under the protection of Farooq Leghari, a powerful landowner who had been president of Pakistan from 1993 to 1997. The reason Farooq Leghari consented to this favour for Chowdri Nawaz Ali was related to the fact that they had worked together in the PPP during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's time in power and had both been jailed when General Zia-ul Haq had taken over.

Mian Nawaz Sharif's PML-N was the party which was most severely affected by defections to General Musharraf's ruling PML-Q coalition, a fact that provides further illustration of the vicissitudes of both circumstance and strategy at the local

political level. Prior to his arrest Chowdri Mazhar Ali Gondal had been a member of the provincial assembly in alliance with Khuda Baksh Mekan, who was a member of the national assembly for the same constituency. When General Musharraf took over, Khuda Baksh Mekan defected from the PML-N and joined General Musharraf's PML-Q fearing the costs of being in opposition to a powerful military government and foreseeing the benefits of remaining in power. In contrast, Chowdri Mazhar Ali remained faithful to the PML-N. Given the widespread practice of defecting in order to follow power, as well as the Gondals' reputation for cunning pragmatism, it is surprising that he did not seek to obtain a position in General Musharraf's ruling party in the same way that Chowdri Nawaz Ali had done when General Zia-ul Haq had overthrown Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. A possible explanation for the fact that he did not is the one Chowdri Mazhar Ali himself put forward. He claimed that a sense of personal loyalty to his leader Mian Nawaz Sharif had precluded his defection, and indeed this cannot be ruled out because there was a long history of cooperation between himself and Nawaz Sharif.<sup>99</sup> But while retrospectively Chowdri Mazhar Ali's claim of loyalty to explain why he didn't defect from the PML-N can appear plausible enough, alternative explanations given by relatives and villagers may also contain elements of truth.<sup>100</sup> Most prominent among the explanations is that it was the enmity between him and Chowdri Zahid Iqbal Awan that prevented him from shifting to the PML-Q. Zahid Iqbal Awan

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<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, his decision appears to evince a canny strategic instinct as well. Chowdri Mazhar Ali's son had considered the possibility of shifting sides and discussed it with his father, but Chowdri Mazhar Ali had told him that he believed that in the long term loyalty would pay its dividends. His father believed that it was likely that Nawaz Sharif would one day return to power and that they would be rewarded for their loyalty. This strategy worked: Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan in 2008 after almost ten years of exile in Saudi Arabia and London, and he proceeded to become Chief Minister of the Punjab in a power sharing deal with the PPP at the centre. In the elections preceding Nawaz Sharif's return to power in the Punjab, Chowdri Mazhar Ali's son ran in the provincial assembly elections and was defeated. Nevertheless, despite losing the election Chowdri Mazhar Ali's son was granted a powerful position in the Punjab Ministry of Agriculture as a reward for his father's loyalty.

<sup>100</sup> In any case, even if some of these explanations are incomplete or even false, the fact that they are put forward is likely to reveal some of the factors determining political allegiances in the present-day Pakistani Punjab.

was the elder brother of the man killed by the group that included Chowdri Nawaz Ali in the 1960s. Zahid Iqbal Awan was therefore a personal rival and enemy (*dushman*) of Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his siblings. The Gondals explained that at the time of the murder the Awans had been unable to take revenge (*badla*) because they were weak (*kamzor*) by virtue of their political and economic positions as well as because of their personal lack of courage. One Gondal rather grandly claimed that the Awans knew that if they lifted a single finger against a Gondal that their entire household would be exterminated. Most of my informants claimed that before entering politics the Awans had owned less than a square of land (25 acres) and that their political influence was limited. However, by 2005 Zahid Iqbal Awan had been a member of the national assembly on five occasions and had become one of the wealthiest and powerful politicians in the district.

According to most accounts Zahid Iqbal Awan began his ascent to riches and power as an assistant revenue collector at tehsil level (*naib tehsildar*). It was widely known that in his position as naib tehsildar Zahid Iqbal Awan had been able to make significant amounts of money. This had eventually resulted in his dismissal on corruption charges. Much like Chowdri Nawaz Ali's initial career as a lawyer Zahid Iqbal Awan's initial career as naib tehsildar had allowed him to establish contacts with officials who played a crucial role in the lives of zamindars. Having contacts with land revenue and land record administration officials was just as valuable to politicians as having contacts with the police and the courts. Among other things, a politician could help his clients in the frequent land disputes that arose between zamindars if he had

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<sup>102</sup> I was emphatically told by *patwaris* that it was not in their power to alter land records, and smallholders confirmed this by telling me that if that was possible then smallholders would soon be eliminated at the hands of the influential landlords. Nevertheless, they could make life very difficult for people by a variety of means, including being uncooperative and unavailable.

influence over a local land record officer (*patwari*).<sup>102</sup> He could also help zamindars avoid having to register tenants on their land so as to forestall any possible occupancy right claims. Zahid Iqbal Awan's contacts and knowledge of the system coupled with his widely recognised astuteness eventually allowed him to run in elections and become a member of the national assembly under General Zia-ul Haq's government at the same time that Chowdri Mazhar Ali became a member of the provincial assembly in a neighbouring constituency. Like Chowdri Mazhar Ali he greatly benefitted from the patronage of Nawaz Sharif in the Zia era and subsequently joined Nawaz Sharif's PML-N. During his political career Zahid Iqbal Awan amassed an even greater fortune than the Gondals, and by 2005 he not only possessed large amounts of land and petrol stations but also several bungalows and buildings in Sargodha and a sugar mill employing thousands of people. The story that was widely circulated with respect to the sugar mill was that it had been owned by a bank that went bankrupt and had defaulted on its obligations. Zahid Iqbal Awan had organised all of those who had lost their money in the bank default and claimed the sugar mill as compensation for them. He then somehow succeeded in getting the majority of the shares of the mill under his own name, while a large number of the bank's customers never received their money back. The mill not only provided significant income to him but also gave him a significant number of guaranteed votes.<sup>103</sup>

Because Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali were elected from a constituency different to Zahid Iqbal Awan's their enmity didn't get in the way of their being affiliated with the same political party during their several terms in office. However, this changed in 1997 when General Pervez Musharraf came to power. At this

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<sup>103</sup> A member of the Noon family told me that their sugar mill basically guaranteed them around ten thousand votes from the mill workers. Although I never confirmed that this was the case for Zahid Iqbal Awan, it is plausible to assume that roughly the same thing was true with respect to his sugar mill.

point Zahid Iqbal Awan shifted his allegiance to General Musharraf's PML-Q and came closer than ever to the centre of power through the fact that his daughter was married to the son of the man who became Chief Minister of the Punjab. Both Gondals and villagers believed that this played a role in the fact that Chowdri Mazhar Ali didn't join the PML-Q. Close relatives of Chowdri Mazhar Ali told me that he hadn't joined the government because he refused to work under his family's lifelong enemy. What they failed to mention, most probably out of pride, was that the Awans, who were now more powerful than ever, were in all likelihood unlikely to accept him into the ruling coalition even if Chowdri Mazhar Ali had wanted to join it. Whatever the case may actually have been, the fact that people mentioned the enmity between Awans and Gondals as a reason that Chowdri Mazhar Ali Gondal didn't shift parties indicates that personal enmity often had a determining effect on the political party allegiances. This will be further illustrated in the next chapter.

### **Conclusions**

The first section of this chapter provided an outline of the history of Pakistani politics and argued that the absence of a popular political party at national independence, and repeated military takeovers, stunted the political and social development of the country and of the Punjab province. Except for a brief period of time when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto initially rose to power, politics in the Pakistani Punjab has been dominated by parochial interests. Three military regimes, each of them lasting approximately ten years, ensured that politics would remain parochial by banning political parties and implementing devolution programmes. By doing this the military succeeded in diverting people's attention away from national issues to local ones, and thereby forestalled, albeit temporarily, the emergence of nationwide social movements

that might challenge its authority. Wilder has noted that during General Zia-ul Haq's regime,

...student politics were reduced from demonstrating over national and even international issues to fighting over campus dorms. The labour movement was reduced from a powerful political force to a weak and divided movement with little political importance. The political role of *biradaris*, which had been virtually eliminated in the 1970 elections, again increased in Pakistani politics. And MNA's were converted into glorified councillors, whose days were spent not dealing with national issues, but with writing chits to get their constituents a job, or into a hospital, or out of a *thana* [police station]." (Wilder 1999: 133).

As a result of the turn towards local issues, politicians continued to focus their attention on control over the means of local patronage at the expense of their role as policy makers and legislators.<sup>104</sup> In line with this development political parties came to resemble large factions principally concerned with the appropriation of the spoils of power instead of being political entities with distinct political and social programmes. This meant that rural politicians could regard ideological differences between the parties as incidental, and consider them simply as alternative routes to power that were largely interchangeable.

This chapter then went on to look more closely at the sort of power that the chowdris wielded, and began particularly to explore the key position they occupied between people on the ground and state institutions, including the police, as well as some of the dynamics of their behaviour. It also illustrated some of the developments of the ethos and practice of the politics of patronage through the case of two Gondal politicians. The politics of patronage was illustrated by the economic and political rise of Chowdri Nawaz Ali Gondal and his younger brother Chowdri Mazhar Ali Gondal. Where politics took shape around patronage, politicians sought to consolidate and

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<sup>104</sup> Additional support for this conclusion comes from national assembly web page itself where under the heading entitled 'area of legislative interest' the most common entry is 'not available.'

increase their power through the appropriation of public goods and funds. It was shown that through the appropriation of public goods politicians could strengthen their political position by increasing their client base at the expense of their rivals. The fact that Chowdri Mazhar Ali greatly extended his landholdings, and that Zahid Iqbal Awan obtained a sugar mill, not only increased their personal wealth but also increased their political power by increasing their client base. One consequence of this style of politics was that the main reason for obtaining development funds was to consolidate political power rather than to develop a solid public infrastructure. Accordingly, projects such as the large water tower in Bek Sagrana, which was intended to serve an area suffering with water shortages, were undertaken where there was no need for them. Moreover, even where there was a need for certain a project such as the Basic Health Unit in Bek Sagrana, the project was used for the short term goal of benefitting clients rather than for the sake of the public infrastructure. Rather than medical care as such, the Basic Health Unit provided some faithful supporters with government jobs, and the bungalow meant for the doctor in charge became the residence of a close relative.

Another significant consequence was the entrance of crime into politics. Not only did Gondal politicians and their clients become involved in lucrative forms of trafficking, but the role of politicians also came to revolve increasingly around protecting clients involved in criminal activities from the police and the courts. The following passage quoted in Wilder's book, where an influential member of the national assembly responds to criticism that members of the national assembly were failing to pass legislation, clearly illustrates this trend and is worth reproducing here:

Look, we get elected because we are *ba asr log* [effective people] in our area. People vote for me because they perceive me as someone who can help them. And what help do they seek from me? Somebody's brother has committed a murder and he comes to me and I protect him from the authorities. Somebody's son is a matric fail and I get him a job as a teacher or a government servant. Somebody's nephew had been caught thieving and I protect him. This sort of thing. That

is my power. This is what they perceive as power. You know, somebody has not paid up their loan and I try to have the payment delayed, etc. That means that I get elected because I am doing all the wrong things... My skill is that laws don't mean anything to me, and that I can cut right across them and help people whether they are in the right or in the wrong. If somebody's son is first class, he's not coming to me to get him a job. If somebody has merit they very rarely come to me—occasionally they come to me. But it's the real wrongdoers who come to me. (Wilder 1999: 204).

It was further argued that in the village of Bek Sagrana the association of politicians with wrongdoers also allowed them to flex their muscles more and more through their use of local toughs to intimidate opponents and harass unruly villagers.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, the case of the Gondal politicians discussed in this section illustrates that the emphasis on patronage at the expense of policy making and legislation meant that political parties were largely regarded as interchangeable by rural politicians. Consequently, they often shifted their allegiances when a new government came to power. It was argued that the need to shift allegiances in order to continue benefitting from government patronage was compounded by the fact that politicians who remained in the opposition frequently faced government prosecution and harassment. Both Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali ended up in jail following military takeovers. As the following chapter will demonstrate, being out of power also meant that their local opponents could consolidate power at their expense. In light of this the question of why politicians sometimes didn't shift parties was raised. Two answers were given: first, that loyalty would result in future rewards whenever the leader of the party returned to power; second, that personal enmities and rivalries could interfere with politicians' joining the ruling coalition. Yet another reason, which wasn't extensively explored above but that probably also played a role, was an obvious one: there was a limit to the number of politicians that the ruling coalition could admit.

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<sup>105</sup> This tendency will be illustrated in the following chapter.



The next chapter will focus specifically on the issue of enmity-structured political allegiances. Given that political parties were not the main focus of people's political loyalties, as this chapter has demonstrated, the next chapter will attempt to unravel what the main focuses of people's loyalties actually were. More specifically, the chapter addresses the issue of whether parochial politics meant the extended lineage (biraderi) had become the central building block of politics in the Pakistani Punjab as certain commentators, including Jalal (1995), have claimed.

### **Chapter Three: Factionalism and Kinship**

In the previous chapter I argued that the lack of a popular national political party at independence, coupled with repeated military interventions in politics, played a significant role in perpetuating a parochial form of politics in which landlord politicians, along with their factional allies and followers, competed to appropriate the spoils of office. By localising politics, military governments were able to consolidate their power and fragment political opposition. This meant that local ties of allegiance remained more important than allegiances to national political parties. Thus Ayesha Jalal (1995), and others (see Rais 1985, Burki 1980, Waseem 1994) have argued that kinship ties, in the form of the extended lineage (biraderi), regained their political force during the Zia regime. Ayesha Jalal writes that in a “country where parties had never managed to strike roots, the Zia regime’s systematic campaign to discredit politicians and politics gave renewed significance to the old personalized networks of biraderi or clan-based ties” (Jalal 1995: 105). In this chapter I seek to address the widespread perception that the biraderi has remained a powerful force in Punjabi politics and to determine the extent to which this is actually the case.

In Pakistan both academic and popular discourses tend to emphasise the idea that primordial loyalties override ideological and party allegiances. Thus it is frequently argued that the assumption behind a democratic system, whereby individuals freely make their own choices in all spheres of life including politics, does not apply in a context where primordial loyalties give precedence to the group over the individual. Ullah, for example, made the following claim:

The first important fact about the village life is that it is an aggregate of individuals. In fact, the real individual in the sense of Western Urban society does not exist in the village. He is an inalienable part of multiple groups which completely overshadow his individuality...The first

and most important group for the individual is the family which makes for him the major decisions of life...Next to the family comes the '*Baradari*' [sic] group. (Ullah 1963: 50-51).<sup>106</sup>

If this is true—if it is the case that the strongest ties of allegiance of individuals pertain to their family and their extended biraderi—then one might expect extended biraderi members to vote as a block and to place their interests above those of outsiders.

The widespread violence within biraderis, which is generally associated with agnates competing for land and power, need not undermine this view if a segmentary social structure can be established. In the classical segmentary model (most commonly used by scholars to analyse Middle Eastern tribal society)<sup>107</sup> the presence of shared interests in a joint estate, together with a sense of honour attached to the tribe, cause opposed segments at one level of segmentation to unite at a higher level of segmentation when faced with an external threat. In such a scenario it might be expected that, despite their internal quarrels, Gondals would always support a Gondal politician over and above a politician belonging to another biraderi since to support an outsider would undermine the interests of the biraderi as a whole.

The empirical evidence presented in this chapter does not support the view that the extended biraderi is the principal building block of political activity in the Punjab. Instead it will be argued that factions characterised by “a vertical structure of power which cross cuts caste and class divisions” (Brass 1965: 236), and which are based upon a loose coalition of individuals structured around a closely knit kinship based core, are the principal building blocks of political activity and allegiance. Following Barth in ‘Segmentary Opposition and the Theory of Games’ (1982), this chapter presents the argument that, even if it is possible to talk of members of an extended biraderi sharing

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<sup>106</sup> See also Ullah (1958).

<sup>107</sup> See Gellner (1969) for a classical account of a segmentary social system in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco.

in a joint estate, this possibility “need not imply a community of interests, and may in fact imply an overriding opposition of interests which inhibits the emergence of corporate unity” (Barth 1981: 81). Barth argues that amongst the Swat Pathans it is the overriding opposition between patrilineal cousins (*tarbur*), who almost invariably compete over the possession of land and the control of client groups implied by it, which inhibits the emergence of the corporate unity of the Yusufzai Pathans. According to Barth’s model, a Pakhtun’s “political activities are directed at gaining an advantage over his agnatic rivals, as only through their defeat can he achieve his own aggrandizement” (Barth 1981: 67). To this end agnates make political alliances with distant collaterals against each other and follow the principle that the enemy of their enemy is their friend. Barth argues that the principal reason that Pakhtuns can afford to oppose their agnates is that, unlike in other lineage systems, their agnates do not form the bulk of their supporters. Instead the bulk of a Pakhtun’s supporters are gained from within the ranks of dependent client groups, including artisans and tenants, whose loyalties Pakhtun patrons win through the distribution of largesse made possible by their ownership of the land. The overriding importance of the rivalry between agnates, and the fact that leaders make alliances with the enemies of their enemies, encourage the regional formation of a two-block system cutting across extended biraderi ties.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that Barth’s model is applicable to the political coalitions made by the chowdris of the Punjab, where agnatic rivalry often obliterates the unity of the blood group. Contrary to Lindholm (1989: 80) I argue that the unity of the blood group is not necessarily activated in cases of revenge, and that factional leaders do in fact frequently support the enemies and killers of their close agnates. By demonstrating that chowdris, particularly powerful ones, often do align themselves politically with distant kinsmen and non-kinsmen against more closely

related kin, I also challenge Alavi's view that "it is only rarely that a household finds itself with no option but to align itself with more distant kinsmen and pitted against closer relatives" (Alavi 1972: 18). I illustrate that the political alliances of chowdris are not structured by mechanical lineage solidarity but by both the largely strategic choices of leaders and followers and by the rivalry and enmity between agnates, who compete over land and political resources.

However, the analysis presented differs from Barth's in that the role of kinship is not merely a negative one (in the sense that it structures enmity rather than creating lineage solidarity) but that the individuals who comprise the core of factions are often held together by multiple, overlapping kinship ties. Because kinship amongst West Punjabi Muslims is structured around preferential cousin marriage<sup>108</sup> this results in "compact, tightly organised and self contained but, at the same time, small and localized biraderi groups" (Alavi 1972:26). The material illustrates that it is such 'tightly organised and self-contained' kinship groups, united by affinal ties, which form the core of political factions amongst chowdris.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, the chapter shows that agnatic rivalry does not stem only from competition over the possession of land. Whereas Barth characterises Swat as having an acephalous political system, the political system of the Pakistani Punjab is clearly not acephalous, and the Pakistani state plays an important

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<sup>108</sup> According to Hamza Alavi (1972) the Punjabi Muslim kinship system is structured on the principle of preferential patrilateral parallel cousin marriage. I have gathered insufficient evidence to confirm this but it appears that cousin marriage is the norm and that a great deal of prestige and honour (*izzat*) is attached to endogamy. Prestige is particularly attached to keeping daughters within the biraderi, and wealthy peasants and landlords often boast about how they take girls but do not give them (see Alavi 1972: 6).

<sup>109</sup> Alavi (1972) and Eglar (1960) both describe the institution of *vartan bhanji*, referring to the exchange of gifts and favours, particularly at times of marriage, which serves to integrate households. I do not explore these in this chapter because they are not strictly central to the discussion and also because most of these exchanges centre on women to whom I had no access. Also See Mundy (1995) where the author similarly argues that Yemeni households are the core of political organisation and not the tribe.

role in structuring political competition and conflict.<sup>110</sup> Thus in the present day Punjab, although land does play a very important role in the maintenance of control over client groups, control over patronage and access to the state is equally significant for leadership. Furthermore, a leader's capacity to retain control over his land, as well as his capacity to acquire more land, partly hinges upon his capacity to mobilise both the police and the courts in case of a land dispute. Political office and positions in the state bureaucracy are also well known for facilitating the acquisition of land through the multiple possibilities for enrichment that they offer. This means that conflict between agnates often results from competition for votes during elections for various tiers of government, as well as from competition over control of state institutions such as the police and the judiciary.

### **Factional Leadership in Bek Sagrana**

During General Musharraf's nine years in power Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali were compelled to keep a low profile in order to avoid any trouble with newly empowered rivals in the military government. This was particularly the case at the beginning of the Musharraf administration, when the possibility of both Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Nawaz Ali being sent back to jail remained a distinct possibility. Chowdri Mazhar Ali claimed that he and his family were under close surveillance by the secret services, and that the local police had not only ceased to be cooperative but were actively opposing their interests. Deprived of both political power and state patronage, Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Nawaz Ali, together with their close supporters, experienced a significant fall in their political and economic fortunes. On the other hand their political opponents, who lost no time in joining forces with

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<sup>110</sup> Barth's characterisation of the Swat political structure as acephalous is in any case problematic, as Ahmed (1976) argues, since it failed to take into account the colonial administration's crucial role in propping up local leaders.

Musharraf's government, experienced a rise in theirs. Standing out amongst their opponents in this ascendancy was Chowdri Abdullah Gondal in their home village of Bek Sagrana.

Chowdri Abdullah Gondal and Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his siblings shared a great-great-grandfather known as Kala Gondal. Chowdri Abdullah's father, Ahmed Rasool, had been the local tax collector (*lambardar*) and principal rival of Ghulam Baksh. The latter was the paternal uncle of Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his siblings. Following Ahmed Rasool's death, his son Abdullah Gondal took over as head of what came to be known as the Lambar Ke faction. On the other side, Ghulam Baksh's son, Hajji Muhammad Hayat, and later his grandson Haq Nawaz Gondal, successively took over as heads of what came to be known as the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction.<sup>111</sup> Ultimately however, Chowdri Haq Nawaz was the local representative of Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali, who were the most powerful politicians in the family but who now lived outside the village, Nawaz Ali where they had the most of their land.

Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali were paternal first cousins, as well as close affines, of Hajji Muhammad Hayat. Hajji Muhammad Hayat had married one of Chowdri Nawaz Ali's sisters and Chowdri Nawaz Ali had married one of Muhammad Hayat's sisters. In the next generation Hajji Muhammad Hayat's eldest daughter had married Chowdri Nawaz Ali's only son. Hajji Muhammad Hayat's various kinship ties with Chowdri Nawaz Ali meant that they formed what they referred to as an extended household (*ghar*).<sup>112</sup> Although they didn't live in a single house they and

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<sup>111</sup> Chowdri Abdullah inherited the position of *lambardar* but passed it on to a minor *zamindar* who was a client of his in the village.

<sup>112</sup> The term *ghar* was generally used to denote the close family unit wherein *purdah* was largely not observed. The term therefore referred to close kinship ties rather than to the actual physical house in which people lived and which was generally referred to as *makan*. Members of a *ghar* in the sense above made up what Alavi (1972) referred to as the *biraderi* of participation. They partake in a variety of prestations and counter-prestations known as *vartan bhanji* (literally 'dealings in sweets') whereby people exchange gifts on ritual occasions such as circumcisions, weddings and deaths.

their families spent a great deal of time visiting each other, taking care of each other's children, attending and helping out in each other's life cycle rituals and exchanging gifts. As a result Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali had always supported Hajji Muhammad Hayat and his son Chowdri Haq Nawaz more than they did Chowdri Ahmed Rasool and his son Chowdri Abdullah, with whom they didn't share as many kinship ties.<sup>113</sup>

According to villagers, although the rivalry between the two factions dated back to the time of Ahmed Rasool and Ghulam Baksh it had intensified in the generation that succeeded them. While the rivalry between Ahmed Rasool and Ghulam Baksh had been tempered by their joint rivalry against the Makhdooms, there was no longer a common external enemy to unite the two factions in the generation that followed. Moreover the fact that Chowdri Abdullah's fortune soared dramatically, for various reasons to be discussed below, had reduced his reliance on fellow Gondals for political support. The eventual consequence of this was that the unity of the Gondal biraderi in Bek Sagrana was obliterated. Elderly villagers fondly recalled a time when, despite rivalries and occasional land disputes, all of the Gondal village elders had sat together in the village men's house (darra) in the evenings in order to address village problems and disputes jointly. Four of the influential village chowdris at the time, including Ahmed Rasool

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<sup>113</sup> See kinship diagram on page 123.



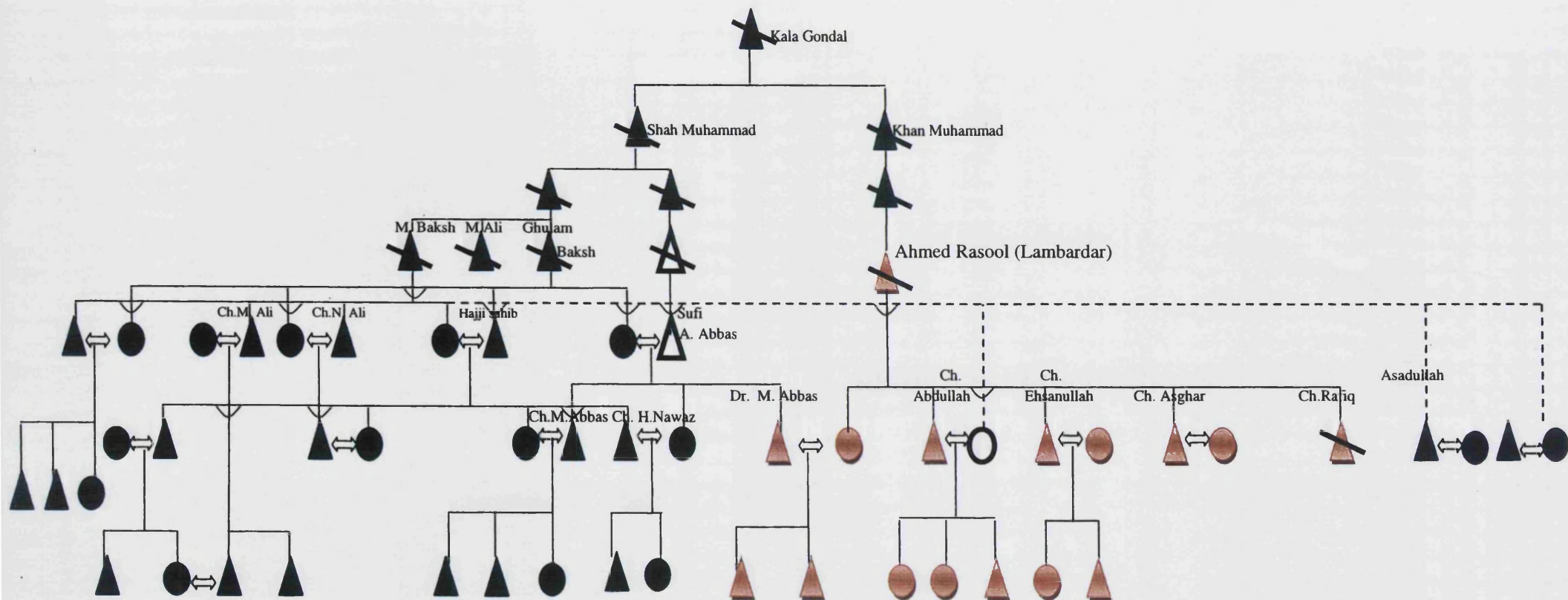





Figure 4: Bek Sagrana, Gondal kinship and factions

 = Lambar Ke Faction members    
  = Ghulam Baksh Ke Faction members    
  = Neutral persons

----- = Offspring from Muhammad Baksh's second Marriage

and Ghulam Baksh, had shared a monthly rotation for covering the expenses of feeding guests and providing a *hookah*<sup>115</sup> at the village darra

Even following the deaths of Ghulam Baksh and Ahmed Rasool both factions had cooperated as the Gondals challenged Makhdoom dominance in the area. During the 1970s and 80s, Ahmed Rasool and his son had even supported Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his brother when they had first run in elections. Subsequently, while Chowdri Mazhar Ali was in power he had provided various forms of patronage to Ahmed Rasool and later to his son Chowdri Abdullah. Most widely recalled was the occasion when Chowdri Mazhar Ali had managed to obtain Ahmed Rasool's release from jail. Ahmed Rasool, like many of his cousins, had been extensively involved in protecting buffalo thieves, an activity known as *rassa-giri*,<sup>118</sup> and had been jailed as a result of it during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's second term in power. It was said that without Chowdri Nawaz Ali's intervention to obtain his release Ahmed Rasool would have been blinded as a result of police torture.<sup>119</sup> In the years that followed, Chowdri Mazhar Ali had also granted Chowdri Abdullah various contracts and had provided him with cover from the police for him to pursue various criminal activities with impunity. Chowdri Mazhar Ali told me personally that it was he who had granted Chowdri Abdullah his government licence for the extraction of sand for the entire district of Sargodha, and that it was in

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<sup>115</sup> The hookah is a water pipe for smoking tobacco and is the first thing that a guest was provided with upon entering a person's guest house.

<sup>118</sup> The term *rassa-gir* refers to those landowners who act as protectors for gangs, thugs and thieves. The term literally translates as 'he who holds the rope' and refers to the fact that landlords metaphorically extend a rope to those they protect, to pull them out of trouble.

<sup>119</sup> Apparently the police officers had applied intense pressure to his eyes with their thumbs. Ahmed Rasool had been jailed during the time that Mustapha Khar, also known as the lion of the Punjab (Sher-e Punjab) and the subject of Tehmina Durrani's (1994) book *My Feudal Lord*, was Chief Minister of the province and had decided to crack down on buffalo theft.

part thanks to this contract that Chowdri Abdullah's economic fortunes had soared. Chowdri Mazhar Ali also claimed to have given considerable support to Chowdri Abdullah in his land disputes with the Makhdooms.

However, as the influence and wealth of Chowdri Abdullah and his three siblings grew they became increasingly assertive, and they started to challenge Chowdri Nawaz Ali and the leaders of the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction in the village. Over the years Chowdri Abdullah Gondal and his three younger siblings aggressively expanded their local political and economic influence through a variety of forceful, sometimes criminal, methods. This led them to acquire a well deserved reputation for being enterprising as well as belligerent and violent, to a degree that surpassed nearly all other Gondals in the region. Like his father Ahmed Rasool, Chowdri Abdullah spent a great deal of his time cultivating contacts amongst influential local, regional, and national-level officials in order to consolidate his political and economic position. His ceaseless networking, coupled with his ambitious and domineering personality, eventually turned Chowdri Abdullah into a highly effective local political figure. Thus, although Chowdri Abdullah (unlike Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali) never achieved political office above the lowest administrative unit, his wide-ranging personal contacts and friendships allowed him to provide patronage to clients in the village. The force of his personality, the awe in which he and his siblings were locally held, and his many gunmen meant that he was greatly feared, but this also meant that most villagers believed him to be the local leader most likely to intervene effectively on their behalf in a dispute. If, for example, a smallholder who had good relations with Chowdri Abdullah had a land dispute with a neighbour, the mere fact that Chowdri Abdullah supported him was usually enough to make his opponent withdraw. Chowdri Abdullah was reputed to have an uncontrollable temper and anyone who angered him was likely to

suffer severe consequences. Villagers told me that if he caught a servant stealing from him, or a villager stealing from his citrus orchards, he would go into violent fits of rage and would exact violent revenge on the offender personally. As a result villagers who often freely picked citrus in other chowdri's orchards didn't dare do so in Chowdri Abdullah's orchards.<sup>120</sup>

Although Chowdri Abdullah was known for his temper and violent acts, it was Chowdri Rafiq, his youngest brother killed in a police encounter, who was the most notorious of the four male siblings. At the time of fieldwork in 2004 he had been lying dead for over seven years in a large domed tomb (*mazaar*) next to his family's farmhouse (*dera*). It was Rafiq Gondal who was credited with the introduction of heroin into the area of Bek Sagrana in the eighties, when the drug started to flow copiously into Pakistan from Afghanistan. Some of his relatives even claimed that he had extended this business to Lahore. Villagers remembered Rafiq Gondal with awe, and stories about his reckless bravado, and his equally reckless generosity, abounded in the village. His personal gunmen recalled how, unlike most other chowdri's, he had personally accompanied them to fight against his rivals and occupy their land. One gunman recalled how on one occasion Chowdri Rafiq personally set off in the middle of the night to find one of his client's stolen buffalos. When Chowdri Rafiq found the thief swimming across the irrigation canal with the buffalos, he jumped in and caught the

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<sup>120</sup> Villagers also recounted an occasion when he ran a rickshaw into an irrigation canal because it had failed to give way to him quickly enough as he sped along the road in his large pickup truck. One villager who had been given accommodation by Chowdri Abdullah in an outbuilding next to his townhouse in Sargodha told me that Chowdri Abdullah had once rammed into the gates of the compound with his pickup because the *chowdkidar* had been too slow in opening them. Yet another story related an occasion when Chowdri Abdullah had slapped his son in the face in front of a large assembly of villagers because the fact of his son's being taller than he was annoyed him. However, the most violent act committed by Chowdri Abdullah was described to me by his nephew. His nephew claimed that, following his younger brother's death in a police encounter in 1999, Chowdri Abdullah had taken revenge by going to the house of one of the police officers involved, shooting him, and burning down the house. In short, few people, other than the leaders of the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction, would dare to provoke the wrath of Chowdri Abdullah.

thief with his own hands. The same gunman recalled how Chowdri Rafiq had once caught one of his local enemies, tied him down to a charpai, and broken both of his legs with a brick. He also recalled how, when Chowdri Rafiq was feeling generous and pious, he would give out thousand rupee notes to his gunmen and tell them to take a few weeks off work. Another man recalled how on one occasion, when Chowdri Rafiq had been listening to loud music in his car in the nearby market town, he had violently slapped a policeman who had ordered him to lower the volume. Faced with a heavily armed group of men the policeman had apparently meekly turned around and returned to his post.<sup>121</sup>

In the rural Pakistani Punjab forceful behaviour, and a reputation for it, were assets for local politicians. In a political context where violence was rife and villagers often needed to obtain protection from predatory enemies including the police, powerful, well-connected politicians were the people best placed to offer protection. Thus the aggressive behaviour of Chowdri Abdullah and his siblings established them as effective patrons and over the years people increasingly approached them to settle their disputes. A reputation for this sort of forcefulness was also an asset for the simple reason that it instilled fear in the majority of the inhabitants of the area who were powerless and poor. As the following chapters will illustrate a reputation for forcefulness could induce people to vote for one candidate over another because of fear of retribution if they voted the wrong way. Additionally politicians could increase their land and wealth and thereby increase their client base through forceful acts behaviour. Chowdri Abdullah and his siblings made a great deal of money through the violent heroin trade and greatly increased their landholdings by occupying by force some of the

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<sup>121</sup> On yet another occasion, during a wedding in Lahore, Chowdri Rafiq had driven off in the brand new car of an army colonel, whom he didn't even know. When the furious colonel came to the village to reclaim his car Chowdri Rafiq returned it, allegedly simply saying that he had taken the car for the fun of it.

best land that belonged to the Makhdooms, as well as significant areas of land belonging to smallholders in the area. Much of this land was planted with citrus orchards, which also gave Chowdri Abdullah a handsome yearly income. In 2004 Chowdri Abdullah was said to have made a thousand *lakh* rupees from his citrus harvest. The increased number of clients that resulted from his growing wealth meant that Chowdri Abdullah gained a significant vote-bank that he could mobilise during provincial and national elections, either for himself or for whichever regional politician with whom he happened to align himself.

By 2006 Chowdri Abdullah had become the wealthiest and most influential chowdri in the village of Bek Sagrana. Given that politics was a zero sum game where one person's gain was another's loss, Chowdri Abdullah's upward mobility had set him on a collision course with both his cousin Haq Nawaz Gondal and Haq Nawaz Gondal's patrons and close kin, Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali. Thus as Chowdri Abdullah grew wealthier he gained more clients at Chowdri Haq Nawaz's and Chowdri Nawaz Ali's expense. Moreover the more clients he had the more independently he could act from his fellow Gondals in Chowdri Nawaz Ali's faction. In addition to taking significant amounts of land from the Makhdooms and others, he also purchased large plots of land. His purchase of eighty acres in the lowlands adjacent to the village of Bek Sagrana in 2004 was a particularly sore point for Chowdri Haq Nawaz and Chowdri Nawaz Ali, and it had almost resulted again in the eruption of armed conflict between the two factions.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Chowdri Haq Nawaz and his close supporters worried that Chowdri Abdullah's purchase of the land would make him more powerful than he already was, and they were set on preventing the purchase from taking place. The owner of the land in question was a zamindar who lived in another village and belonged to another biraderi. He wished to sell the land in order to buy some closer to his home village. As soon as he learned that a deal was underway Chowdri Nawaz Ali, who was a friend of the seller, tried to get him to withdraw from his deal with Chowdri Abdullah and to sell it instead to a close relative of Chowdri Haq Nawaz. When the seller did try to withdraw, Chowdri Abdullah sent his gunmen to occupy the land and thereby prevent Chowdri Haq Nawaz's faction from appropriating it. In

By 2006, Chowdri Abdullah had purchased a petrol station<sup>123</sup> on the road between Sargodha and Lahore and he also ran the only bus service to Sargodha that passed by the village. He had also purchased property in Sargodha as well a new house in Lahore's Model Town. It even appeared that following a trip to Dubai, where the glitter had dazzled Chowdri Abdullah, he had decided to invest in real estate there. In 2005 Chowdri Abdullah caused a great stir by spending eighty *lakh* rupees on a Toyota Lexus Land Cruiser that he personally imported from Japan. Upon its arrival a large number of villagers assembled at his dera to watch Chowdri Abdullah proudly displaying his new vehicle. Additionally, While Chowdri Abdullah hadn't even completed secondary school, his eldest son was now attending the Lahore University of Management Studies (LUMS), one of the costliest and most prestigious higher education institutions in Pakistan.<sup>124</sup> On the political front Chowdri Abdullah became Union Council Nazim in General Musharraf's devolved government scheme.<sup>125</sup> Every day dozens of people from Bek Sagrana and surrounding villages gathered at his farm house to seek help with some problem or other. Others simply came to pay their respects and to thereby assure Chowdri Abdullah of their continued loyalty. Chowdri Abdullah presided over them with absolute authority from a heavy golden sofa that looked like a throne. From there he attended and made phone calls and heard people's problems. He would occasionally interrupt the assembly by publicly performing his prayers or by vigorously performing his morning exercise in the courtyard where clients

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the end armed conflict did not occur because the seller was forced to sell the land to Chowdri Abdullah since the latter had already put a down payment on the land of twenty three million rupees. Several months later Chowdri Abdullah proudly looked on as hired machinery began developing his newly purchased land. Villagers commented on how much Chowdri Abdullah's fortunes had soared, and rumours emerged that his new political allies in power, the Awans and the Melas, were planning to seek funds to build a minor distributor canal (*mogga*) that would irrigate Chowdri Abdullah's newly purchased plot.

<sup>123</sup> One of his employees at the petrol station told me that Chowdri Abdullah meticulously kept track of the accounts and called him no less than twice a day in order to do so.

<sup>124</sup> Chowdri Abdullah told me that when his son had completed his studies at LUMS he hoped to send him abroad to the London School of Economics to study law.

<sup>125</sup> He was succeeded in the post by his younger brother in 2006.

and servants could admire his physical strength. Other times he would interrupt the assembly in order to speed away to the local *thana* in his Land Cruiser.

Chowdri Haq Nawaz proved unable to rise to the challenge posed by Chowdri Abdullah. There were several reasons for this. One was that he belonged to a smaller and less aggressive sibling set. Chowdri Haq Nawaz once had three brothers but the youngest died before reaching the age of twenty, and his elder sibling was known as a somewhat miserly recluse who from his mid-forties showed much more interest in piety than in politics. Thus although Chowdri Haq Nawaz had several supporters both in and out of the village, his village faction lacked the unity of purpose and core strength that the Lambar Ke faction enjoyed. What's more, most villagers, including close relatives who supported him, believed that Chowdri Haq Nawaz lacked the charisma, force, courage and even the intelligence of Chowdri Abdullah and his siblings.

Despite the fact that villagers were highly critical of Chowdri Abdullah because of his occasional cruelty and criminal activities, most of them believed that he and his siblings had several important qualities that were not in equal evidence in Chowdri Haq Nawaz. As mentioned above, the forcefulness and energy of Chowdri Abdullah and his brothers meant that, whatever else, villagers believed them to be effective as patrons. In addition most villagers believed that despite their hardness (*sakhti*) there was some evidence that they also had a compassionate and generous side to them.<sup>126</sup> While he lived Chowdri Rafiq had demanded absolute loyalty from servants and gunmen but in exchange he had often been lavishly generous. Two of his ex-gunmen told me that although he had been highly exacting and at times unpredictable, he had also rewarded loyalty and obedience through patronage and gifts of money. They told me that unlike other chowdri, including Chowdri Haq Nawaz, he never let any of them rot in jail

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<sup>126</sup> People often told me that although they were hard on the outside that they were soft on the inside (*bahar se sakht lekin andhar se naram*).



when they had been caught by the police in a gunfight or while carrying out criminal activities on their master's behalf. Similarly, even though Chowdri Abdullah was also highly demanding of servants and clients, he too was known to be very generous. Villagers often illustrated this with the fact that he had gifted four acres of fertile canal-irrigated land to an ageing gunman who had served both him and his father before him with absolute loyalty. He was also known to be generous when he felt repentant for having been too harsh towards a client or a servant. For example, on one occasion he repented for having beaten and verbally abused a servant for a minor offence by making him a gift of several thousand rupees and by even publicly asking him for forgiveness.<sup>127</sup> This side of his personality helped increase Chowdri Abdullah's stature, as did the fact that he had a sense of humour. When he wasn't angry about something, he often cracked jokes with his clients when they assembled at his dera.

On the other hand Chowdri Haq Nawaz possessed few such admired qualities. Like Chowdri Abdullah he also wished to be the most influential man in the area of Bek Sagrana. He too was involved in a variety of criminal activities, and like Chowdri Abdullah he was also reputed for being harsh and at times cruel. The similarities ended there, however. In the first place, Chowdri Haq Nawaz was not as brave as his rivals and many villagers went so far as to claim that he was a coward. One event that was often invoked to illustrate this related to an episode that took place years before I carried out my fieldwork. At that time, Chowdri Haq Nawaz had been in the business of organising cockfighting and gambling events in the village. Because gambling was illegal no such event took place unless the person organising it could assure participants that the police would not turn up and arrest them. The organiser generally did this by

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<sup>127</sup> Asking for forgiveness was generally seen as somewhat demeaning, and it was generally only the defeated and the socially subordinate to whom it was thought appropriate. However, on this occasion Chowdri Abdullah showed that he was above pride and capable of the humility that was characteristic of God-fearing men.

paying a low-ranking police officer to warn him if the police were intending to patrol the area. For arranging this sort of insurance for the participants the organiser of the event received ten per cent of the proceeds from the gambling on the cockfights and a third of the profits from the dice games. The policeman involved would also receive a share of the profits from the cockfights and another third of the profits from the other gambling activities. During one such event the police turned up despite Chowdri Haq Nawaz having obtained assurances from his police contact that they would not. Instead of facing the police and protecting those attending the event from arrests and police brutality, Chowdri Haq Nawaz's immediate reaction had been to flee. As a result several villagers had been badly beaten and a few arrested by the police. The villagers who recounted this event claimed that if Chowdri Abdullah had been the one responsible for the event the police wouldn't have turned up in the first place but that, even if they had, Chowdri Abdullah would never have run away from them.

To the villagers who related this episode, it clearly illustrated that Chowdri Haq Nawaz was not the sort of person who could protect his clients from the authorities, including the police. It was also representative of other failings that undermined the public perception of him. While some of his rivals, notably Chowdri Rafiq, fought alongside their gunmen, Chowdri Haq Nawaz preferred to stay behind and direct operations from a distance. Like his rivals Chowdri Haq Nawaz also demanded absolute loyalty and dedication from gunmen as well as other servants and clients, but unlike his rivals he often failed to reward those who served him with generosity and patronage. It was virtually a matter of routine for gunmen, who after all did much of the dirty work of the landlords they served, to find themselves in jail sometimes. When this happened, it was expected that their patron would do what was within his power to secure their release, and meantime that he would supply them with cigarettes and even food while

they were there.<sup>128</sup> Although Chowdri Abdullah didn't always look after the welfare of his gunmen Chowdri Haq Nawaz's track record on this score was far worse. Many of Chowdri Haq Nawaz's gunmen complained that he did little to help them when they were in trouble.

Chowdri Haq Nawaz's ineffectiveness as a patron was generally attributed to the fact that he was more concerned with his own pleasure than with care for his clients. This tendency had been established early on in his life when he had attempted to establish himself as an actor. Amongst the conservative landed elites of the Punjab, as well as throughout much of the rest of Pakistan, acting was considered to be a highly disreputable profession. It was held to be the preserve of prostitutes and other similarly disreputable characters.<sup>131</sup> Later on in life Chowdri Haq Nawaz was well known for being a heavy drinker and frequenting prostitutes, whom he sometimes brought back to his bungalow in the village. On one occasion his activities had even been exposed in the press after he was caught in a brothel by the police. Although Chowdri Haq Nawaz denied the reports and claimed that Chowdri Abdullah had paid the press to print defamatory reports about him to discredit him and his faction in upcoming elections, few people believed him.

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<sup>128</sup> If a certain landlord managed to obtain the release of his men before his rival was able to secure the release of his, and if the former's were better cared for while in jail than the latter's were, this would serve as evidence that the latter either lacked influence or was careless, or perhaps even that he was miserly. A reputation for lack of influence and miserliness could badly damage the political influence of a landlord. To avoid this, rival landlords often competed to show off how efficiently they could get their gunmen out of jail, and how they supplied their gunmen with better food and cigarettes while they were incarcerated.

<sup>131</sup> According to villagers this was precisely what attracted Chowdri Haq Nawaz to acting. Unbeknown to his father Chowdri Haq Nawaz had taken up an acting role in a film, rather aptly playing a cruel British soldier who oppressed Punjabi villagers. In the film, villagers eventually led an uprising against him and decapitated him. His head was then impaled on the tip of a spear. The inhabitants of Bek Sagrana found the ending to the film very suitable. For his part, Chowdri Haq Nawaz's father was furious. He severely chastised Chowdri Haq Nawaz and forbade him from pursuing his acting career further.

The combination of the fact that he wasn't part of a large and cohesive sibling set, coupled with what was perceived to be a pleasure-seeking personality lacking in force, courage and generosity, made Chowdri Haq Nawaz a relatively unpopular and unsuccessful factional leader. Unlike his opponents Chowdri Haq Nawaz neither acquired new land nor set up any new business ventures. While by 2006 Chowdri Abdullah had acquired significant new landholdings and established various businesses, Chowdri Haq Nawaz possessed little more than what his father had passed on to him. This consisted of approximately seventy acres of land and a few buildings that he leased out for commercial activities in a nearby market town. People often noted that while Chowdri Abdullah cruised around in his brand new Lexus Land Cruiser, Chowdri Haq Nawaz continued to drive around in an old Toyota pickup truck, though even more commented upon was the fact that Chowdri Haq Nawaz's father continued to travel around in a battered old Hyundai that broke down regularly. In addition to these things, unlike Chowdri Abdullah Chowdri Haq Nawaz was never able to obtain any form of political office. He rarely came to the village and even when he did few clients assembled at his farmhouse.

The fact that despite all of this Chowdri Haq Nawaz continued to have supporters is largely attributable to Chowdri Nawaz Ali and to Chowdri Mazhar Ali. Many of the supporters of the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction supported Chowdri Haq Nawaz because by doing so they also supported Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Nawaz Ali who were both demonstrably powerful politicians capable of wielding significant influence with the authorities. Moreover, it was largely thanks to Chowdri Nawaz Ali and to Chowdri Mazhar Ali that Chowdri Haq Nawaz was able to provide patronage to his clients. This was particularly the case when either Chowdri Nawaz Ali or Chowdri Mazhar Ali had been in power and had been able to pull strings on his behalf. This had

allowed Chowdri Haq Nawaz to help clients resolve court cases and even to obtain coveted government jobs for faithful supporters of their shared faction. Nevertheless, even his patrons were aware of that Chowdri Haq Nawaz had become a liability to the faction. They complained that his lack of popularity cost them votes, and as will be shown in chapter five it even led them to seek another candidate from the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction of Bek Sagrana to contest the union council elections in 2005. However, because of their close kinship ties to him they continued to support Chowdri Haq Nawaz as the faction's de facto leader. Furthermore, even though they were aware of his shortcomings, they continued to support him because he was the person most committed to fighting the growing influence of Chowdri Abdullah, whom he regarded as a personal enemy.

### **The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend**

The conflict between the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction of Chowdri Haq Nawaz and the Lambar Ke faction of Chowdri Abdullah began to rage in the early 1990s, when Chowdri Abdullah's growing influence became a serious threat to Chowdri Haq Nawaz's local leadership and therefore, indirectly, to Chowdri Nawaz Ali's influence in Bek Sagrana. By this time the Makhdooms had long ceased to be an external force that united the Gondals against a common enemy. Moreover Chowdri Abdullah's growing influence meant that he could now rely on an increased number of clients for political support instead of on his fellow Gondals. The intensity of the personalities involved in this conflict, combined with the influx of both drugs and weapons that began during the Zia era, were ingredients for a particularly explosive situation. At the time when the conflict began the leaders of both factions still lived in two large fortress-like houses adjacent to each other in the centre of the village. Villagers recalled a not so remote time when not a week passed without a shootout taking place between the houses of

Chowdri Haq Nawaz and Chowdri Abdullah. Bullet marks were still visible on the walls of both houses in 2004 after the conflict had subsided and both Chowdri Haq Nawaz and Chowdri Asghar (Chowdri Abdullah's youngest brother) were rendered lame by bullet wounds suffered during these exchanges of fire. Villagers told me that during these shootouts at least three gunmen belonging to both parties were killed and several others imprisoned. The leaders of both factions and their close followers fought each other mainly over land, elections and control of the local drug trade. These disputes were often complicated by the fact that both sides tried to entangle each other in cases, some real and some fabricated, with the police and the judiciary.<sup>132</sup> The causes of these weekly gun battles were often real and perceived personal slights by an opponent and his men. The fact that a gunman didn't like the way a rival gunman had looked at him was enough to result in an exchange of insults, which could in turn escalate into a full blown shootout where the landlords themselves became involved.<sup>133</sup>

These battles made life difficult not only for the landlords and their men but for villagers as a whole. Not only did villagers have to put up with the dangers of stray bullets, they also had to put up with gunmen who began abusing their power. Villagers told me that some of the younger gunmen had started behaving as if they were landlords by bossing people around, sending them off on errands, simply taking supplies from shops and stealing people's poultry and livestock. Either out of indifference or because they were too busy fighting each other, neither Chowdri Haq Nawaz nor Chowdri Abdullah appear to have done anything to discipline their men. Poorer villagers simply had to put up with this state of affairs.

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<sup>132</sup> See chapter five for examples of this during the 2005 local body elections.

<sup>133</sup> According to the village mullah at least ninety per cent of the shootouts at the time had begun because of quarrels amongst gunmen. Although I do not necessarily accept this statistic at face value it does suggest that gunmen played an important role in instigating the fighting.

Some of the wealthier landlords in the village, including Chowdri Abdullah himself, were able to relocate their compounds outside the village in an effort to gain some respite from the flare-ups in fighting. Chowdri Abdullah and his brothers built their new headquarters amidst citrus orchards about half a mile away from the village, where their family and dependants could spend their days in peace without having to fear stray bullets. Similarly Chowdri Haq Nawaz's reclusive elder brother moved to a peaceful location half a mile south of the village. These moves, however, did not signal the end of the conflict, which continued to rage for several years after and which subsided only following the death of Chowdri Rafiq Gondal. For the villagers themselves even worse times still lay ahead.

The leaders of both factions continued to fight each other both overtly as well as covertly through a wide variety of intricately Machiavellian schemes. In order to combat the growing influence of Chowdri Abdullah and his fearless sibling Chowdri Rafiq, Chowdri Mazhar Ali decided to use his influence to help Chowdri Haq Nawaz. He did this by providing both logistical and political support to four young and notorious Gondal siblings who lived in Bek Sagrana. Given that the genealogical distance between Chowdri Mazhar Ali and these four siblings was greater than that between Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Abdullah (who also happened to be affines) this was a case of making an alliance with more distantly related kin against more closely related kin.<sup>134</sup> The four siblings in question each owned approximately fifteen acres of land and had become involved in several criminal ventures including bootlegging, gambling and, to a lesser extent, drug dealing. Chowdri Mazhar Ali essentially offered the four siblings political support in exchange for them to unite with Chowdri Haq Nawaz and take up arms against Chowdri Abdullah. Chowdri Mazhar Ali

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<sup>134</sup> Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Nawaz Ali's half sister was married to Chowdri Abdullah. See kinship diagram on page 124.

even sent several of his men to purchase weapons for them from a contact in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) bordering on Afghanistan.

Initially the four siblings fought fiercely against Chowdri Abdullah. In one of the various shootouts Chowdri Abdullah's youngest sibling, Chowdri Asghar, was shot in the leg causing him, like Chowdri Haq Nawaz, to limp for the rest of his life. Over time, however, the four siblings grew increasingly assertive and independent from both Chowdri Haq Nawaz and Chowdri Mazhar Ali. Since most of the influential Gondal landlords had by then moved out of the village the four brothers began what was effectively a reign of terror within it. On several occasions the four brothers sexually assaulted Mussalli women during the night. They also wandered around the village carrying weapons and bullied anyone who crossed their path. One torrid summer day they came upon a carpenter (Tarkhan) who was walking towards them and who inadvertently failed to give way to them. Because of this the four brothers abused him verbally and then made him take off all of his clothes and lie down on the burning hot tarmac. Villagers told me that during this time even some of the wealthiest and most influential chowdris in the village feared the four siblings and avoided the village if they could.

As discontent amongst Gondals and other inhabitants of Bek Sagrana grew Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Haq Nawaz tried to reign in the four siblings whom they had initially abetted, but failed to do so. In the end the alliance not only came to an end but the four siblings joined the Lambar Ke faction of Chowdri Abdullah against whose members they had only recently been fighting. However, this new alliance proved to be equally short-lived as the four siblings continued making life unpleasant



for everyone in Bek Sagrana. As discontent amongst villagers grew Chowdri Abdullah and Chowdri Shahawaz were compelled to get together for the first time in years in order to do something about the four brothers. In the end the two leaders managed to organise a police raid which landed all four siblings in jail. After a couple of months the mother of the four young men went to beg Chowdri Abdullah for their release and her request was eventually granted on the condition that the four young men ceased to cause trouble.<sup>136</sup>

Just as Chowdri Mazhar Ali had devised a plan involving the use distantly related kin to weaken and possibly eliminate more closely related kin, namely Chowdri Abdullah and his siblings, Chowdri Abdullah also concocted schemes to weaken and possibly eliminate the leaders of the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction with the help of outsiders. Prior to General Musharraf's takeover in 1999 Chowdri Abdullah had become expediently allied with the influential politician Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana, who at the time was in the midst of a vicious feud with Chowdri Mazhar Ali and his siblings. Although Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana belonged to a branch of the extended Gondal biraderi known as the *Midhianas*,<sup>137</sup> the genealogical distance between him and Chowdri Abdullah was far greater than that between Chowdri Abdullah and Chowdri Mazhar Ali. Like Chowdri Mazhar Ali, Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana first became a member of the national assembly in 1985 under General Zia-ul Haq and subsequently shifted his allegiance to the PPP where he still remains.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Two of the four brothers died shortly after their release in any case, which seemed to diminish the potential trouble-making inclinations of the surviving two. Of the two who died, one died of a heroin overdose and the other in a firearms accident at a drinking party. This tragic end was welcomed by almost all of the villagers, who believed that God had punished them for their misdeeds.

<sup>137</sup> Midhiana basically referred to the people from the town known as Mid or Mid Gondal.

<sup>140</sup> Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana ate, dressed, and behaved like a Jat cultivator and took pride in it. He signed documents with a thumbprint and attended sessions in the provincial assembly wearing the traditional Punjabi clothes. One of his principal sources of revenue was widely known to be from buffalo theft. He was known to have not only sent thieves and retainers to carry out nightly raids but to have personally accompanied them as well. He possessed several trucks which he used to carry the

Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana's enmity with Chowdri Mazhar Ali began in the early 1990s and encompassed the rest of the period of civilian rule, which lasted from 1988 to 1999 and saw power transferred back and forth between Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto. Following the end of General Zia-ul Haq's regime Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana joined Benazir Bhutto's PPP while Chowdri Mazhar Ali joined Nawaz Sharif's PML-N. The feud between them allegedly began during an electoral campaign when Chowdri Mazhar Ali Gondal and Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana were running for the same seat in the Punjab provincial legislature. Violent feuds between families of politicians frequently began during elections when candidates tried to entangle their opponents in court cases prior to election day and to take over polling stations on election day itself.<sup>141</sup> In this case what appears to have sparked a feud—which lasted almost a decade and wound up costing several lives—was an otherwise incidental taunt. At the time seventeen year-old Asadullah, Chowdri Mazhar Ali's youngest half-brother whose reckless bravado rivalled that of Chowdri Rafiq, was campaigning on behalf of his elder brother. At one stage during the campaign some of Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana's men encountered Asadullah and began to taunt him, telling him that his elder brother was about to lose the upcoming elections. The taunt led to an argument and eventually culminated in Asadullah shooting and killing three of Ghulam Ali Midhiana's supporters. Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana started a court case against Asadullah over the incident, which eventually led to further fighting between his men and Asadullah. Two more of Midhiana's men would be shot and killed in the course of it.

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buffalos away to the Frontier Province, where their owners would be unable to trace them, and he was also widely rumoured to own a place where he could hide stolen buffalos in a sparsely populated area bordering the Jhelum River. His personal farm in *Mid* Gondal boasted several hundred buffalos that grazed on open pastures.

<sup>141</sup> See Chapter Five.

Thanks in part to his elder brother's protection Chowdri Asadullah was able to spend almost seven years as a fugitive before he was caught and sentenced to death. Chowdri Asadullah's nephews, who seem to have been fond of Western movies, told me that throughout this period Asadullah had lived like a 'deperado', spending his time in hideouts with his faithful retainers. In the meantime Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana and his men had been looking for opportunities to take revenge (*badla*), meaning that for about fifteen years Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali rarely travelled without a contingent of at least three gunmen. In his quest for revenge Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana found an ally in Chowdri Abdullah.

In the early stages of their alliance Chowdri Abdullah had supported Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana during elections by providing him and his allies with votes from amongst his numerous clients and dependants. Because it was shared enmity rather than kinship or friendship ties that united the two parties however, Chowdri Abdullah's motivation for supporting Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana was not based on a desire to make him more powerful *per se*. His main motivation was simply to prevent Chowdri Mazhar Ali from winning elections as well as to obtain some degree of political patronage from a powerful politician. In fact according to many people it was actually against Chowdri Abdullah's interests for Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana to become too powerful: people said that his ultimate goal was to eliminate both Ghulam Ali Midhiana and Chowdri Mazhar Ali from the political scene in order to emerge as the most powerful politician in the area himself.

In this hothouse Chowdri Mazhar Ali claimed that in 1998 Chowdri Abdullah had managed to make him unwittingly grant protection to a group of wanted men who planned to launch an attack on Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana and murder him. Chowdri Abdullah's basic plan was to eliminate Ghulam Ali Midhiana and to entangle Chowdri Mazhar Ali in a court case for having harboured the men who killed him. In the event, Chowdri Abdullah managed to get a group of wanted men—who had their own grudge against Midhiana—to ask one of Chowdri Mazhar Ali's clients for protection from the police. Chowdri Abdullah knew that this client would then ask Chowdri Mazhar Ali to provide them with a place to hide.<sup>145</sup> Chowdri Mazhar Ali complied with his client's request and allowed the wanted men to hide at his dera where it was assumed, because he was still a provincial minister at the time, the police would not intrude. In the end, however, Chowdri Abdullah's plan failed when the police did in fact raid Chowdri Mazhar Ali's dera and arrested the men before they could launch their attack on Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana. Nevertheless, Chowdri Abdullah appears to have been partially successful because the incident caused Chowdri Mazhar Ali to become temporarily embroiled in a police case.

It would take the military takeover by General Musharraf some months later to achieve, at least in part, what Chowdri Abdullah had been unable to accomplish through his own devices. Chowdri Mazhar Ali became entangled in a variety of NAB cases on several corruption charges (see Chapter Two) and remained out of office for the nine years that General Musharraf was in power. This situation provided Chowdri Abdullah with an invaluable opportunity to strengthen his own political clout further at the expense of Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Haq Nawaz. Shortly before that

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<sup>145</sup> The individual in question was a friend of both Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Abdullah. He was not as powerful as Chowdri Mazhar Ali and could not have personally granted the wanted men any significant form of protection.

happened, however, Chowdri Abdullah's brother Rafiq lost his life. Several Gondals believed that the encounter with the police which caused his death had been orchestrated by Chowdri Mazhar Ali, who was particularly keen to get rid of the intrepid young man and thereby weaken the Lambar Ke faction.

The political realignments that resulted from General Musharraf's takeover provided Chowdri Abdullah with an opportunity to move out of the opposition and to join forces with the newly formed ruling coalition, and he aligned himself with Chowdri Khuda Baksh Mekan who was now an opponent of Chowdri Mazhar Ali. Prior to General Musharraf's takeover Chowdri Khuda Baksh Mekan and Chowdri Mazhar Ali had been allies in the PML-N, and had supported each other in the 1997 elections. This alliance, like many others described in this chapter, had been based on a temporary coincidence of interests and wasn't firmly rooted in either close kinship or friendship ties. As a result, when Chowdri Khuda Baksh Mekan shifted over to the PML-Q following General Musharraf's takeover, and Chowdri Mazhar Ali remained in opposition in the PML-N, they naturally and immediately became political opponents. In addition to aligning himself with Chowdri Khuda Baksh Mekan Chowdri Abdullah also aligned himself with Chowdri Zahid Iqbal Awan, who had also joined the ruling coalition and who, as shown in chapter two, was a longstanding enemy of Chowdri Mazhar Ali. Chowdri Abdullah was once again making alliances with outsiders against kin. The fact that Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana didn't join forces with the ruling coalition meant that Chowdri Abdullah ceased to support him politically. Moreover the possibility of an alliance between Mazhar Ali was eventually made even more unlikely when Chowdri Nawaz Ali established a truce with Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana after

agreeing to support him in the future elections and paying him blood-money (*diyat*) for the murders committed by Asadullah.<sup>146</sup>

The truce resulted in the release from jail of Asadullah, put an end to hostilities between Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana, and even resulted in an agreement to join forces against the ruling PML-Q with which Chowdri Abdullah was now aligned. Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana agreed to support each other in the local council elections of 2005 as well as in upcoming provincial and national assembly elections. At one stage there were even rumours that the alliance between the two would be consolidated through a marriage between Chowdri Mazhar Ali's son and Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana's daughter. In this manner two longstanding enemies affiliated with traditionally opposed political parties (the PPP and the PML-N) joined forces against the PML-Q, thereby reducing the number of local political groupings from three to two.

The forging of the new political alliance between Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana and Chowdri Mazhar Ali fit the model noted above of a temporary coincidence of interests resulting from shared opposition to a third party. Despite the fact that the leaders of the two factions began to assert that they were brothers by virtue of belonging to the same extended Gondal lineage, their long history of enmity and conflict meant that they continued to distrust each other intensely. Chowdri Asadullah, who had ignited the feud between his half-brother Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Midhiana, couldn't fully reconcile himself to the alliance and his elder siblings tried to keep him away from the negotiations with Midhiana in case old tensions were revived. For their parts Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Nawaz Ali didn't fully trust Chowdri

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<sup>146</sup> Under this settlement Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana agreed to receive twenty-five acres of land from Ghulam Ali as compensation for the murders. Although many details of the agreement remained secret it appears to have been facilitated by another political figure in Sargodha who had an interest in uniting the two parties in order to defeat Khuda Baksh Mekan in upcoming elections.

Ghulam Ali Midhiana either, whom they believed still harboured grudges against them. More than that perhaps, they were aware that the coincidence of interests that emerged from General Musharraf's military takeover might not last forever. Since both Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana remained loyal to their respective political parties they recognised that they were likely to become opponents once Musharraf and the PML-Q were out of office and the PPP and the PML-N resumed hostilities in their bid to gain political power. A more immediate obstacle to their alliance related to whether they would be able to agree on what offices Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana would run for. Although they cooperated during the local council elections of 2005 they feared that tensions might arise over who would run for the local provincial assembly seat in the upcoming elections. The concern arose from the fact that Musharraf's government ruled that members of legislative assemblies must hold bachelor's degrees. As a result they had agreed that Chowdri Nawaz Ali, who had a degree in law, would run for the provincial assembly seat while Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana, who was illiterate, would run for the seat of tehsil nazim for which no degree was required. However, it was expected that these educational requirements might soon be scrapped.<sup>147</sup> This would present a problem for the alliance because it might cause Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana to want to run for the seat in the provincial legislature, creating a clash over it with Chowdri Nawaz Ali.

### **Conclusions**

In line with Barth's analysis of Swat Pathan society the principal conclusion to emerge from this chapter is that enmity could be a more powerful force in the creation of alliances between big landlord-politicians than extended kinship ties in the form of

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<sup>147</sup> The rule that only people with bachelor's degrees could run in elections for the legislative assemblies was widely held to have been designed by Musharraf's government in order to selectively prevent certain candidates from running. Members of the opposition demanded that the rule be scrapped as it excluded the vast majority of Pakistanis.

the biraderi. This was illustrated by demonstrating that what had historically held the Gondals of Bek Sagrana together was their opposition to the politically dominant Makhdooms rather than corporate unity arising from shared ties of descent. So long as the Makhdooms had been politically dominant it had been in the interest of the Gondals of Bek Sagrana to set aside their differences in order to overtake them politically. However, following the decline of the Makhdooms fault lines between the Gondals gradually became more distinct until eventually, in the early 1990s, internecine conflict erupted between the leading Gondal households of the two village factions. As in Barth's analysis of the Swat Pathans the fault lines that emerged within the Gondal biraderi were the result of agnatic rivalry arising from competition for local dominance. However, in contrast to the situation in Barth's analysis, the conflict in this case was not between paternal first cousins but rather between more distantly related agnates. Here there was no evidence to suggest that conflict between paternal first cousins fighting over land (as was the case in Swat) was a widespread structuring principle of rural Punjabi society. In fact there appears to have been a broad range of political configurations among different villages. While in villages dominated by a single biraderi, as in Bek Sagrana, conflict might take place between agnates with varying degrees of genealogical proximity between them, in other villages with two zamindar biraderis conflict might predominantly follow biraderi-based cleavages. Other villages might even possess more than two factions.

It was also shown that, as in Barth's model, the control over land was an important source of conflict since a landlord's power and client base partly depended upon land ownership. Unlike in Barth's model, however, which assumes a stateless society, another important source of conflict in this case revolved around gaining control over access to the state through competition to gain the votes of villagers.



Political office, like land, was an important source of power and could increase the client base of leaders by permitting them to dispense patronage and to acquire new clients accordingly. Nevertheless, in relation to this the description of village factional leadership also demonstrated that generosity and patronage were important factors in determining the following that a leader acquired, a situation which was paralleled by Barth's Swat Pathans. Thus the fact that Chowdri Abdullah was a more generous and better patron than his village rival Chowdri Haq Nawaz made him the more popular factional leader in the village. Another important factor that strongly emerges from the description of leadership in Bek Sagrana, and which is also implicit in Barth's analysis of the creation of a following, relates to the need for leaders to be forceful. Through their forcefulness leaders could increase their wealth and landholdings and thereby increase their capacity for patronage. They could also protect their interest and those of their clients against enemies, including in this case the often predatory Punjab police. Largely absent from Barth's analysis, however, is the role of forcefulness in the coercion of clients and the creation of fear. For Barth clients in Swat were largely free to choose whom they followed, but as this chapter indicated and following chapters will demonstrate, forceful leaders could coerce followers through the threat of sanctions and violence. The following two chapters will demonstrate how the use and the threat of coercion and violence and were often employed by landlords to secure the votes and labour of landless clients.

The second section of this chapter sought to illustrate the role of enmity between village factional leaders in determining their political alliances. It was shown that factional leaders almost invariably became the allies of the enemies of their enemies. Because the only thing that held many of these alliances together was a temporary sharing of interests based on a shared enmity they were often short lived. For example,

the alliance between Chowdri Abdullah and Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana was instrumentally based on their joint enmity with Chowdri Mazhar Ali and not on a desire to see each other succeed; indeed, as was noted, according to many people Chowdri Abdullah secretly harboured a desire for and plotted the demise of Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana. The temporarily instrumental nature of the alliance was further demonstrated when it fell apart shortly after General Musharraf took over in 1999. The alliance that then emerged between Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana was equally provisional as there was little love lost between both parties after a long history of enmity that had cost money and land as well as several lives. In this case their alliance was based on a common desire to counter the new government. Once that government fell, however, there was a distinct possibility that the alliance might fall apart.<sup>148</sup>

The highly instrumental nature of many political alliances raises the question of exactly what role kinship played in their creation in rural Punjabi politics. The chapter demonstrated that the extended biraderi was generally not the basis for political decision-making among powerful landlord politicians. Instead it was shown that close kinship ties, including those between male siblings and those between close relatives united by marriage ties, were often at the core of political factions. The political significance of cooperation between male siblings was clearly illustrated by the case of Chowdri Abdullah and his brothers. The fact that Chowdri Abdullah belonged to a set of four forceful brothers played a decisive role in the political success of his faction. This gave him an advantage over Chowdri Haq Nawaz who, following the death of his younger brother, was left with only his older, who preferred to keep his distance from politics. Nevertheless, Chowdri Haq Nawaz's close and variously intertwined kinship

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<sup>148</sup> The only thing that might have helped hold the political alliance together would have been the additional establishment of a marriage alliance.

relations with Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his siblings permitted him to retain his influence in the village.<sup>149</sup>

Following Hamza Alavi (1972) the material presented can also be taken to indicate that the political role of the extended biraderi varied according to the socio-economic rank of its members. Alavi argued that the least cohesive biraderis were those that were economically and politically dependent upon the landlords. Their dependency meant that they were unable to create horizontal ties of solidarity amongst themselves. Similarly he argued that biraderi solidarity tended to be weak amongst big landlords. The reason for this was that such landlords didn't need to rely on their extended biraderi for political support but could instead rely upon their clients, retainers, and economic dependants for it. In contrast, the most cohesive biraderis were those of economically independent landholders. Their economic independence meant that they could unite and assert their interests against those of the bigger landlords. These biraderis often voted as a block, and powerful landlord-politicians spent a great deal of time trying to gain their votes during elections. In accordance with this analysis it is arguably the case that the Gondal biraderi of Bek Sagrana had been more cohesive before the political and economic fortunes of certain of its individual members began to soar. Earlier the Gondals of Bek Sagrana had depended upon each other in order to achieve political influence and combat the Makhdoods. This changed when people like Chowdri Nawaz Ali, Chowdri Mazhar Ali and Chowdri Abdullah acquired greater power and wealth, allowing them to consolidate their personal client bases and depend less upon other Bek Sagrana Gondals to assert their political power.

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<sup>149</sup> This having been said, it should be noted that there were cases in which brothers could be political rivals. One famous instance involved two Gondal politicians from the area who, because of a dispute over their inheritance, had become fierce political rivals. However, cases such as these appear to have been uncommon and were met with strong disapproval.

The findings of this chapter are important for understanding the political sociology of the Pakistani Punjab because they shed light upon some of the reasons that so few candidates in the central and northern Punjab win decisive victories even when their biraderi is the numerically dominant one in the area. As Wilder puts it, "...because nearly every village is divided into factions, and these are often linked into larger factional groupings, their cumulative effect can be great. This poses a challenge to political parties seeking to increase their support in rural constituencies. No matter which candidate is selected, strong opposition is virtually guaranteed by rival factions" (Wilder 1999: 177). The localisation of politics has therefore not necessarily led to an increased importance of extended biraderi ties in politics. Instead it might be argued (as was done in chapter two) that the localisation of politics has consolidated the importance of personal local enmities in determining people's political allegiances. Thus the principal concerns that align rural politicians are not related to particular social and political agendas but rather their local enmities. If anything, the weakness of political parties and the localisation of politics described in the previous chapter has led to increasingly dynastic politics where wealthy extended households pool their various resources together in order to capture political office jointly.

## **Chapter Four: Patronage and Coercion**

The previous chapter focused on the issue of how factionalism divided dominant landowning biraderis and showed that political mobilisation didn't necessarily follow extended biraderi lines. It was argued that, following Barth and Alavi, what made it possible for agnates to oppose each other was the fact that the bulk of a patron's supporters was gained from within the ranks of dependent client groups, including artisans and tenants. As a consequence, factions were never made up of a single biraderi but were instead a loose coalition of individuals belonging to different families. This chapter deals with the question of how the political allegiance of these subordinate social groups was established. More specifically, it analyses the elements of coercion and patronage involved in the creation of vertical ties of allegiance between these subordinate social groups and the landlords.

Whereas Barth argued that the allegiance of subordinate groups, including tenants and artisans, was gained by leaders through the dispensation of generosity and patronage, it will be shown here that coercion also played a significant role. In doing so this chapter addresses some of the omissions that result from Barth's rational choice framework for the analysis of political coalitions in Swat. Asad (1972) famously critiqued Barth's model of Swat society on the basis that it depicted subordinate clients as freely entering contractual alliances with leaders in order to obtain protection and patronage. Asad claimed that underlying this model was a Hobbesian view of society whereby individuals freely assent to the rule of a sovereign in order to escape the perpetual conflict and insecurity that would exist in the absence of a sovereign government. However, according to Asad Barth's material indicates that the basis of leadership in Swat was in fact based not so much on individual choice as upon class

domination by the Pakhtun chiefs. Thus Asad argues that the horizontal cleavages dividing Swat society into landed and landless classes were in fact more important for an understanding of the Swat political system than were the vertical blocs described by Barth. Asad writes,

...this is not to say that vertical bonds between landlord and tenant are of no social consequence in Swat, but only that such bonds derive their special character from the horizontal class divisions—i.e. they are bonds of solidarity between members of exploiting and exploited classes, between those who are able to exercise significant political choice and those who are not (Asad 1972: 85).

With this observation in mind, this chapter examines the nature of the relationship between the exploited and the exploiting classes in the village of Bek SAGRANA. It shows that in order to understand the political system of rural central Punjab it is indeed crucial to understand the horizontal class cleavages existing between landed and landless segments of the population. The chapter therefore illustrates the various ways in which the economic and political choices of subordinate social groups are circumscribed by the economic and political power of the landlords.

However, in addition to recognising the importance of 'horizontal' class cleavages this chapter also seeks to highlight the importance of the vertical ties between the exploiting and the exploited classes and the way in which these ties consolidated the dominance of the exploiting class. They did so by preventing the emergence of an assertive proletarian class in a context where, as a result of changes in the local economy, landless villagers and artisans were increasingly turning to wage labour to sustain their livelihoods. In Barth's account of Swat political mobilisation retained a strong vertical, factional, character. In this chapter I argue that the same thing applied in the village of Bek SAGRANA despite the fact that an increasingly commercial society had led many former artisans and sharecroppers to become wage labourers. The main question that I address relates to why labourers in the area of Bek SAGRANA continued to

be attached to the landlords through relationships of patronage and coercion, with the result that they did not assert themselves as a class. In exploring the relationships of patronage and coercion between labourers and landlords the widespread existence of bonded labour in the Pakistani Punjab will be a particular focus.

### **Bonded Labour and Worker Assertiveness<sup>150</sup>**

In its World Labour Report of 1993, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) described the problem of bonded labour in Pakistan as among the worst of its kind in the world (ILO 1993). According to a 1994 estimate by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, around twenty million people worked as bonded labourers in agriculture, brick kilns, fisheries, construction and domestic service (HRCP 1995: 120). Reports suggest that bonded labour is most widespread in agriculture and most coercive in areas of southern Punjab and interior Sindh provinces where land distribution is particularly unequal.<sup>151</sup> Landlords in these areas are known to have maintained private jails where labourers were kept locked up and guarded by armed men at night, and sent to labour in the fields by day. Female labourers were frequently sexually assaulted by landlords and their strongmen as well as by the police, who were complicit in the maintenance of these jails. In 1991, in a widely publicised case, the army raided the private jail of a major landlord in Sindh and released 295 labourers.<sup>152</sup>

In the central Punjab district of Sargodha where I carried out my research, there were no private jails and I didn't hear of anyone operating any in the recent past.

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<sup>150</sup> Similar issues to those covered in this chapter appear in a paper by the same author entitled 'The Political Economy of Bonded Labour in the Pakistani Punjab' (Martin 2009).

<sup>151</sup> See K. Lieten and J. Breman (2002) for an account of bonded labour in rural Sindh. Their work focuses principally on Hindu Hari sharecroppers in Sindh where sharecropping remains more widespread than in the Punjab.

<sup>152</sup> See Human Rights Watch (1995) for an account of this event. The Human Rights Watch report quotes newspaper articles stating that this jail was one of twelve such jails in the Sanghar district of Sindh.

Nevertheless debt-bondage, whereby labourers could spend an entire lifetime working under abusive conditions in order to repay a landlord's loan, was widespread.

Furthermore my data largely confirm reports that the practice was often characterised by the threat and use of physical and other forms of coercion by landlords. Although debt-bondage was formally banned under Pakistani law, it operated with the tacit as well as active cooperation of the police and other authorities. In addition to exploring the element of coercion involved in debt-bondage, an aspect generally emphasised by the ILO and human rights groups, debt-bondage also relies on an element of patronage. However, contrary to what is argued in some of the literature on the topic, patronage doesn't usually mitigate the exploitative aspects of debt-bondage, even though it does allow for acts of benevolence by landlords.

The landlords' role as patrons in a village in the central Punjab stemmed from their monopoly over local state institutions, economic resources and the means of physical coercion. This monopoly worked to make the rest of the village population dependent upon them for their basic welfare and security as well as their livelihoods. Furthermore, the landlords' exclusive control over resources enabled them to extend assistance strategically, deploying it in the idiom of generosity and patronage in order to obtain votes and labour and, in the process, further strengthen their stranglehold over villagers. Thus despite the paternalistic ideology of generous care and protection invoked by the landlords, the extension of patronage to labourers was frequently used as a means to secure cheap and permanent labour.

That having been said, it must also be recognised that there were villages in the central Punjab where both power and land were somewhat more equally distributed than in Bek Sagrana. This was the case, for example, in some canal colony settlements (chaks) of the Sargodha district, as well as in much of the more industrial northern



Punjab where landholdings and political power were more fragmented. But the evidence does suggest similarities between Sargodha and areas of southern and western Punjab where political power and landownership were more concentrated.<sup>153</sup>

The widespread existence of debt-bondage in certain areas of the Pakistani Punjab where labour relations are characterised by economic and extra-economic forms of compulsion together with vertical ties of patronage raises a conceptual as well as political question: In this context, is it meaningful to talk about the emergence of a proletarian class, a social group characterised by two kinds of freedom—freedom from the ownership of private property and freedom to sell its labour power in exchange for wages? In the literature on debt-bondage, the question of class formation assumes political significance because, by virtue of being free from personalised ties of dependence, proletarians are supposed to be able to develop horizontal ties of allegiance and unite in order to overthrow their oppressors.<sup>154</sup>

While the decline of sharecropping consequent upon the introduction of citrus orchards in the 1970s and the demise of traditional village occupations due to the availability of industrially-manufactured goods have brought about partial proletarianisation, attempts at political resistance by labourers remain isolated and fragmented. Labourers in the Pakistani Punjab are still largely the *de facto* political

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<sup>153</sup> See Wilder's (1999) chapter three for a general description of the geography and political economy of the different regions of the Punjab.

<sup>154</sup> In the Indian context authors such as Patnaik (1985) and Brass (1999) argue that forms of labour attachment involving coercion are still widespread and deprive labourers of proletarian status. The result of this is that they cannot challenge their own subordination. On the other hand writers such as Rudra (1994), Prakash (1990) and Breman (1993, 1974) argue that rural labourers in India are, increasingly, proletarians in a capitalist system. This means that the relationship between them and their employers is increasingly one which is devoid of both coercion and patronage. For Breman the assertion of the continuity of historical forms of bonded labour in modern day Gujarat ignores the "materialistic and ideological changes that have occurred between landowners and landless in the countryside in South Gujarat" (Breman 1993: 311). He argues that the onset of commercial agriculture and the expansion of the Indian state have largely eliminated the elements of both patronage and coercion that used to characterise the relationship between Anavil Brahmin landlords and their Dubla labourers and servants previously. The result is that employers can no longer enforce debt bondage and that labourers have become increasingly assertive towards employers.

subjects of landlords who frequently occupy high ranking government positions and have personal ties of allegiance reaching up to the highest levels of the State. This means that labourers often cannot freely dispose of their own labour power and are in a weak position to combat their own oppression. The process of proletarianisation is complicated by political factors such that class formation is not the inevitable outcome of changes in economic relations. As a result, class formation in the Pakistani Punjab has largely failed to take place and political mobilisation retains a vertical factional character which cuts across both caste and class. The effect of this is that labourers remain the political subjects of their local landlords and that vertical patron-client ties persist at the expense of horizontal ties of class.

Before analysing debt-bondage in rural Pakistani Punjab, it would be useful to examine briefly the political situation of labourers in India. A comparison of the labour situations in rural India and rural Pakistan sheds light on the larger issues of un-free labour and worker assertiveness and their relation to broader political and state processes. I take the literature from South Asia, and India in particular, as my main reference point given that the rural social structure of the Pakistani Punjab shares many of the characteristic features of the fertile plains of North India. Both areas are marked by high population densities, sharp inequalities in wealth and landownership, and status hierarchies. In spite of these broad similarities however, the present-day labour situations in India and Pakistan differ significantly and the explanation for these differences lies in the nature of the respective political processes that have characterised the two countries.

In India the deepening of competitive electoral politics and reservations for Other Backward Classes as well as for Scheduled Castes (SCs) have posed a serious challenge to traditional structures of authority and have curtailed the power of

traditional landed elites to enforce debt-bondage and to coerce their labourers. Although as Tom Brass's work (1999) shows, the eradication of bonded labour may not have been evenly achieved throughout India and persists in parts of north India, such as pockets of Haryana, evidence from the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh suggests that competitive electoral politics have curtailed the power of landed elites to enforce debt-bondage. Thus for example Lerche and Jeffrey (2000) show how, in Uttar Pradesh, the rise to power of the Dalit political leader Mayawati in 1995 and 1997 resulted in greater assertiveness on the part of SC labourers. The authors show that Mayawati's ascendance forced the landed middle and upper castes to stop some of the more abusive and exploitative practices towards SC labourers. Thus in one instance, a Chamar woman from Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party managed to indict some Thakurs for paying agricultural labourers below the stipulated minimum wage. Similarly, the molesting of SC women by Jat landlords came to an end in certain villages. Although it may be overhasty to assume that these developments are evenly distributed throughout Uttar Pradesh, they are nevertheless significant and contrast sharply with the situation in the Pakistani Punjab where the stranglehold of the traditional landed elite remains largely unchallenged. Finally even in Bihar, India's 'lawless' and caste ridden state, the dominance of the upper caste Brahmins and Rajputs has been challenged by the rise to power of the Other Backward Classes and leaders such as Laloo Yadav Prasad. Also, as Corbridge, Williams, Srivastava and Verón (2005) show, years of Naxalite agitation in Bhojpur district, Bihar, meant that SC groups were actively pressing for their rights and had reached an 'uneasy truce over agricultural pay and conditions' (2005: 105). Moreover they claim that slights to the honour of the Scheduled Castes could quickly escalate into public confrontations. Thus although agricultural labourers from the Scheduled Castes were still afflicted by chronic poverty and were largely excluded from

governance, they were pressing for rights and empowerment in a way that their Pakistani counterparts were not.<sup>155</sup>

### **Landlords and servants: Economic and political power in Bek Sagrana**

In chapter one, mention was made of the arrangement between kammis and their various chowdri patrons known as seyp. As noted there, seyp arrangements traditionally served as the main source of income for many kammis. Barbers, for example, carried out weekly visits to a select number of chowdri patrons to cut hair. In addition to this barbers carried out a variety of different tasks for their patrons including cooking at life cycle ceremonies and religious celebrations, circumcising children, and delivering wedding invitations. Similarly other kammis carried out a number of tasks for their patrons in addition to their principal occupation. Carpenters did carpentry but they also carried wood used as fuel to the households of their patrons and dug graves when members of their patron households died. Kumhars traditionally made clay pots to carry water but they were also in charge of carrying the wheat from the fields to their patron's household in a donkey cart. In this manner virtually every type of kammi carried out a variety of tasks for their various chowdri patrons in the village. In addition to carrying out these specified jobs, and as will be further illustrated below, kammis were often required to perform a variety of tasks for their patrons without payment. This was particularly the case for kammis who were house tenants of a landlord. Finally kammis also rendered services to each other in exchange for which they generally demanded no remuneration but largely expected the services rendered to be returned equivalently.

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<sup>155</sup> In addition several authors have pointed to the fact that the idea of equality has made important inroads into the popular consciousness of Indians. It has been argued that working towards equality through democratic means has promoted the transformation of caste as a system of interdependent hierarchical social relations, as embodied by the *Jajmani* system, towards caste as a system of 'horizontal,' disconnected groups, with their own distinct cultures. Dumont has described this process as the 'substantialisation of caste' (Dumont 1980: 226-27) while others have described this process as the 'ethnification of caste' (Barnett 1975: 158-59; see also, Fuller 1996:22-25).

Thus, for example, if a blacksmith fixed the metal tools of a carpenter he would expect the carpenter to reciprocate by fixing his charpais when they became unstable.

As noted in chapter one, the reason usually adduced for the ranking of certain kammis was related to the perceived quality of the occupation that they pursued.

Among the Mirasis, Pirhains and Mussallis it was the latter that were considered to have the lowest status. Part of the reason for this lay in the fact that the occupations that they pursued were perceived as requiring the least skill. Among other things these occupations included agricultural labour, construction, sweeping and domestic service for the landlords. In addition to this, like other kammis they engaged in seyp with various chowdri patrons in order to perform various tasks. These included covering the chaff and the straw collected during the wheat harvest with mud, preparing the mud to place on the roofs of traditional dwellings and preparing the strings that others then attached to charpais.<sup>156</sup> Like other kammis they also fulfilled specific roles during life cycle ceremonies such as weddings and funerals during which they were in charge of the cooking fires as well as of preparing the hookahs.

The other reason for the particularly low status of the Mussallis was that they carried the stigma of the fact that prior to their conversion to Islam they had belonged to a Hindu sweeper caste known as *Chuhra*s. Both Hindus and Muslims refused to eat with Chuhra)s because they removed night-soil and ate the impure flesh of animals such as pigs (*khanzir*). Reports suggest that many of them converted to Islam and Christianity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to raise their social status. The 1888 District Gazetteer for Sargodha reports that it was only after they converted to Islam and ceased to remove night-soil and eat forbidden (*haraam*) foods that other Muslims consented to eat with them. In recognition of their conversion they were renamed

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<sup>156</sup> I was told that it was the drummers (Pirhain) were traditionally the ones who placed the strings onto the wooden frame of charpais.

Mussalli, an intended honorific that can be translated as 'he who spends his time on the prayer mat.'<sup>157</sup> However despite the fact that the term Mussalli was originally one of honour it was nowadays practically a term of abuse and the Mussallis continued to carry some of the stigma of their formerly non-Muslim and untouchable status. Thus more than any other kammis the Mussallis were considered to be poor Muslims. Besides being thieving, deceitful and highly promiscuous they were said to be dirty, to live in overcrowded dwellings overrun with dogs and to be lax in performing daily prayers. Chuhraes who had converted to Christianity rather than Islam fared worse and fully retained their low status. They also faced various discriminatory laws and social attitudes. While Muslims wouldn't refuse to eat with those Chuhraes who had converted to Islam they would often refuse to eat with those who had converted to Christianity, even barring them from public restaurants. There were also stories of Christians that were badly beaten because they polluted public water drinking facilities by drinking from them.<sup>158</sup>

In modern day Pakistani Punjab, however, the difference in status between Mussallis and other kammis isn't always reflected in the occupations that they pursue. The availability of competitive, commercially produced goods has meant that many traditional artisanal occupations had become obsolete. The Kumhars in the village, for example, had entirely ceased producing the clay vessels that were traditionally used to hold drinking water. None of the village Mochis made shoes any longer, and only one of them dedicated himself to some semblance of his original craft by fixing cheap leather and plastic shoes from China. In addition, the advent of agricultural mechanisation meant that locally produced farm implements had largely been replaced by commercial machinery. Although some kammis had managed to transform their

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<sup>157</sup> The word *mussalla* refers to a prayer mat.

<sup>158</sup> For an ethnographic account of Christian Punjabi sweepers in Karachi see Streefland (1979).

traditional occupation into a successful business others had turned to both rural and urban wage labour.

In Bek Sagrana Tarkhans (carpenters) and Lohars (blacksmiths) had been among those successful in translating traditional occupations into viable cottage industries. The village Tarkhans lived in a joint household of eleven of which seven were able bodied siblings all dedicated to woodworking and furniture making. They continued to have seyp contracts with various chowdris but their large number meant that in addition to this they could produce furniture to sell in the market. Some of the elder siblings had obtained further training in Chiniot, a town renowned for its furniture making two hours away from the village by bus, and they were now producing increasingly sophisticated furniture. Some of the siblings had also made several trips to Islamabad where they had won contracts to do carpentry work in houses newly built for high ranking military officers. By 2006 when I left the village they owned several buffalos and a motorcycle and were planning on opening a furniture shop in the nearby market town. For their part the village Lohars had an even larger joint household of twenty of which seven were able bodied siblings. They too continued to have seyp contracts with various chowdris for fixing and sharpening a variety of metal farm implements<sup>159</sup> but had additionally expanded their business by obtaining a welding machine, setting up a flour mill and expanding their sideline of installing hand pumps (nalka) for villagers. By 2006 they too had purchased a motorcycle and were supplementing their income by renting a total of ten acres of land from various chowdris.

Aside from the Tarkhans and the Lohars some other kammis had also been relatively successful at turning their traditional occupation into a business. One Nai (barber) for example had managed to set up a barber shop in Sargodha with some

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<sup>159</sup> They continued to make and sharpen the sickles (*daatri*) that people used for harvesting different crops and fodder.

relatives and the help of a wealthy chowdri who allowed him to live in the out-building of a house that he owned and was renting out in Sargodha. A relative of the man who was also a Nai was the only person in the village to have migrated to the Persian Gulf where he worked in a barber shop in a town near Jeddah. In other villages I also heard of village tailors (*darzi*) setting up tailoring businesses, cobblers (Mochis) setting up shoemaking businesses and even of Mirasis becoming popular singers and musicians.

However, in contrast to those artisans who had been able to translate their traditional occupations into viable businesses those who for whatever reason had not done so relied more and more on wage labour for subsistence. Consequently it was not uncommon to find Mussallis now working in the fields or as domestic servants side by side with Mochis, Kumhars, Machis, Mirasis and even impoverished Tarkhans and Lohars. Similarly many former tenants from agricultural (zamindar) biraderis that were displaced by mechanisation and the introduction of citrus orchards in the 1970s were also having to resort to wage labour and even debt-bondage. Although it continued to be Mussallis that were most commonly associated with wage labour and debt-bondage, the reality was that they were no longer alone in those things.

As previous chapters have shown the picture at the other end of the social spectrum stood in sharp contrast to the gradual pauperisation of many kammis and tenants. Besides privatised control over the means of coercion through the use of private militias, the landowning Gondal chowdris backed their economic power with political power through their control of access to various state institutions. As noted in chapter one, members of the kammi biraderis were largely excluded from politics. Accordingly, such positions as they might be able to achieve within state institutions were got through the patronage and good will of a chowdri. Thus in Bek SAGRANA many of the village kammis who had obtained government jobs had done so during Chowdri Mazhar



Ali's various terms in office. As was shown in chapter one some chowdris did this in order to have servants that the state would pay for. In other cases however they granted government jobs to people in order to secure their political popularity and as a reward to faithful clients. In this manner, for example, a Nai who had worked faithfully for Chowdri Mazhar Ali was granted a position as *Chowdkidar* in the village school.

It was also noted earlier that villagers relied almost exclusively on personal contacts with Gondal patrons to mediate successfully their interactions with state institutions such as the police, the courts, hospitals and schools. If, for example, a person needed to file a complaint with the police in the form of a First Information Report (FIR) they needed to go through a chowdri. Without such patronage a kammi was likely to have to pay bribes in order to get the FIR filed.<sup>160</sup> The chowdris could influence the police through their political, kinship or friendship connections within the police force itself. It was also widely known that various chowdris had connections with the police by virtue of their varied criminal activities, including buffalo theft, heroin trafficking and the smuggling of stolen cars, out of whose proceeds the police were known to take shares. As noted earlier, villagers lived in fear of the police. Some villagers avoided walking along the paved road leading to the nearby market town at night for fear that police patrols that occasionally drove by might try to extract bribes from them by arbitrarily arresting them on fabricated charges that they were planning a highway robbery. One Mirasi who was walking back from town late at night told me about how he hid in the nearby orchards when he saw a police van approaching. Villagers also told me about one occasion when, some ten years earlier, an unknown labourer who was working in the citrus harvest had died overnight. Apparently no one

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<sup>160</sup> In one instance the driver of one of the chowdris decided to personally place an FIR and between all the trips to the police station and bribes to the clerks he spent Rs.1500 which was the equivalent of a month's wages.

in the village had been willing to report this to the police for fear of being accused of being involved in murder. Eventually the villagers decided to send the nine year old son of the village Imam on the basis that the police were unlikely to cause problems for a child.<sup>161</sup> There were also several cases when villagers had run away from their village homes when an unknown vehicle was seen approaching because they thought it might be a police car. It often turned out that the car had simply been that of a friend visiting one of the Gondal chowdris.

Throughout my stay in the village there were several cases when villagers sought refuge in the farmhouses of chowdris in order to escape the police. It was widely known that the police were highly unlikely to enter the house of a chowdri unless the chowdri in question had powerful enemies who were trying to deploy the police against him. In one instance, for example, a Mussalli who was being threatened with an FIR by a landless zamindar who accused him of playing with the honour (*izzat*) of his daughter hid in the farmhouse of Gondal chowdri for several days for fear that the police would come after him. In yet another instance a *Tarkhan* who had beaten someone up sought refuge in the farmhouse of another chowdri for several weeks.

To summarise, the discussion and evidence here and in preceding chapters indicate that the chowdris fully controlled the crossroads of political and economic influence at the local level, and in doing so delimited and determined the political and economic realities of the kammiss through the chowdris' own self-determined indispensability. As noted in chapter two, in contrast to the situation of the Anavil Brahmin landlords in Gujarat who retained only the coercive power inherent in wage relations, the Gondal chowdris of Bek Sagrama retained both private coercive power and political power, the latter stemming from their position as patrons with privileged access

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<sup>161</sup> The boy who by 2006 was almost twenty years old told me that he had been very frightened during his encounter with the police because had treated him gruffly and interrogated him extensively.

to state resources. As the sole access points to state institutions their relationship with labourers and tenants had a strong and inherently political element to it. What's more, the chowdris felt able to fall back on a paternalistic religious ideology both to justify their social prominence and lay claim to a higher moral and social status associated with it.<sup>162</sup> Although, as will be further illustrated below, there had been an increase in free wage labour, and an expansion in the job opportunities beyond the village, labourers still had to approach the chowdris for credit and patronage during times of hardship. In what follows the circumstances that led labourers to seek patronage and employment with the Gondal chowdris will be further examined, along with the reasons that the Gondal chowdris actually extended patronage and credit to labourers. Finally the ways in which labourers who had taken loans were coerced into repaying them will be considered as well.

### **Wage Labour and Patronage**

Becoming a farm or household servant attached to one of the Gondal chowdris was not an attractive option to most people. Nevertheless the seasonal variations in the availability of daily wage labour as well as the need for credit, to cover things such as large wedding or medical expenses, and other forms of patronage meant that servitude was an option that was resorted to frequently. It was well known that working for a chowdri was both physically and mentally exhausting. Servants were poorly paid and had to be at the constant beck and call of their masters who, as the servants often claimed, treated them like animals.

The highly seasonal demand for agricultural labour was largely the result of the widespread introduction of tangerine and orange orchards that began in the 1970s. This had also played an important role in reducing the area of land that the chowdris

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<sup>162</sup> See chapter six.

dedicated to sharecropping and causing many redundant sharecroppers to turn to wage labour as a result. The chowdris had introduced citrus because it was both more profitable and less labour intensive than other forms of cultivation, which had previously included sugarcane, wheat, cotton, maize, fodder crops, rice and vegetables. This allowed the chowdris to spend less time in the village overseeing agricultural tasks and village affairs and more time in the cities where their children were now being educated.

The greatest demand for labour in the citrus orchards occurred during the harvest season over the three months between the end of December and the end of March. A contractor (*wapari*) who purchased the fruit based on roughly estimated yields while it was still on the trees was in charge of organising the harvest. This included recruiting and organising labourers as well as transporting and selling the fruit. Depending on the size of the orchard and on the speed with which the contractor wanted to complete the harvest, citrus harvesting teams could comprise as many as forty people. Such teams comprised fruit pickers who climbed the trees, people to carry away the fruit in large wicker baskets and load the truck(s) and sometimes a group of people to sort the fruit according to grades of quality and box it. At this time of year it was common for various contractors and their teams of labourers to be working simultaneously in the orchards of different chowdris.

The chowdris had nothing to do with the process other than finding the contractor that offered them the best price for his services. During this time, therefore, labourers dealt directly with the contractors rather than with the chowdris. Fruit pickers earned between Rs.100 and Rs.120 per day making it possible for them to earn around Rs.2500 per month if they worked twenty-five days each month over the three months of the harvest. This was significantly more than what attached farm or domestic

servants earned in monthly wages, and it was also more than what daily wage labourers could expect to earn throughout the rest of the year with the exception of the wheat harvesting season.

Outside of the harvest period, however, the demand for labour in the citrus orchards was relatively low and the chowdris or their managers (*munshis*)<sup>163</sup> organised and recruited labour for the few tasks at hand without the assistance of a contractor. The orchards had to be irrigated throughout the year and in particular during the flowering of the trees in the spring, a task that was generally carried out by a single labourer, usually an attached farm servant. The orchards also had to be fertilised once a year and sprayed with pesticides about six times a year. These tasks were also frequently carried out by a farm servant and a few hired wage labourers who were paid a standard wage of Rs.80 per day. In addition, during the summer months, some labourers were hired to trim the trees and remove any dead branches that had not already been removed for firewood.

The second greatest demand for agricultural labour occurred shortly after the end of the citrus harvest for the wheat harvest that started around the middle of April. Although citrus provided the bulk of the Gondal chowdris' agricultural income they all dedicated some of their land to wheat and fodder cultivation. It was possible to cultivate both of these crops in the citrus orchards when the trees were still relatively small and didn't stop the sunlight from reaching the crops. For the most part, however, the chowdris saved some land solely for the cultivation of these crops. Wheat in the form of unleavened bread (*roti*) was the basic daily staple of ordinary villagers and chowdris alike and all households stored wheat to last them for the entire year if they could afford to do so. Additionally the chowdris kept an important amount of it in order to pay their

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<sup>163</sup> If the chowdri was wealthy enough to employ one.

servants and the kammis who occasionally provided services to them and were paid fixed amounts of wheat on a yearly basis.

During the wheat harvest plots of land were allotted by the chowdris to teams of labourers of up to five people who were frequently, but not necessarily, close kin belonging to a single household. The work was known to be physically exhausting so only the able bodied took part in it, but it was also considered to be the most important and profitable work of the year. Teams of labourers were paid three maunds of wheat per acre harvested meaning that at a value of Rs.400 per maund a team of five labourers could make Rs.250 per head if they harvested an acre a day. Although wheat could be sold and directly converted into cash most people stored it for consumption throughout the year and only occasionally sold some whenever they needed money.

Outside of the wheat and citrus harvests there was no time of the year when almost all of the villagers were working in the fields. People took up wage labour both in and out of agriculture and frequently found employment in construction and sometimes in factories in nearby industrial centres like Sialkot and Faisalabad. However, most of the labourers that I interviewed only took up industrial employment for a few months at a time and at most for a year or two. Although wages in industrial jobs were higher than those in agriculture living expenses in town were significantly higher than in the village where accommodation was free and food was less expensive. Also, industrial labourers had to live far from their families, who could not easily accompany them because of the cost of accommodation, and they were therefore frequently homesick. And, while young and unmarried men were free to go away labourers who were the heads of independent households were reluctant to leave their wives and children to fend for themselves in the village.

Labourers from the various artisan biraderis as well as displaced agricultural tenants told me that the main benefit of free wage labour was that it allowed them to take advantage of the peaks in the agricultural cycle during the wheat and citrus harvests when daily wages were at their highest. Another benefit was that the economic compulsions of wage labour gave them a relatively greater degree of freedom than the extra-economic forms of compulsion that they were subject to if and when they became attached servants with a chowdri. Labourers could now find work with employers as far afield as Islamabad and their livelihoods no longer solely depended upon the Gondal chowdris of Bek Sagrana (who in any case spent each time more of their time living in cities). Both chowdris and kammis told me that as a consequence villagers were relatively freer from the influence of the Gondal chowdris than they had been in the past.

On the other hand, the disadvantage that labourers saw in free wage labour was that it could be difficult to find work on a daily basis outside of the peaks in demand between December and May. Free wage labourers also faced a significant degree of uncertainty as to whether and when employers with whom they didn't have longstanding relationships would actually pay them. In addition to this free wage labourers faced greater difficulties than attached farm and domestic servants in obtaining patronage and loans, both small consumption loans as well as larger loans to cover wedding and medical expenses. Both the uncertainty of free wage labour and the need for patronage meant that many free wage labourers opted to become attached servants with the chowdris, sometimes out of necessity and at other times simply for the sake of security, despite lower wages and working conditions that were known to be exploitative and abusive.



**Figure 5: Labourers harvesting tangerines**

Besides allowing them to take both small consumption and larger loans labourers also took up employment with the Gondal chowdris because it was supposed to entitle them to other forms of patronage including support in case of a dispute, mediation with state institutions and even help in retrieving an eloped wife or daughter. On their side, part of the reason that the chowdris extended such forms of patronage and gave labourers large loans was that they thereby ensured themselves a cheap and permanent supply of labour. This was important to them because in a great economic circularity permanent and reliable labour wasn't readily available due to the reluctance of many labourers to work for them. Chowdris frequently complained that nowadays the only way to obtain labour was by giving loans and patronage. Many chowdris blamed this on the fact that the kammis had inflated job expectations as a result of a combination of education, television and easier access to urban centres. Until the time when the debt was fully repaid chowdris guaranteed themselves cheap labour at their



beck and call by extending loans. Because of the Islamic prohibition on interest these loans were interest free. Nevertheless, as will be shown below, landlords still profited because extending the loans allowed them to reduce their workers' wages. Debts could be repaid after weeks or after an entire generation depending upon both the size of the loan and upon whether the labourer had able bodied siblings that could help him in the process of repaying. For the chowdris having servants was also part of a display of status that demonstrated power and influence. Unlike in modern day Gujarat (Breman 1993) having dependants in the Pakistani Punjab continues to play an important political function for the chowdris because servants, and especially gunmen, are frequently used to settle disputes with enemies (*dushman*) and because dependants more generally are mobilised for their votes during elections.

The sorts of labourers that the chowdris generally required and to whom therefore they saw particular advantage in extending loans and other forms of patronage were farm servants, domestic servants and drivers as well as gunmen. Depending upon the chowdri who employed them it was not uncommon for attached servants to end up having a combination of these duties. The most usual combination was of domestic and farm work, despite generally having being hired for either one or the other. Only in instances where they were hired by village factional leaders involved in politics was it usual for labourers to become gunmen, and only the wealthiest chowdris were likely to hire drivers.<sup>164</sup> Farm work usually involved feeding and milking the livestock,<sup>165</sup> irrigating the orchards and the crops, sowing crops and driving the tractor. The domestic tasks that farm servants ended up having to attend to often included serving food and tea to the chowdris and their guests, cleaning, and being constantly sent on errands to fetch

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<sup>164</sup> Only six Gondal chowdris in the village and the surrounding area had drivers.

<sup>165</sup> Most of the chowdris owned some livestock in the form of cows and buffaloes for the production of milk for domestic consumption.

and buy things, frequently well into the night. Even though they might have their own house in the village, servants were frequently asked to stay the night in order to guard the livestock from roaming cattle thieves and to be on hand if the need for their services arose. Additionally attached servants had to work throughout the year; if they ever wanted a day off it was generally the case that they personally had to provide a replacement to work during their absence.

For all their labour farm and domestic servants rarely earned more than Rs.1500 per month plus eight *maunds* of wheat per year, two meals and a cup of tea a day, and at least one set of clothes per year on *Eid*. In total this amounted to roughly Rs.18,000 per year or Rs.70 per day, which was less than the lowest wages of the agricultural cycle (usually around Rs.80 per day) and considerably less than peak daily agricultural wages earned during the citrus and wheat harvests. However if the servant happened to have a large debt his wages were often significantly lower at around Rs.10,000 per year. It therefore appears that the reason that the chowdris extended loans to servants was because it allowed them to reduce their wages and thereby assure themselves a cheap and permanent supply of labour.

### **Child Servants and Patronage**

The cheapest source of labour available to the chowdris was children as young as five years old. Poor households sometimes sent their children to work in the village or town homes of the chowdris. In exchange for their child parents either obtained some form of patronage, which might include a loan, or payments of around Rs.6000 per year. This practice was justified by the chowdris with the argument that they were doing the children and their families a great favour by hiring them because chowdris themselves would be able to provide for, protect and educate the children better than their parents would. One chowdri told me that the eleven year old girl that worked in his house in

Lahore was there for the protection of her modesty (hayaa) because there were no adult males in her family to keep the young men of the village at bay. In most cases the chowdris told me that they took on such children in order for them to learn how to read the Holy Qur'an as well as how to read and write Urdu. However, for most villagers it went without saying that the children weren't really gaining an education. Villagers knew the children were generally unhappy and homesick, and that they spent most of their time wearily washing dishes, carrying trays, sweeping floors and running errands. Those children who ended up in Lahore or in Sargodha often didn't see their families for months on end. In fact many chowdris purposely avoided taking the children back to the village to visit their families because they claimed that these visits subsequently made them more homesick and less willing to work.

The mindless drudgery of the children's work was clearly illustrated by the case of one seven year old Mussalli boy who worked for the wealthiest chowdri in the village. The child's father had abandoned his family and left its members to fend for themselves. The child's mother had started to work as a servant for a Gondal chowdri but had been unable to make ends meet and was compelled to take several loans from her master. Indebted and still short of money, she eventually accepted Sufi Ahmed Abbas's offer to employ her son. Sufi Ahmed Abbas offered to pay her Rs.400 per month for her son's labour and he also promised to feed, clothe and educate him. Even though her son would be required to spend most of his days and nights at Sufi Ahmed Abbas's farmhouse, the fact that he would be nearby meant that she could occasionally see him in the little free time that she was granted by her own master. Moreover she consoled herself with the idea that Sufi Ahmed Abbas and his wife would be able to give him a better education than she ever could.

The reality however was that her son spent little time studying. His working day started at around five in the morning when he was often sent laden with heavy breakfast trays, which he clearly struggled to carry, to the men's house where guests were staying. The same tasks were often repeated at lunch and dinner times. Between these periods he was largely occupied carrying and fetching things for his masters. Like other chowdris, his masters preferred being served than doing things for themselves, which meant that there was almost no limit to the number of times he might be sent to fetch a glass of water, a cup of tea or a packet of cigarettes. I witnessed several instances when he would be called from another room in order to bring a glass of water that was only a couple of metres away from his master. He also spent so much time running around communicating messages between his master and different labourers that villagers came to refer to him affectionately as Nokia after the brand of mobile phone.

Needless to say the repetitive and mindless nature of the tasks that he was set meant that he often appeared weary and bored. As a result he was often careless and his masters frequently reprimanded him for it. By evening time he was generally exhausted and I often saw him fall asleep on the spot at the men's house while guests were eating. Even though his mother lived close by he didn't get so many opportunities to see her, and like other children in his situation he was often homesick. There were even fewer occasions when he could see his elder sister, who had also been placed with a family as a servant shortly after he had. For her part his sister had even fewer chances to see her mother since she lived in town. However her situation was mitigated by the fact that she lived with a pious middle class family who treated her with affection and appeared to be genuinely concerned with her education. Nevertheless, despite being treated relatively well she remained a servant and was not the equal of her masters' children. While the

other children went to school she spent her days working and studying at home, and while the other children played she often had to help out with domestic chores.

Attitudes of class difference and discrimination towards the servant children were passed from the chowdris and their wives to their own children. Frequently the children of the households were told that the child servants were jangli, meaning wild and ill-mannered. As a result the children of the chowdris quickly came to look down on the children who worked in their homes. On one occasion an eight year old chowdrani, who appeared to be piqued by the fact that I was giving more attention to the young boy servant than to her, told me that the boy servant was ill-mannered, dirty, lazy and stupid and went on to explain that such was true of Mussallis generally. In addition, chowdris rarely reprimanded their children if they struck a child servant in a quarrel for example, but they were quick to reprimand a child servant if he or she had hit their child under similar circumstances. As a result young masters quickly learned that they were in a position of power and knew that they could get away with treating their servants badly. For their part, child servants often grew resentful of their masters and vented their feelings in a variety of ways. I once caught the young boy who was described by his young mistress as ill-mannered and stupid aggressively slapping and pinching the two year old child of his master after being left alone with it. Given the way that he was treated around the house and his generally unhappy appearance, it is not unreasonable to assume that he was venting feelings of anger and discontent upon the only member of the household who was not in a position of power over him. Others vented their discontent in different ways. One twelve year old boy told me about how when he had been a servant as a small child he would purposely run up large phone bills on his master's phone by calling a friend of his in town. The same boy told me that when in the early mornings his masters would call him he pretended to remain asleep in

order to waste time. He also told me that on the few occasions when his masters brought him to stay with his family in the village for a few days he would go into hiding on the day that he was due to go back to Lahore.

It is clear from the evidence that even in the best cases servant children had a hard time. Adults who had been child servants almost unanimously told me that they didn't wish their children to go through the same experiences that they had despite the bonds of mutual understanding that almost inevitably developed between them and their masters. Those who spent their entire childhoods and in some cases their entire adult lives as servants were effectively inferior members of their masters' families. As family members of a sort, long-serving child servants developed some emotional attachment with the families but these ties were rarely unqualified feelings of affection and were most often strongly tinged with resentment. Such mixed feelings probably arose in large measure from the fact that while their masters inevitably took on the role of parental figures for them on one hand, as parental figures their masters were often demanding and unloving on the other. The fact that masters were parental figures for their child servants was underlined linguistically when servants who had been raised by their masters compared them to fathers and mothers (*maa aur baap*). It was also underlined by the fact that child servants often acquired the habits and mannerisms of their masters. In fact villagers often commented that the behaviour of close servants resembled that of their masters.

The most striking example of this in Bek Sagrana was provided by a close servant of Chowdri Mazhar Ali's younger brother Chowdri Arif. The servant, named Bashir, came from a poor Machi family and had worked with Chowdri Arif and his family between the ages of eight and twenty-eight. Even once he had ceased being formally employed by Chowdri Arif he maintained a relationship with him. He often

visited Chowdri Arif in his farmhouse and performed odd jobs for him. What was striking about Bashir was the degree to which Chowdri Arif's influence upon him as a parental role model was visible. Bashir had inherited many of the marked mannerisms of his master and could easily have been taken for his son. The resemblance between master and servant was such that villagers jokingly referred to Bashir as Chowdri Arif. Bashir explained to me that it was inevitable that he should have come to resemble his master after serving him day and night for twenty years. He had shared the intimate daily routines of Chowdri Arif and his family and knew all of the family's quarrels, vices and secrets, including the many secrets that members of Chowdri Arif's family kept from each other.<sup>166</sup> Such shared secrets obviously added to the intimacy between Bashir and his masters, but despite this intimacy and some material benefits Bashir felt that his time spent as a servant had not been worth it. This was the case even though Bashir could approach his masters for patronage and that Chowdri Arif had helped him to buy a rickshaw after his term of employment had ended. Bashir claimed that Chowdri Arif had tricked him into becoming his servant when he was eight by promising to teach him how to drive. Had it not been for this trick Bashir claims that he would not have voluntarily left his family. Although he eventually did learn how to drive he spent most of his childhood doing tiresome household chores. He complained that his masters had often slapped him and that Chowdri Arif frequently punished him in the manner of schoolmasters by making him squat down and hold his ears with his arms under his legs (*kaan pakarna*). He also complained that Chowdri Arif, who was a notoriously stingy man, had generally made sure that his wife served him only leftovers of food and very little meat.

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<sup>166</sup> For example, he knew that both Chowdri Arif and his eldest son drank alcohol and frequented prostitutes.

Another villager who regretted his childhood as a servant was Bilal Mirasi. He was frequently singled out by villagers as an example of the psychological damage suffered by child servants. Bilal Mirasi, or Ballu as he was nicknamed,<sup>167</sup> had started to work for Chowdri Mahmood Abbas at the age of five following his father's death. He continued to work for him until he was twenty. Afterward, like Bashir, he had maintained contact with his masters and occasionally worked for them. For example he would sometimes accompany Sufi Ahmed Abbas's younger son when he travelled to visit friends.<sup>168</sup> Like other child servants he had performed mindless work for long hours throughout his childhood. However, unlike Bashir, he had acquired few skills that might help him find employment in the wider world. While Bashir had learned how to read and drive, Bilal had learned nothing and remained illiterate.

Villagers commented that because Bilal had been treated as if he had no feelings, like an animal (*janvaar*), he had grown up to be useless as well as mentally damaged (*pagal*). They claimed that it was because of this that Bilal was unable to work consistently and spent his days smoking marijuana. As a result he was unable to provide for his children, who went around dressed in rags. His reputedly peculiar sense of logic was also used as evidence of the damage that had been done to him. People additionally observed that the damaging hardship that he had endured as a child wasn't even mitigated later by any significant form of patronage from his former masters. As evidence, villagers cited the fact that Bilal was one of the poorest men living around the farmhouse (*dera*) of Sufi Ahmed Abbas. Bilal lived in a mud hut with a single bedroom that had almost no furniture. The hut remained unconnected to the electrical grid

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<sup>167</sup> Kammiss and servants were often given nicknames so that a name like Qasim became Qasu, Mehmood became Mooda, Ghulaam Ali became Gamma and Bilal became Ballu. Chowdri on the other hand were always called by their full names and were additionally addressed with the honorific term chowdri when they were being addressed by subordinates.

<sup>168</sup> This could sometimes be lucrative because his master's friends occasionally gave him gifts of money.



because Bilal couldn't afford the bills. His former masters rarely offered him assistance and showed little concern for his children, who ran around naked or in rags with faces caked in mud and mucus. Once when Bilal's eldest son suffered a severe electric shock from a faulty fan (*pankah*) Sufi Ahmed Abbas offered no help in getting the child to a doctor. Instead it was the village mullah, who lived near Bilal but didn't possess even a fraction of the wealth and influence of Sufi Ahmed Abbas, who took Bilal's son to the local hospital on his motorcycle.

This evidence and more made villagers certain that the costs of being a child servant with a chowdri outweighed any of the benefits. Parents who sent their children away to work as servants were often embarrassed about it and justified it to themselves and others by invoking necessity or the need for their children to get an education. Many people told me that they would only send their child to work with a chowdri as a last resort because of economic hardship or because a chowdri had forced them to do so. People's desire for their children not to become servants of the chowdris was clearly illustrated when Dr. Muzaffar Abbas, Sufi Ahmed Abbas's eldest son, asked his Mussalli driver to send one of his sons to work for him as a servant in Lahore. The driver implored his master not to ask this of him, arguing that it would break his wife's heart to see any of her children go. Later the Mussalli driver decided that his son would be much better off if he worked as an apprentice with a mechanic in the nearby market town. He argued that in this way he would actually learn a skill other than carrying serving trays. After the driver succeed in sending his son to become an apprentice many of the other kammis who lived around Sufi Ahmed Abbas's farmhouse decided to follow his example with their own children for the same reasons.

## **Debt and Bondage**

The extending of loans by chowdris to kammis was discussed earlier, and it was noted that this benefited the chowdri by ensuring him of reduced-cost labour over a long period. Various factors worked together to keep this situation stable and ensure that servants remained bound to their debit obligations towards the chowdris. To begin with servants who had debts couldn't simply run away for the simple reason that they usually had no place to go. Servants had few places outside their home village they could run to and be beyond the reach of the chowdris. If they ran away from Bek Sagrana to nearby villages, or even to the nearby town of Sargodha, the chowdris were likely to find them through their local contacts. Generally kammis had few contacts in faraway cities or villages that they could rely on to help them find employment and accommodation, but even if they did have friends or relatives in cities like Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Jhang or Lahore, those relatives that stayed behind in the village were likely to know where those contacts lived and to tell the chowdri if put under pressure. It was also widely believed that the chowdris could enlist the support of the police to retrieve and even jail escaped bonded labourers (although this hadn't happened to any of the bonded labourers that I knew). In fact findings by Human Rights Watch (1995: 70) confirm that the Pakistani police frequently arrest bonded labourers who resist their employers or try to file charges against them. The labourers are often arrested on fabricated charges of theft and the police routinely fail to file complaints against employers (*ibid*).

In most cases, however, the chowdris could rely on the kin of attached servants to ensure that they repaid their loans and didn't run away. When a chowdri made a loan to a labourer he generally obtained a guarantor (*zaman*) from among the labourer's household's kinsmen. The guarantor was responsible for repaying the loan, in labour or in kind, if the labourer failed to meet his obligations through abandoning his duties,

illness or death. In cases where the house of an attached servant was located on the land of the employer it was generally taken for granted that other able bodied household members would be held responsible in case the attached servant defaulted on his debt servicing obligations. It was therefore in the interest of kinsmen to prevent their attached relatives from running away, and by extension it was also in their interest to help the attached relatives to service their debts so as to prevent them from wearying of their work and running away, leaving the kinsmen with the burden of servicing the debt in their place. This help took the form of supporting them economically so that they didn't need to take their monthly wages from the chowdri. Thus an indebted attached servant who was paid Rs.10,000 per year could eliminate that amount from his debt if he refrained from claiming his wages and relied on his kinsmen to cover for his basic needs.

The case of Muhammad Hussain Mussalli and his younger brothers serves to illustrate how siblings could cooperate in order to repay a loan from a chowdri. Muhammad Hussain's family was well off in comparison to most other Mussallis. The family lived in one of the colony schemes established in Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's time and possessed legal title to the plot of land where their three bedroom brick and mud house was situated. Muhammad Hussain's father had made a decent living by dealing in timber and by working as the cleric (*maulvi*) at the small mosque in the centre of Sikander Colony. He had five sons of whom Muhammad Hussain was the eldest, and he had been able to pay for Muhammad Hussain's education through primary and secondary school. Subsequently Muhammad Hussain had spent two years in a nearby *Bareilvi madrassah* where he had become a *Hafiz-e Qur'an*.<sup>169</sup> After this he had taken up a job as a teacher in a small private primary school owned by a retired air force

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<sup>169</sup> A *Hafiz-e Qur'an* is a person who can recite the Holy Qur'an by heart.

major in nearby Gullhapur. He earned only about Rs.1500 per month<sup>170</sup> but between his wages and those of his two siblings of working age, along with some money that his now old and half-retired father continued to receive on Eid, they lived relatively well. The two brothers immediately junior to him had dropped out of school at a young age and worked as daily wage labourers, taking up employment according to the agricultural cycle. Muhammad Hussain's two youngest brothers were still attending school.

Given his educational qualifications, Muhammad Hussain hoped that he might obtain a low ranking government job or even a job in the military. However he was painfully aware of the fact that he needed the patronage of an influential person for this to happen. The retired air force officer who owned the school where he worked, and who was a relatively influential chowdri in his area, offered to help him out on the military side but was not able to guarantee anything. As for the possibility of a government job Muhammad Hussain complained that despite vague promises none of the Gondal chowdri in the area were helping him. Like many others in similar situations, Muhammad Hussain asserted that the reason for this was that the Gondals didn't want to see locals becoming economically independent because it meant that they would no longer have people around to serve them. He also claimed that many of the chowdri resented the fact that he was an educated Mussalli. He claimed to notice a note of mockery when they referred to him with the honorific *Hafiz-ji*. This suspicion was not groundless; several chowdri who knew that I was Muhammad Hussain's friend told me that he was an uneducated Mussalli and couldn't possibly have any real understanding of Islam.

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<sup>170</sup> This was far less than the minimum of Rs.6000 that junior school teachers earned in government schools, and was the equivalent of what most farm and domestic servants earned. Wages for teachers in small private schools were generally low and most of the teachers in them wanted to get work in a government school but were unable to for lack of a patron willing to help them.

When Muhammad Hussain reached the age of twenty his father decided to have him marry and also decided that his second son should obtain a loan of Rs.30,000 from a landlord to finance the wedding. The father hoped that by pooling their earnings and selling some of their livestock all three siblings would be able to repay the loan in under a year. Unfortunately things didn't turn out so well. Within three weeks of Muhammad Hussain's wedding his father had a heart attack and was hospitalised. This meant that the family had to borrow a further Rs.30,000 from the same chowdri in order to cover multiple medical expenses. Even though half of the debt had been incurred on behalf of Muhammad Hussain it was the second son, Muhammad Irfan, who became the servant of the landlord from whom the loan had been taken. One reason that it wasn't Muhammad Hussain was that he already had a job with which he could contribute to repaying the loan. Another reason was that his parents still hoped that with his qualifications and some patronage he might be able to get a better paid job that would help the family cover its debts. Yet another reason was that, although he was hard-working, Muhammad Hussain was unfit to do the sort of physical labour that would have been expected of him working for a chowdri, and was better suited to work of a more intellectual nature. Muhammad Hussain told me himself that he was incapable of doing heavy agricultural labour. He said that he had once tried harvesting wheat and had ended up severely ill for several days as a result.<sup>171</sup>

Muhammad Irfan was offered the low salary of twenty four maunds of wheat per year. At the price of Rs.450 per maund this was equivalent to about Rs.10,800 per year. In addition to this he was to be provided with two meals per day and a cup tea in the afternoons. His main task was to attend to the livestock but, like most other attached farm servants, he also had to perform a wide range of other tasks which included

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<sup>171</sup> Wheat harvesting is done with a sickle and occurs around May when the temperature starts rising. It is extremely physically demanding.

running errands and attending to guests well into the night. He was required to sleep at the chowdri's farmhouse to guard the livestock from roaming thieves and was only allowed to take a day off if he could provide someone to replace him. Muhammad Irfan frequently complained that his master verbally abused him and never gave him a minute's rest.

Although it was Muhammad Irfan who had to put up with the worst hardship his two siblings worked hard to help him eliminate the debt incurred by the family as a whole. Muhammad Hussain and his other younger sibling pooled their incomes in order to sustain the entire family. This included sustaining Muhammad Irfan so that he wouldn't need to claim the twenty four maunds of wheat from his chowdri, diminishing the Rs.60,000 debt by Rs.10,000 by the end of the year. They provided Muhammad Irfan with pocket money of around Rs.300 per month in order for him to purchase basic necessities such as soap and cigarettes. In order to repay the debt more quickly Muhammad Hussain took on extra work in the afternoons after he was finished teaching in the school. At one stage Sufi Ahmed Abbas offered him Rs.600 per month plus daily breakfast and dinner to make the call to prayer three times a day and recite the Holy Qur'an on the loudspeaker in the mornings.<sup>172</sup> Muhammad Hussain accepted the offer and did it for a month, but when the time came to claim his wages Sufi Ahmed Abbas falsely accused him of shirking and failing to perform the call to prayer on several occasions.<sup>173</sup> Sufi Ahmed Abbas decided to deduct the cost of the two daily meals from the monthly pay and told Muhammad Hussain that he would only pay him Rs.300. Muhammad Hussain was outraged by the behaviour of the pious chowdri and left without taking any of the money. After this Muhammad Hussain managed to get a

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<sup>172</sup> Teaching obligations prevented Muhammad Hussain from making the late morning and afternoon calls to prayer.

<sup>173</sup> The truth was that Muhammad Hussain had only missed a total of two calls to prayer.

temporary job as a security guard at a construction site in the nearby market town. There he earned Rs.1000 for his evening and night shifts. The job didn't last for more than three months but during that time Muhammad Hussain became completely exhausted by working all night then teaching from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon. The younger brother contributed to the repayment of the debt by working during the tangerine and wheat harvests and by finding work in construction outside the peak periods in the agricultural cycle.

With great effort the family managed to decrease its' debt by Rs.10,000 within a year. In the second year Muhammad Irfan shifted to another chowdri who offered to pay him Rs.15,000 per year and purchased the remaining debt of Rs.50,000 from the previous employer.<sup>174</sup> In that year the debt was further reduced by Rs.15,000 through the ongoing combined efforts of the three siblings. Muhammad Hussain continued teaching and taking up supplementary jobs in the afternoons. In the meantime he continued searching for patronage in order to obtain a formal sector job. During this time his younger brother continued doing daily wage labour. The remaining Rs.45,000 was repaid shortly after the end of this second year when the family sold a buffalo and some goats that they had been raising in order to cover the debt. When the debt was finally repaid Muhammad Irfan returned home and Muhammad Hussain invited me to his house to celebrate the end of their 'punishment' (*azaab*) with a large meal.

After this Muhammad Irfan, who felt physically and mentally drained after his two years of hard labour, took several months off work to recover. Muhammad Hussain managed to get a government job in southern Punjab with the National Logistics Cell through the patronage of the retired air force major. In the end, however, the job proved

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<sup>174</sup> It was possible for indebted labourers to leave their employer as long as another employer was willing to purchase their debt. It was an unwritten rule amongst the chowdris that they didn't poach each other's bonded labourers, even when they were hardened enemies. Doing so was seen as a lowly act by the chowdris as it was tantamount to stealing money.

to be a great disappointment. The National Logistics Cell was a notoriously corrupt branch of the army supposed to combat smuggling of various sorts on Pakistan's main highways. As it turned out patronage was not only necessary to obtain the job but also in order to keep. While he was on the job Muhammad Hussain witnessed one of his superiors taking a bribe from a heroin smuggler. When the superior in question was later questioned about this by his own superiors he summoned Muhammad Hussain to lie that he hadn't seen him taking the bribe. But when Muhammad Hussain was asked to swear on the Holy Qu'ran that his superior hadn't taken a bribe he refused to do so. As a result his superior, who actually got away with taking the bribe, transferred Muhammad Hussain to a remote location in Sindh. Muhammad Hussain told me that without a superior to look after his interests it was impossible not to be pushed around in such cases. Furthermore his pay was only Rs.3000 per month and he spent almost Rs.1000 of this when he returned to visit his family and wife. In the end he decided that he would be better off earning only Rs.2000 somewhere nearer to home where he wouldn't be homesick and wouldn't have to compromise his integrity by turning a blind eye to heroin smuggling and human trafficking.<sup>175</sup>

As a result of all of these experiences Muhammad Hussain grew increasingly bitter about the daily injustices faced by the majority of Pakistanis. He would often talk about the way that the landlords were holding the country back and about how all of their activities violated the basic tenets of Islam. At one stage he even joined a local worker and farmer (*kisan aur mazdoor*) movement headed by a retired army colonel in Sargodha. Muhammad Hussain told me that the movement gained a number of followers from within the district and that rallies and other functions were held on a

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<sup>175</sup> Muhammad Hussain told me that following the devastating earthquake in Kashmir in 2005 he witnessed two instances of human trafficking in which Pathans had stolen orphaned Kashmiri children in order to sell them into various kinds of servitude in Karachi.



regular basis. Muhammad Hussain became a member and discretely went around the area of Bek Sagrama getting people to sign up and make small contributions to the movement. He claimed that he managed to arouse the interest of some people but that the majority appeared to think that the whole exercise was futile. The doubters were eventually proven right when the retired colonel ran away with all of the money that he had allegedly been collecting for the movement. Obviously this episode left Muhammad Hussain even more embittered.

### **Other Cases**

Instances whereby families cooperated in order to repay a loan from a landlord like the one described above were quite common. For example, one labourer who belonged to a family of impoverished non-Gondal zamindar tenants also managed to pay off a loan from a chowdri thanks to the income and labour of three able bodied siblings. The labourer had obtained a loan of Rs.50,000 from a chowdri in order to cover his father's medical expenses. Thanks to the labour of his siblings and the sale of some livestock the loan was repaid after two and a half years of toil.

There were instances, however, when the joint servicing of debts didn't go so smoothly and could result in bitterness and conflict within households. In one Mirasi household the older of two brothers secured a loan of Rs.15,000 from a Gondal chowdri in order to cover joint wedding expenses for himself and his younger brother. The brothers agreed that they would service the debt by working for two different landlords. In the end, however, it was the older brother who ended up having to pay the greater part of the loan because his younger brother left his master after only six months of work and then spent several months wasting time without permanent employment. Thus the elder brother worked for a year and a half for a chowdri and repaid Rs.11,000 while his younger brother repaid only Rs.4000. This situation created a great deal of bitterness

between the two brothers but they still continued to live in a joint household with their parents.

When indebted servants had no able bodied siblings or parents to assist them, repaying a loan could take an entire lifetime and, rather than see their debts diminish, they were likely to see them grow. Repayment was even more difficult if a household was afflicted by additional crises such as illness or drug addiction. In one instance, a Mussalli who was a heroin addict had given his seven year old son Fazi over as a servant to a Gondal chowdri in exchange for Rs.6,000 per year and various small cash advances. The family had come to depend economically on the young boy because of the father's addiction and the absence of other able bodied males in the household. By the time Fazi turned seventeen, the debt had risen to Rs.20,000 as the household was continually short of money. The father had sold much of the furniture in the house in order to finance his heroin addiction. The debt further increased by Rs.30,000 when Fazi and his sister got married. At the time of fieldwork, the outstanding amount totalled Rs.50,000 and the *Ranjha* chowdri had decided to cut off any further flow of credit because it was becoming unlikely that the loan would ever be repaid.

The situation for Fazi had, however, become more hopeful as he now had a younger sibling of working age who was working in a vermicelli (*sevian*) factory in Sargodha and was contributing to family finances. The father had also ceased to be a burden since going to Islamabad where he found work in a market carrying people's shopping bags to finance his heroin addiction himself. In addition, a charitable and pious *Ranjha* chowdri had given Fazi a baby buffalo to rear, such that when the animal was fully grown they would share the proceeds equally. An adult buffalo could be sold for about Rs.80,000, allowing Fazi to reduce his debt by as much as Rs.40,000 from his share. However, there was an unfortunate setback: his sister contracted tuberculosis and

her in-laws sent her back home because she had become a financial burden. Medical treatment was expensive and Fazi, who was desperate to repay his debt, complained that it was the duty of his sister's in-laws to take care of her. He threatened not to make any financial contributions towards her treatment.

### **Weapons of the Weak<sup>176</sup>**

Most of the servants that I interacted with deeply resented their employers. On one occasion I saw a servant spit and throw angry punches at a photograph of his master. The same servant would often steal flour from his master's kitchen whenever his master was away in Lahore. He would also occasionally raid his master's hidden alcohol supplies and then invite friends over to his master's empty house to get drunk and watch Punjabi and Bollywood movies on the DVD player. For servants who had no debts, and gunmen in particular, the greatest gesture of discontent was to desert their masters and join their rivals, to whom they generally revealed all of their former master's secrets. Servants with debts could not do this because the chowdris had an agreement not to poach them from each other unless their debts were settled. They could of course try to run away altogether but as noted above this wasn't easy to achieve and relatives left behind were likely to pay the price for it.

Because these acts were largely individual and isolated and because they never openly challenged the chowdris they were a far cry from the openly assertive behaviour of labourers in Gujarat documented by Breman (1993) or the assertive behaviour of Dalits in Uttar Pradesh described by Jeffrey & Lerche (2000). In public servants and villagers generally continued to enact displays of subordination towards the chowdris whom they greeted with a bow and with their right hand upon their hearts expressing thankfulness. When they sat in a group with the chowdris it was still quite common for

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<sup>176</sup> Scott (1985)

them to squat on the floor while the chowdri sat above them on a charpai. In any case, the fact that they didn't just walk out of their jobs but instead resorted to 'weapons of the weak' such as surreptitious shows of contempt or petty theft illustrated the absence of any real bargaining power on their part.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter has shown that changes in the regional agrarian economy, largely due to the introduction of citrus orchards together with broader economic expansion in non-agricultural sectors, resulted in the decreased economic dependence of rural labourers on the chowdris. However, these changes in the regional economy were not matched by changes in the highly unequal political structure, and the livelihood strategies of labourers continued to be circumscribed by the political influence of the chowdris. Not only did the chowdris have the means to coerce labourers physically, in certain cases through their gunmen, but they also had a virtual monopoly over access to the state meaning that they had the power to grant and withhold patronage in ways that almost always furthered their personal interests. Labourers continued to depend largely on the chowdris for patronage in the form of mediation with state institutions, dispute resolution and the extension of credit. The result of this was that despite their dislike of the chowdris labourers going through periods of hardship were compelled to seek attached employment with them. However, the partial proletarianization of the workforce did have the important consequence that it caused the chowdris to rely increasingly on the threat of coercion and on their capacity to grant and to withhold patronage in order to obtain both labour and political support. Without these things the chowdris were finding it increasingly difficult to attract labourers. Arguably the result of this was that relations between the chowdris and the labourers increasingly fraught. The chowdris continued to expect villagers to serve them but the latter increasingly

sought better job opportunities outside the village. As a result the chowdris complained about the raised expectations of villagers whom they believed to be aiming to rise up above their 'proper' station in life, and some chowdris even actively sought to put them back into place. For example, one chowdri prevented a Mussalli from getting a permanent job in a nearby factory by phoning the management and telling them not to take him on. The chowdri in question later told me that if all the villagers started getting such jobs that there would be no one left to work in the fields. Others sought to keep kammis in their place by humiliating them when they wore new clothes or by mocking them when they spoke Urdu rather than Punjabi.<sup>177</sup>

However, unlike in the areas of India referred to at the beginning of this chapter where labourers were increasingly independent from as well as increasingly assertive towards their employers, the outward behaviour of labourers in the Pakistani Punjab remained solicitous and obsequious. I suggest that the principal reason for these differences is found in broad differences in the political evolution and development of India and Pakistan. The fact that Pakistan lacked a popular national political party at independence and that repeated military interventions over the country's sixty year history severely curtailed the possibility of the development of genuinely popular political parties and had highly deleterious consequences for the country's social and political development. One significant consequence of this was that the Pakistani masses never witnessed the sort of political empowerment that some of their counterparts in India enjoyed over the past several decades. Thus the assertiveness of the Dalits described by Lerche and Jeffrey (2000) under Mayawati in Uttar Pradesh as well as that of labourers described by Breman (1996) in Gujarat remained largely

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<sup>177</sup> Urdu was considered to be the language of the educated elites and therefore the chowdris thought that it was ridiculous for kammis to speak it. On several occasions chowdris made fun of kammis who spoke with me in Urdu by sarcastically telling them that they had now become teachers (*ustad*).

unthinkable for many labourers and kammis in much of the central, southern and western Punjab. Nevertheless, as this chapter has illustrated many labourers and kammis resented their subordination and their lack of assertiveness could not be taken to mean that they fully acquiesced to it. The case of Muhammad Hussain Mussalli, who felt strongly enough to join a workers' movement however corrupt its leader turned out to be, illustrated the fact that given a chance some of the more enterprising and thoughtful labourers were prepared to mobilise against their oppressors. In fact political developments in the 1970s (discussed in chapter two) illustrate that the pent up frustration of landless labourers, artisans and tenants could erupt into the political scene if given a chance.

Subsequently the result of policies implemented by successive military regimes in Pakistan was to fragment the political landscape and to thereby forestall the emergence of large scale popular political movements such as the one witnessed during the rise of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1970. In this fragmented political landscape politicians largely ceased to focus on national issues, legislation and policy making and became almost exclusively concerned with consolidating their position as local patrons. One consequence of this is that rural strongmen in the Punjab, such as members of the Gondal biraderi described in this thesis, consolidated their political and economic fortunes and continued to be the principal mediators between the have-nots and the state. There was no political party or organisation based either on class or on caste to which tenants and landless labourers could turn for support and they were therefore largely restricted to seeking patronage from local landlords. In this manner political mobilisation in much of the rural Pakistani Punjab remained factional, characterised by a vertical structure of power that cross cut both ties of caste and class.

## Chapter Five: Elections and Devolution

The previous chapter concluded with the argument that one of the reasons that landless tenants and labourers didn't unite in order to assert themselves politically was that authoritarian and military rule had succeeded in forestalling mass political movements by fragmenting the political landscape. As a result grievances and discontent were only furtively expressed through the weapons of the weak (Scott 1985) and people continued, both actively and passively, to participate in a system of domination that reproduced their own subordination. Their active participation in the reproduction of their own subordination consisted not only in their working for the chowdris on terms that were highly unfavourable to them (generally in exchange for loans or patronage) but also, as this chapter will illustrate, in their frequent political support for the chowdris, to whom they gave their votes either under compulsion, in exchange for temporary compensation, or even in the hope of obtaining future patronage. Their passive participation consisted in their doing little to challenge their own subordination (though not without reason given the potential consequences) and, as this chapter will also illustrate, in their frequently indifferent and cynical attitudes towards politics.

This chapter further explores the links between authoritarian rule and the consolidation of the political power of the landlords by focusing on the issue of electoral politics. It shows why elections have largely failed to empower the underprivileged masses, unlike in areas of India such as Uttar Pradesh. It also shows how the interaction between politics at the centre and politics at the local level has contributed to the consolidation of the chowdris' political power through the electoral process. By exploring the interaction between politics at the centre and at local levels

the chapter seeks to impart to and expand upon existing literature on Pakistan that focuses on national-level politics but often doesn't consider the various ways in which local factors impact upon it. The work of authors such as Wilder (1999, 2004) and Waseem (1993), among others, as well as various reports by the International Crisis Group (2005b, 2004b) have all provided valuable evidence of the various machinations employed by authoritarian central governments in Islamabad to retain political power. These include various forms of electoral and pre-electoral rigging as well as the holding of non-party elections, devolution programmes and national referendums. This has rightly led Wilder to claim that a consistent theme running almost throughout the seven national party-based elections held in Pakistan prior to 2008—as well as the various non-party and local party elections and presidential referendums—has been “to legitimize the retention of power by the unelected institutions of the state rather than to transfer power to local institutions” (Wilder 2004: 102). What needs to be added to this account of the lack of popular political enfranchisement, however, is that the local power structures described in this thesis also work against it, even though ultimately these structures are reinforced by authoritarian governments. This chapter shows that the entrenchment of parochial politics has perpetuated the inability of even military central governments to determine what happens locally. Not only is the government unable to implement its policies because in villages like Bek SAGRANA and others throughout the Punjab powerful landlord lineages wield disproportionate political and economic power (often with the assistance of armed militias), but also because the police and other government institutions often act in pursuit of their own predatory local agendas. As previous chapters have shown, institutions such as the police sometimes pursue these activities on their own and at other times in collusion with local landlords and the criminal elements that are frequently allied to them. Consequently, both the



central government's well intentioned and less well intentioned policies can often be totally subverted locally.

Against this background, even if General Musharraf's devolution programme had genuinely been geared towards the empowerment of the masses and towards greater accountability on the part of local government that this would imply (and it will be argued below that there is reason to doubt that this was actually the case), it is by no means clear that this end could have been achieved without a drastic redistribution of political and economic resources and the mass social mobilisation—not to mention social upheaval—that this would require. As this chapter will show, even if the central government wanted to hold free and fair elections it appears unlikely that it would be able to do so by relying solely on the local arms of the state due to the stranglehold over their constituencies of many local politicians. Even where Musharraf's government was determined to rig local body elections,<sup>178</sup> local factors could often intervene to subvert this aim. In fact the evidence provided here shows that there were instances in the local body elections of 2005 where local opposition politicians actually succeeded in rigging the elections in their own favour. This was achieved through the cooperation of polling officers and policemen who were friendly towards local politicians and were willing to overlook, and sometimes actively to cooperate in, a wide array of electoral malpractices. These might include among other things the takeover of polling stations by the strongmen of local politicians.

### **Devolution**

On the 23rd of March 2000, General Pervez Musharraf declared that devolution “was the beginning of a constructive, democratic, dynamic revolution whose sole objective is to place in [the] hands of the people the power to shape their own

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<sup>178</sup> It will be seen that there is ample evidence to show that this was true in some cases.

destiny...an unprecedented transfer of power will take place from the elites to the vast majority.” (ICG 2004b: 5) The programme, devised and funded by various international organisations including Britain’s Department for International Development, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, aimed to encourage grassroots political participation and greater government accountability through the creation of various tiers of local government. According to a report by the World Bank (1998) entitled “A Framework for Civil Service Reform in Pakistan” governance in Pakistan suffered from (a) an over-centralised organisational structure, (b) a serious lack of accountability to the public resulting from both a colonial legacy and years of military dictatorship and (c) the politicisation of civil service decision-making and the failure of politicians to exercise their oversight role in the wider public interest.

LaPorte (2004: 155) argues that the lack of accountability of Pakistan’s civil service can be traced back to the early days of independence when Mohammad Ali Jinnah perpetuated the colonial vice-regal tradition by designating himself Governor General with the power to bypass ministers and deal directly with civil servants. After Jinnah’s death successive governors general<sup>179</sup> largely retained these vice-regal powers. Up to the time of Musharraf’s takeover, the local embodiment of this centralised, top down, bureaucratic power structure had been the Deputy Commissioner, who served as a one-man locus of judicial, executive and revenue functions at the divisional level. The Deputy Commissioner was largely an instrument of centralised government control who kept opposition politicians in check and rewarded political supporters. One fairly obvious consequence of this was that the concentration of powers in the Deputy Commissioner’s hands created a vast potential for corruption and the abuse of power.

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<sup>179</sup> The 1956 Constitution changed the title of the head of state to President.

General Musharraf's devolution programme was ostensibly aimed at doing away with the vice-regal tradition of governance in order to further democratisation and accountability. It was to do this by giving greater administrative powers to various elected tiers of local government and abolishing the powerful position of Deputy Commissioner. However, aside from the fact that democratisation through a military government is in itself contradictory, there are various reasons to doubt the intentions of Musharraf's government in implementing devolution. Evidence from the International Crisis Group as well as the evidence presented in this chapter suggests that Musharraf's military government may in fact have been more interested in appeasing international donor countries and reducing pressure from them than with actual democratisation and accountability. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989 Pakistan lost its status as a frontline state in the war against communism, and two years later the United States cut short its economic assistance to Pakistan when Pakistan began trying to develop nuclear capability. In 1998, the USA imposed economic sanctions on Pakistan after the country tested two nuclear bombs. General Musharraf's military takeover in 1999 did little to improve the country's international standing. Given Pakistan's historical dependence on foreign aid, the implementation of a devolution programme was a good way to appease international calls for democratisation and to get foreign aid flowing once again.

Although the devolution programme on its own may have achieved some of these aims it was the events of September 11th, 2001 which decisively got foreign aid flowing back into Pakistan. The Afghan Jihad in the eighties had helped to prop up the military regime of General Zia-ul Haq through military and development funds and other assistance received principally from the USA. Similarly, the events of September 11th propped up General Musharraf's government and transformed Pakistan from an

international pariah into a frontline ally in the war on terror almost overnight. In the context of the international war on terror devolution took on renewed importance as it was presented to the international community as a way of increasing political stability in Pakistan and therefore, implicitly, as a way of avoiding the possibility of extremists taking control of the country and, most particularly, its nuclear assets.<sup>180</sup>

It is reasonable to conclude that domestically General Musharraf was following in the footsteps of his military predecessors who through similar though supposedly less radical devolution schemes sought to institute lower tiers of government as a substitute for democratisation at the provincial and national levels. The ICG report of 2004 suggests that both General Ayub Khan's and General Zia-ul Haq's military governments used local government programmes in order to: "(1) depoliticise governance; (2) create a new political elite to challenge and undermine the political opposition; (3) demonstrate the democratic credentials of a regime to domestic and external audiences; and (4) undermine federalism by circumventing constitutional provisions for provincial political, administrative, and fiscal autonomy" (ICG 2004b: 1). General Ayub Khan introduced his Basic Democracy plan as a nominal concession to democracy after having suspended the constitution. He argued that the nature of Pakistani society meant that it wasn't ready for fully fledged democracy and that it needed the benevolent, modernising guidance of an enlightened elite. Under the Basic Democracy plan Pakistan was divided into 80,000 wards to elect a 'Basic Democrat' on a non-party basis, and local councils were created at the district as well as at the union, tehsil and *thana* levels. Roughly half of the members of the local councils were officially nominated while those who were directly elected largely remained under the

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<sup>180</sup> See the international Crisis Group (2005b:11) on how the government claimed that the local government scheme helped weaken extremism.

control of the district administration (which unlike under Musharraf's local government system remained unreformed, and retained the power to overrule council decisions and suspend the execution of their orders). General Ayub Khan also circumscribed provincial powers through the federal appointment of provincial governors. This meant that Ayub Khan's regime was able to create a new class of politicians over which the central government could directly extend its control through the district administration. As was noted in chapter two, many of these Basic Democrats were selected from gentry and middle-ranking landlord backgrounds, such that Ayub Khan's regime was able to bypass not only the obstacle to centralised state power that political parties and provinces posed, but also the obstacle of the powerful ashrafi landlords that dominated them. Additionally the Basic Democrats were made into an Electoral College for the presidency as well as for the provincial and national assemblies. Because this Electoral College could easily be manipulated by the district administration (which was ultimately controlled by centrally appointed governors), it was used for the purpose of rubber-stamping the continuation of the Ayub regime. Thus, through the Basic Democrats General Ayub Khan was able to obtain a 95.6 per cent approval rating in a presidential referendum to extend his presidency for five more years. Thirty years later General Musharraf obtained a similarly high approval rating of 97.5 per cent in a presidential referendum thanks to his system of devolved government.

Following the rise of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Ayub Khan's basic democracy scheme was scrapped and it was almost another decade, following General Zia-ul Haq's military coup, before a similar scheme was implemented again. In its details General Zia's Local Government System differed somewhat from the Basic Democracy system but its fundamental aim was the same: "to cloak a highly centralised, authoritarian system of government under the garb of decentralisation" (ICG 2004b: 4). Like General

Ayub Khan's system it aimed to establish an elite of faithful local politicians that could be manipulated through the district administration. General Zia used these local politicians to undermine the political opposition constituted by the popular PPP. He did this principally by staging non-partisan elections and using local governments as a means of extending patronage to pro-military politicians in order for them to win elections. Where his system differed from General Ayub Khan's was that local politicians didn't form the Electoral College for the national and provincial assemblies. Nevertheless, because the bulk of the finances of local governments came from federal transfers this gave the central government ample scope to provide patronage to pro-military politicians to help them win elections. Following the restoration of democracy after General Zia's decade in power, his local government scheme was allowed to decay and was eventually scrapped in the early 1990s. It wasn't until General Musharraf's military coup in 1999 that the idea of local government returned to the national political agenda.

Although the planned reforms under General Musharraf's local government system were far more significant than the local government reforms carried out by both General Ayub Khan and General Zia-ul Haq, the evidence suggests that once again the scheme served to provide the garb of democracy and decentralisation to a highly centralised and authoritarian regime. Whereas neither of the previous two local government programmes had aimed to reform the district administration, General Musharraf proposed to do so radically by replacing provincially and centrally appointed bureaucrats with democratically elected local representatives. Under Musharraf's programme the indirectly elected district administration headed by the district nazim was, among other things, to take over the responsibility for law and order, education, health, agriculture and transport from the traditional district Management Group and the

Deputy Commissioner. Below the district level the tehsil administration was to take charge of municipal infrastructure, water, sanitation and roads. Finally at union council level, the lowest administrative tier in the scheme, the union council administration was put in charge of registering births and deaths and also of encouraging the formation of voluntary associations termed Citizen Community Boards (CCBs) composed of a minimum of twenty-five unelected members. These voluntary associations were planned to encourage grassroots participation for the sake of monitoring service delivery and promoting accountability, as well as for the implementation of minor infrastructure projects. Additionally the union council was to serve as the Electoral College for the district nazim.

Despite these seemingly significant transfers of power to elected representatives, the evidence suggests that like previous local government programmes implemented by military rulers Musharraf's devolution programme served to ensure regime survival by actually centralising power and fragmenting the political opposition. It appears that the central government was able to retain significant power over local bodies by bypassing both political parties and provincial governments. As under previous local government programmes elections for local bodies were held on a non-party basis and the government was able to bypass provincial governments by essentially retaining control over the finances of local bodies. This was achieved by making the provinces transfer forty per cent of their total revenue to local governments. The reason for the bypassing was that it made it easier for the central government to control a large number of disunited local politicians than it would have been to control relatively more cohesive provincial governments and political parties.

In this manner Musharraf's government, like the governments of his military predecessors, was able to create a political constituency that could be easily

manipulated through the granting and withholding of government funds and patronage. This political constituency could then be used to stage elections that would give a mantle of legitimacy to the regime. Just as General Ayub Khan and General Zia-ul Haq had done before him, General Musharraf used his local government scheme in order to extend his term in power through a presidential referendum. During the April 2002 presidential referendum on extending Musharraf's term in office by five years it was widely reported, including in the village of Bek SAGRANA, that the central government channelled funds through local governments to union councillors in order for them to campaign on Musharraf's behalf. Union councillors were said to have used the money to buy votes through cash payments as well as through minor infrastructure projects. Additionally, the funds were used to hire large numbers of buses in order to get supporters who didn't have means to travel to the polling stations. In Bek SAGRANA Chowdri Abdullah Gondal who had been elected union council nazim gave voters the additional incentive of a free meal at the polling station, allegedly by using government funds. In addition, the fact that in Musharraf's devolution programme the councillors served as a restricted electoral college for the district nazim was further evidence of the way in which the devolution programme actually served the objective of entrenching Musharraf's regime rather than its stated objective of encouraging grassroots political participation and democratisation. Because union councillors could be easily manipulated through the granting and withholding of patronage it was easier to get them to vote for a pro-government district nazim than it was to influence an average of around a million voters per district. Once a pro-government district nazim was in place the government could then keep patronage flowing to its supporters in order to consolidate its power.



To further ensure favourable results in the presidential referendum (as well as in other local, provincial and national elections) General Musharraf's government is also widely reported to have taken various other measures. These measures, which will be further illustrated below, included harassing and even abducting political opponents<sup>181</sup> through the police and the secret services, as well as arbitrarily disqualifying opposition politicians from running for office. Politicians aligned with opposition political parties were barred from entering elections in both of the local body elections of 2001 and of 2005 on the grounds that these were supposed to be non-partisan, but politicians who were openly entering elections on a PML-Q platform were allowed to do so. Additionally, many candidates were disqualified for 'unspecified defects' in their educational qualifications and others were disqualified for their alleged inability to prove 'adequate knowledge of Islamic injunctions'. Under the Local Government Ordinance of 2001 contestants for the positions of nazim and vice-nazim (*naib-nazim*) were required to have no less than a secondary school certificate or matriculation for the alleged reason that this would raise the quality of politicians. In practice, however, this measure not only served to disqualify a large number of opposition politicians, including the PPP politician Ghulam Ali Mithani mentioned in previous chapters, but also to exclude the large majority of the population, who fell short of these standards. This contradicted General Musharraf's claim that the devolution programme aimed to 'transfer power from the elites to the vast majority'.

Another significant measure taken to ensure electoral success through the local government system was the large scale manipulation of the judiciary through the transfer and replacement of judges by more pliable ones. This began at the highest level, that of the Supreme Court. This practice allowed Musharraf's government to place

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<sup>181</sup> See ICG (2005b).

partisan Session and district Judges, who since 1988 had acted as returning officers, at polling stations in order for them to either overlook or participate in various forms of electoral rigging. It also allowed the government to try to ensure that polling stations were located either in friendly territory<sup>182</sup> or, if this wasn't possible, to locate polling stations in remote areas in order to make it difficult and costly for people to present themselves to vote. A large number of transfers was also widely reported to have taken place prior to both local body elections in various branches of the civil bureaucracy and the police. Yet other measures to ensure favourable election results included the large scale gerrymandering of constituencies in order to divide the opposition. According to a report by the International Crisis Group, this was particularly aimed at the PPP in its Sindhi strongholds (ICG 2005b: 5).

The combination of all of these measures led to overwhelming victories for pro-government candidates in both the local council elections of 2001 and of 2005 and the presidential referendum of April 2001, when the proposal to extend General Musharraf's term in office by a further five years was approved by 97.5%. This almost farcically high approval in the referendum clearly pointed to widespread pre-election and election day rigging and led Musharraf himself to admit reluctantly that "unbeknownst to him some of his supporters had shown over-enthusiasm" (Wilder 2004: 107). Nevertheless, following the 2005 local body elections and in situations where similar strategies were used by the central government, the Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz declared that the overwhelming pro-government turnout indicated that people had shown their support for president Musharraf and for his policies of enlightened moderation.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> In order to be able to intimidate opposition voters and politicians as well as to facilitate the possible takeover of the polling station by local pro-government factions.

<sup>183</sup> See ICG (2005b:11).

The evidence therefore indicates that General Musharraf's devolution programme was only nominally geared towards democratisation and accountability. As will be discussed further below, even if the programme had genuinely been geared towards transferring power 'from the elites to the vast majority' as General Musharraf claimed it was and as various donor organisations and NGOs working in Pakistan appeared to believe, it is unlikely that an apolitical programme that excluded political parties from participation and which was engineered by technocrats could have achieved this goal to begin with. One important reason for this was that candidates had to run in elections as independents—in other words, without a political party to fund them. This meant that only individuals with independent economic means would have the ability to finance an election campaign. This requirement, together with the requirement of secondary school certificates for all candidates, made it highly unlikely that the vast majority would be represented in the elections and would therefore have any real chance of gaining power. Inasmuch as General Musharraf's devolution programme served to further entrench the elite parochial patronage based political system, independent candidates from elite backgrounds remained focused on divisive local issues and enmities rather than uniting for a joint cause through a political organisation whose power lay in numbers. The result was to worsen the already severe factional, clan, sectarian and ethnic conflicts that were already fracturing Pakistan as local leaders scrambled for political supremacy in their own regions. Thus the International Crisis Group reported that in 2005 on election days alone at least sixty people were killed and some 550 people were injured across Pakistan (ICG 2005: 10). In the end what all of this meant for the masses of landless labourers and kammiss in most rural areas was that, rather than released from an unfair and unrepresentative

system, they remained dependent on the local landlords for patronage and for protection in an increasingly violent and factional environment.

### **Devolution in Bek SAGRANA**

Bek SAGRANA was one of the thirteen villages that comprised the union council of Gullapur. In light of the foregoing, it is not surprising that Gullapur's first union council nazim elected in 2001 hailed from the zamindar class and was none other than the strongman Chowdri Abdullah Gondal. There were two factors that had greatly facilitated his becoming union councillor. The first was the fact that his most powerful rivals, Chowdri Nawaz Ali and siblings, had been jailed and forced underground by Musharraf's government. This had cleared the way for him to grab the seat without any substantial opposition. The second was that he had obtained the backing of Chowdri Khuda Baksh Mekan, a powerful member of General Musharraf's ruling PML-Q who had supported his campaign by channelling government funds to him and directing the local police and civil service in his favour. In exchange Chowdri Abdullah had supported Chowdri Khuda Baksh Mekan's choice of district nazim and would deliver votes to Chowdri Khuda Baksh Mekan in future elections. This in turn meant that Chowdri Abdullah received substantial patronage from Chowdri Khuda Baksh Mekan thereby giving him far greater influence than the office of union council nazim alone gave him.

Throughout my time in Bek SAGRANA between January 2004 and July 2006 it became clear to me that neither Chowdri Abdullah, his political opponents, nor the villagers which the programme allegedly aimed to empower appeared to be particularly concerned with, or even aware, of the devolution programme's stated aim of democratisation and popular empowerment. Both Chowdri Abdullah and his opponents were principally concerned with the consolidation of their own power at each other's

expense. Neither was concerned with even attempting to pay lip service to the idea that devolution was about creating greater government accountability through the empowerment of the masses. Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali largely saw the devolution programme for what it was: an attempt by Musharraf's government to extend central government control over politicians and to weaken the political opposition. Chowdri Nawaz Ali, who was an experienced politician and who had seen a similar programme implemented by General Zia, thought that the exercise was all a big show (*namuna*) and that it wouldn't survive beyond Musharraf's regime. As he was in opposition to the government he realised that for his faction and other factions allied with it to obtain the majority of union council seats in the district would be difficult. He was keenly aware that the government would not only be dispensing funds to pro-government candidates but that the entire judiciary and civil services would be manipulated in order to support them. His hope was at least to be able to prevent his rivals from consolidating their hold over the new government structure.

In order to achieve this Chowdri Nawaz Ali joined forces with his erstwhile enemy Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana who, as a member of the PPP, was also in the opposition.<sup>184</sup> As a part of the peace deal (*sula*) between them, which was agreed to only two months prior to the union council elections and followed years of violent feuding, Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana agreed to support each other in order to obtain as many of the twenty-two union council nazim seats in the tehsil of Qot Momin as possible.<sup>185</sup> It had also been agreed that during the district nazim elections which followed the union council elections Chowdri Nawaz Ali's faction would get all of his allied union councillors to vote for a district nazim of Midhiana's

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<sup>184</sup> This was discussed in chapter three.

<sup>185</sup> The tehsil of Qot Momin included the Union Council of Gullapur in which Bek Sagrana was located.

choice. Chowdri Nawaz Ali would also give all of his votes to Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana's candidate for the tehsil nazim elections. In exchange for this Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana would later support Chowdri Nawaz Ali in future elections for the Provincial or National Assembly.<sup>186</sup>

The absence of popular empowerment and of public accountability on the part of politicians following the implementation of devolution is clearly demonstrated by the case of Chowdri Abdullah. To begin with, a large number of the twenty-one elected union council members whose role was to approve the budget and oversee the delivery of different services delegated all decision-making to Chowdri Abdullah. If Chowdri Abdullah required their signatures for a given project the union councillors gave it without any questions and I heard of no cases where they opposed any of Chowdri Abdullah's expenditure decisions. Part of the reason for this was that a number of union councillors had been personally selected by Chowdri Abdullah from among his most faithful subordinate clients and employees and made to run in the elections by him. One councillor, for example, was his sharecropper and another was a *kumhar* whose family had worked as kammiss for Chowdri Abdullah's family. Given that these councillors depended on Chowdri Abdullah for either employment or patronage, they were unlikely to start questioning Chowdri Abdullah's decisions. They were also unlikely to do so for the simple reason that clients and employees were supposed to display deference and respect towards their chowdri patrons. If a client or employee questioned his patron he

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<sup>186</sup> While in the area of Bek Sagrana allied landlord factions vied with each other to capture the new local government structure, there were areas of the Punjab, particularly in the South and in the West, where single households were able to capture all of the elected government positions in their areas. For example, in one village that I visited near the town of Chiniot, an hour and a half's drive south of Bek Sagrana, an influential household of Shia Sayyid pirs managed to secure seats at every level of representative government. The eldest of the three brothers in the family was elected to the National Assembly, the middle one to the Provincial Assembly, and the youngest became district nazim. What's more, the son of the eldest became tehsil nazim while the youngest son of the brother elected to the provincial assembly became union council nazim in the family's ancestral village. Although such cases were not the necessarily the norm, people that I spoke to at the Asian Development Bank in Islamabad as well as in other NGOs working in the Punjab indicated that such cases were quite common.

was likely to be seen as trying to rise above his station, and was equally likely to be quickly put back into his place.

Although most of the other union councillors weren't kammis, tenants or permanent employees of Chowdri Abdullah's, all of them were his clients and power brokers. They were predominantly Gondal smallholders but there were some that were non-Gondal smallholders from neighbouring villages as well. As power brokers they served as channels for people to approach Chowdri Abdullah for patronage. Kammis or smallholders who who needed Chowdri Abdullah's patronage but didn't have close or direct relations with him would first approach one of them. Their knowledge of issues in their own neighbourhoods meant that they could keep Chowdri Abdullah informed about different problems around the union council. Their close knowledge of people's changing political alignments in their own neighbourhoods also meant that they were invaluable to the electoral strategies of their patron. They also played an important role during elections because they could influence their neighbourhoods to vote for Chowdri Abdullah.

The issue of Citizen Community Boards (CCBs) also clearly illustrates how devolution failed in its stated goal of empowering people and making politicians more accountable. The voluntary CCBs, described earlier, fell under the purview of the union council. With Chowdri Abdullah as union council nazim not only did no such voluntary organisation emerge but almost no one that I spoke to was aware of what CCBs were supposed to be. In any case, it is unlikely that, even if they had been aware of them and their function, they would have seen any benefit in creating one.

It therefore appears that landlord politicians largely used the new local government structure to reproduce the highly personalised, patronage-based politics that they had always practiced. As illustrated in chapter three, such factional patronage

politics was based on loose alliances between individuals, often joined by kinship and friendship ties but also by purely instrumental ties arising from shared interests and enmities, who sought to appropriate the spoils of power. A further characteristic of this factional patronage-based politics was that in rural areas its leadership was restricted to a relatively small elite emerging from the landed classes. By virtue of both these characteristics factional patronage politics was incompatible with the two ostensible principal aims of the devolution programme, accountability and participation, which rested on fair and open representation for the public at large. These politicians did not seek power with the public in mind but rather to benefit their own factions composed of close kin, friends, allies and clients. The fact that the political leadership were members of the powerful landed class made reduced their accountability that much further, since few villagers were likely to risk standing up to or questioning the likes of Chowdri Abdullah or his counterparts.

### **The August 2005 Union Council Elections**

It is worth considering the August 2005 union council elections in some detail to shed further light on why elections in Pakistan, both under the devolution programme and more generally, failed to empower ordinary citizens. One obvious reason for this was that many kammiss had to vote according to the dictates of their chowdri. However, even those kammiss who weren't under the direct authority of any single chowdri and could therefore cast their vote freely didn't feel that they would derive any benefit from it. On the contrary, many believed that by casting their vote for one or the other candidate they risked incurring the ill will of one or another of their local chowdris. For them, their vote could at best be a source of cash from candidates willing to buy it. In



short and for reasons already discussed, both chowdris and kammis had good reason to believe that only wealthy and powerful individuals could become effective leaders. Elections were therefore seen as a means of obtaining powerful patrons rather as a chance of participating in governance, and the fact that various forms of pre-poll and poll day rigging took place further confirmed the view that elections were simply a contest to reveal who wielded the most power by winning.

But by what means were these outcomes brought about? How did factions and their candidates actually go about gaining people's votes, and what forms of interference prevented the electoral process from empowering—or even just feeling like it could empower—the majority of villagers? To answer these questions, four aspects of the 2005 elections will be considered: nomination, campaigning, rigging and the polling day itself.

### **Nomination**

As noted earlier, the union council election of August 2005 followed a five year period where chowdri Nawaz Ali's faction had been forced underground and where Chowdri Abdullah had become union council nazim for Gullhapur. In doing so, Chowdri Abdullah came generally to be seen as the most important and powerful politician in Bek Sagrana. By 2005, however, Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his faction had returned to the political scene and allied themselves with Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana. Given that Chowdri Haq Nawaz was the head of the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction in Bek Sagrana, and that he was the person in the union council of Gullapur with the greatest interest in defeating Chowdri Abdullah, he would have been the most obvious person for Chowdri Nawaz Ali's faction to agree upon as candidate for union council nazim. The fact that Chowdri Haq Nawaz was a close relative of Chowdri Nawaz Ali also suggested him as an obvious candidate since this meant that he was

more likely to share political and economic interests than someone more distantly related would. Moreover, the fact that he was one of the wealthier Gondals of Bek Sagrana meant that he would be able to raise sufficient funds to finance a significant proportion of electoral campaign costs, which could run up to and over Rs.800,000. And last but not least, the fact that he could mobilise armed men also argued for his suitability to the challenge of taking on Chowdri Abdullah.<sup>187</sup>

Nevertheless there were various problems with putting forth Chowdri Haq Nawaz's as a candidate. Chowdri Nawaz Ali and his siblings realised that his bad reputation would be a liability to the faction. Even though Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Mazhar Ali knew that many people would still vote for Chowdri Haq Nawaz simply because he was the representative of more powerful politicians such as themselves, they also realised the importance of enticing swing voters whose vote might be lost because they disapproved of Chowdri Haq Nawaz. Additionally, the fact that his philandering had once been publicised in the Sargodha press and that he had a criminal record rendered his application for candidacy unlikely to be accepted by the government, particularly since it was well known that he was part of a faction which opposed the Musharraf government.

It was therefore necessary for Chowdri Nawaz Ali to find another candidate who would ideally be a wealthy close relative and would additionally have his own connections with influential people. The candidate needed to be wealthy because this would enable him to fund his electoral campaign, and he needed to have his own connections because this would make him an effective patron. The first alternative to be considered was Chowdri Mahmood Abbas, who was Chowdri Nawaz Ali's nephew and

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<sup>187</sup> Obviously this also meant that he had muscle he could also use to coerce voters to vote for him, or at least to deter them from voting against him.

the husband of Chowdri Haq Nawaz's sister.<sup>188</sup> Not only was Chowdri Mahmood Abbas a close relative, but he was also a wealthy landlord and the son of the pious Sufi Ahmed Abbas, who was the second largest landowner in Bek SAGRANA after Chowdri Abdullah. Chowdri Mahmood Abbas was a lawyer who had studied at the Christian Foreman College in Lahore, which was the city where he continued to spend most of his time and where his two sons were being educated.<sup>189</sup> He was well connected and had a reputation for being a *sharif admi*, a pious, noble man who abstained from immoral activities. Chowdri Mahmood Abbas, unlike Chowdri Haq Nawaz, had never touched a drop of alcohol, had never been involved in criminal activities and remained relatively aloof from village strife; accordingly he had no criminal record and was not a particularly divisive figure. Furthermore, Chowdri Mahmood Abbas was likely to take up the offer of running for union council nazim because he bore a personal grudge against Chowdri Abdullah who had recently belittled him in public.

The fact that Chowdri Mahmood was a *sharif admi* had its advantages as well as its disadvantages, however. As noted, the advantages included the fact that he wasn't a divisive figure and that few people, other than possibly Chowdri Abdullah, had any significant quarrel with him. His status would also provide a cover of respectability for Chowdri Haq Nawaz who would continue playing a prominent role in the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction. The disadvantage was that being a *sharif admi* could suggest that a person was neither comfortable nor familiar with the political utility of violence and force, and would therefore be ineffective in a political context which required leaders that were ready to face up to powerful opponents by these and other means. What's more, when people referred to Chowdri Mahmood as a *sharif admi* they implied that he

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<sup>188</sup> See kinship diagram on page 120. The nephew in question was the son of Chowdri Nawaz Ali's sister.

<sup>189</sup> At Aitchison College.

was not only apt to be ineffective but that he was also lazy. Both villagers and relatives illustrated his laziness through the fact that Chowdri Mahmood paid little attention to his lands and that his labourers did as they pleased and frequently stole from him. Even his father once publicly reprimanded him after Chowdri Mahmood left his wheat standing several weeks after everyone else had harvested theirs. His father called him a *badshah admi*, a term indicating a person who lived a kingly lifestyle and who had little concern for work.<sup>190</sup> As a result of the widespread perception that he was lazy, several people in the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction quietly voiced their concern about how effective Chowdri Mahmood would be both in running his campaign and, in case he won, in his subsequent position as union council nazim.

The most reasonable alternative to Chowdri Mahmood who was willing to run in the elections against Chowdri Abdullah was Dr. Shafique Gondal, a distant Gondal cousin of Chowdri Haq Nawaz who owned land in Bek Sagrana. Unlike Chowdri Mahmood who came from a higher-ranking family of Gondals, Dr. Shafique's family came from the Gondals' middle ranks. Nevertheless, Dr. Shafique's father owned some fifteen acres of citrus orchard that had permitted him to send all of his three sons to university in Sargodha. The eldest of the three was now a police inspector working in the office of the Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) in Sargodha, and the youngest worked at the government education board in Sargodha. Dr. Shafique, the middle son, worked in the Sargodha government health department. The three siblings lived in separate rented accommodation in Sargodha and occasionally travelled to the village on their motorcycles. All three brothers had a good reputation and there was nothing in Dr. Shafique's personal track record that would have allowed the government to interfere with his nomination. Additionally, although Dr. Shafique and his brothers

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<sup>190</sup> *Badshah* literally means king.

were not as wealthy or as well connected with the mighty of the land as were some of the wealthier Gondals, they were still in a position to pull strings for their relatives and to dispense patronage to villagers. Dr. Shafique's younger brother (who worked in the Sargodha Education Board) had, for example, obtained a job for the son of the Imam Masjid as a school teacher in his home village. He had also helped another villager obtain a high school matriculation certificate even though the man in question had never completed high school. Dr. Shafique's elder brother (who worked at the ASP's office in Sargodha) had helped a few villagers in sorting out problems with the police. Dr. Shafique himself had helped obtain hospital treatment for several people in Bek Sagrana and the surrounding area and was promising to use his position to secure government jobs as low ranking hospital *chowkidars* and cleaners for others.

Despite his relatively solid position in the village Dr. Shafique would have been unlikely to run in the elections at all if he had not been put forward by one of the more powerful village chowdris. Dr. Shafique had neither the financial means nor the power to stand independently of either Chowdri Nawaz Ali's or Chowdri Abdullah's faction. As discussed earlier, election costs could run up to Rs.800,000 and beyond, covering everything from fuel for vehicles to payment for votes, and the funding of minor infrastructural projects to payment for meals and campaign advertisements. Funds were also required to provide poorer voters with transport to the polling station on election day. In addition, Dr. Shafique was likely to be thought of as a weak candidate by the electorate if he didn't have the backing of influential politicians. As noted, the electorate expected and wanted powerful and well connected politicians since they were the people who could deliver on promises of patronage. Furthermore, especially against a figure as powerful and well connected as Chowdri Abdullah, a candidate who wasn't

well connected risked being intimidated and victimised through the threat of force and the use of the judiciary and its processes.

Thus, Dr. Shafique only decided to run in the union council elections because he had been asked to do so by Chowdri Nawaz Ali's faction through Chowdri Haq Nawaz. The campaign expenses were principally going to be covered by a collective effort of the principal stakeholders including Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Haq Nawaz, as well as by occasional contributions in the form of a vehicle or a meal by other supporters including Chowdri Mahmood. The latter, for example, put his car at the disposal of Dr. Shafique for more than ten days and paid for a great deal of the fuel expenses incurred by the extensive daily travel to various households and villages in the union council of Gullapur by the candidates and their close supporters. Nevertheless, the principal support for Dr. Shafique came from Chowdri Haq Nawaz who was constantly at his side throughout his campaign and who put his vehicle, funds and gunmen at Dr. Shafique's disposal.<sup>191</sup>

Although a reputation for piety and gentleness could help a candidate by making him more likeable to the electorate making it harder for the government to find an excuse to refuse his nomination, put simply it was wealth and the capacity to mobilise force that were crucial in determining whether a candidate was able to run in an election. It is for this reason that Chowdri Haq Nawaz and Chowdri Abdullah were eminently suitable as candidates. In the case of Dr. Shafique, although the fact that he was largely considered to be a *sharif admi* might help the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction obtain some extra votes, in the end it was the fact that he had powerful backing that

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<sup>191</sup> Meanwhile, on the other side of the contest, Chowdri Abdullah decided that he wouldn't personally run for the seat of Union Council nazim that time around, deciding instead to let his younger brother Chowdri Ehsanullah run in his place. The reasons for this were unclear but many people in the village claimed that it was mainly because Chowdri Ehsanullah had a gentler personality than his choleric elder brother and that this might make him more attractive to voters. Nevertheless, it remained an obvious fact to the majority of the electorate that just as Chowdri Haq Nawaz remained the main force behind Dr. Shafique, the main force behind Chowdri Ehsanullah was his powerful elder brother Chowdri Abdullah.

made it possible for him to run as a credible candidate. Had Dr. Shafique simply been a *sharif admi* without the backing of powerful leaders he would not have stood a chance in the elections. In fact, despite the backing that he enjoyed of powerful politicians in the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction, many ordinary villagers remained sceptical of Dr. Shafique's capacity to deliver patronage. Many villagers, including kammis, thought that Dr. Shafique was a nobody, and they underlined their view by pointing to the fact that he rode around on a motorcycle while his opponent, Chowdri Abdullah, rode around in a brand new Lexus Land Cruiser.

The foregoing makes the reasons that ordinary villagers didn't present themselves as candidates in the union council elections obvious. Given what it took to qualify as a candidate in both practical and reputational terms—even to the extent that Dr. Shafique, despite his powerful backing and his already respectable personal status and contacts, remained a figure of questionable political effectiveness to ordinary villagers—the thought of a candidate emerging from the ranks of kammis or labourers was unthinkable and literally risible. Muhammad Hussain, discussed in the previous chapter, explained to me that people's mentality was such that if a kammi stood up to contest elections everyone would laugh at him. Not only would the chowdris laugh at him (and possibly punish him for insubordination), but his fellow kammis would also find him ridiculous. Hussain said that people would completely discount a poor politician who didn't campaign with a large convoy of cars and cohort of gunmen.

Hussain concluded that the reason that the poor were oppressed and powerless was the result of their mentality, which worshipped the outward signs of power and wealth. Yet the poor had good reason to believe that only the rich and powerful could be effective politicians. Because politics was largely about power and patronage it was obvious to people that a poor kammi, even in the unlikely event that he managed to be

elected as union council nazim, would almost certain to be unable to deliver patronage to his clients in the same way that a well connected zamindar would. Since the majority of influential politicians and civil servants in the district and the Provincial Government belonged to elite zamindar families—and were also connected to each other through kinship and friendship ties—a union councillor who was a zamindar was obviously much more likely to be able to mobilise contacts in order to deliver patronage than a kammi. Thus, if even Dr. Shafique's power was questionable to members of the electorate (let alone the fact that the faction that supported him was currently out of power) the notion of a kammi even standing as a candidate represented a simple impossibility.

### **Campaigning**

For both Chowdri Abdullah and Dr. Shafique the key to winning the union council Elections was their capacity to gain the allegiance of the various heads of zamindar families living in the thirteen villages that comprised the union council of Gullapur. By gaining the allegiance of these zamindars, the majority of whom were middle-ranking and owned less than fifty acres of land, the candidates sought to win not only the votes of entire households (which included close servants), but also the votes of these zamindars' dependent and client households. It was often the case that members of zamindar households voted according to the decision of their household's head. Where heads of households had conflicting loyalties or desired to remain neutral they either told their household members to abstain from voting altogether or instructed them to split their votes equally between the candidates.<sup>192</sup> Zamindar household heads could also determine the way their tenants, labourers and kammis voted. As a result, campaigners tended to bypass kammis and labourers who were known to be under the

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<sup>192</sup> In cases where heads of households had little interest in the outcome of the elections, individuals within the households often just disposed of their votes as they saw fit.



authority of a particular chowdri and simply approached the latter for their votes instead. In fact directly approaching kammis without first consulting the chowdri under whose authority they lived was likely to be interpreted as a challenge to his authority.

In order to obtain the votes of these zamindars, candidates relied upon both friendship and patronage. Candidates could rely upon their close supporters to mobilise their zamindar friends on their behalf since friends were supposed to support each other politically. In cases where the core faction members had neither kinship nor friendship ties with particular zamindars these zamindars had to be won over either with promises of future patronage or, more effectively, by offering them immediate patronage. Thus, approximately two months before the elections candidates from both sides could be found busily travelling around the district trying to resolve different zamindars' issues in order to gain their votes. Among other things, candidates became involved in resolving land disputes, mediating with the police, getting people treated in hospital, getting school teachers to attend to their duties, and repairing municipal infrastructure such as roads, bridges, phone lines and gutters.

Although Dr. Shafique was able to resolve several police disputes thanks to his elder brother's help and was also able to get some people treated in hospital, Chowdri Abdullah had a significant advantage when it came to granting patronage for two obvious reasons: because he was the incumbent union council nazim and because he was aligned with the ruling coalition. In one instance for example, some Ranjha Jat cultivators who lived along the irrigation canal downstream from Gullapur essentially offered to give their votes to whichever candidate built a bridge over the irrigation canal for them. Although several bridges already existed, the cultivators complained that they had to walk thirty minutes upstream to get to the closest one and that this caused them unnecessary delays. Dr. Shafique had been the first candidate to approach them in order

to find out what they needed in hopes of gaining their votes. Although Dr. Shafique didn't have the Rs.100,000 that building the bridge would cost at his immediate disposal, he promised the cultivators to return after a week with the necessary funds. Before the week had passed, however, Chowdri Abdullah, who had access to local government funds, appeared in the hamlet and offered the cultivators a cheque for Rs.100,000 on the spot to cover the costs of the bridge, on condition that they all went into the local mosque and made a vow to give him their votes. The cultivators happily accepted the offer and Dr. Shafique lost out because he had been unable to muster funds quickly enough.

Similarly Chowdri Abdullah managed to snatch a number of zamindar votes away from Dr. Shafique by getting the authorities to install a telephone line for them. The zamindars in question, who lived downstream from Bek SAGRANA, had tried to get the relevant authority to install a phone line for years but had failed to make any progress. With the onset of elections Dr. Shafique had promised to help them. However, Chowdri Abdullah managed to get the relevant authorities moving before Dr. Shafique was able to do anything, and he accordingly gained their votes. Apparently Chowdri Abdullah achieved this by getting MNA Khuda Baksh Mekan to pull strings in the relevant ministry, providing another obvious example of the power of connections in political outcomes.

Although the bulk of patronage was dispensed to existing and potential supporters from zamindar families, in certain instances both factions did try to reach out directly to kammis and landless labourers. This was generally done in cases where these people were either not under the direct authority of any particular chowdri or where the chowdri under whose authority they were desired to remain neutral or was indifferent about the elections. People who weren't directly under the influence of particular

chowdris included some who lived in the Bhutto colonies, some who lived in villages and who earned an independent livelihood from the chowdris and some who had settled on government land adjacent to paved roads. Unlike people who settled around the farmhouses (deras) of chowdris or in a house on their fields and who were therefore generally supposed to vote for whomever their chowdri told them to vote for, voters who weren't directly under the authority of any particular chowdri were free to cast their vote however they pleased.

In most cases these independent voters were cynical and were themselves indifferent about the elections since they believed that they had nothing to gain from them. Many kammis that I spoke to during the campaign period told me that chowdris who had a stake in the elections suddenly became friendly and greeted them as they drove past. One day a Mussalli who lived in a Bhutto colony and earned his livelihood independently of any Gondal chowdri, told me that one of the Gondals campaigning with Dr. Shafique even got out of his car to greet him and ask him for his vote. He commented that this was unthinkable outside of electoral campaigning when if a Gondal addressed him it would be either to boss him around or to insult him. Like many others he told me that as soon as the campaigning was over things would revert to the old way.

Another factor that contributed to the cynicism and indifference of these less privileged voters was the fact that although they were relatively independent from the chowdris many of them preferred not to take sides so as not to provoke ill will from any of the chowdris concerned. As was indicated in the previous chapter even kammis who lived in the colonies or at the side of the road on government land sometimes had to ask for permission from neighbouring chowdris to settle there and had to remain on good terms with them subsequently. Even if this wasn't the case many still preferred not to risk provoking ill will in case an issue arose in the future where they might need the

cooperation of a chowdri. As a result even those people who were actually planning on supporting a particular candidate kept it quiet and appeared nervous about revealing their preference when asked either by myself or other villagers. Part of the reason for this was that they were keenly aware of the fact that there were informants among the villagers who might reveal their voting intentions either out of a personal grudge or simply in order to ingratiate themselves with a particular chowdri. In any case, many people preferred not to take sides or vote at all, even if they privately believed that a particular candidate might possibly be better than another. This was not only out of fear of being found out through informants prior to the election but also out of fear of being found out on polling day, where the secrecy of the ballot box was far from adequately ensured.

In the case of independent landless villagers who were either indifferent to the elections or who desired to remain impartial out of fear of displeasing any of the chowdris, the most effective way of securing their votes was to buy them with cash. Dr. Shafique's limited funds meant that he was largely unable to do this, but chowdri Abdullah managed to secure a large number of votes in the two days prior to the elections by paying people Rs.500 for their vote. Several people including Dr. Shafique commented that by buying people's votes Chowdri Abdullah was effectively carrying out a commercial transaction that absolved him of any future responsibility towards his voters. Dr. Shafique explained to me that in the future if any one of those individuals whose votes Chowdri Abdullah had purchased went to him in order to obtain patronage he would simply turn them away by telling them that they had already received money for their votes. Those people who obtained cash for their votes realised this, but when queried about it many of them said that cash in hand was better than promises which were likely to remain unfulfilled. For them at least Chowdri Abdullah had something to

offer immediately while Dr. Shafique could only make promises. In this light it can be said that even for independent voters elections did not represent an opportunity for political empowerment.

### **Rigging**

Another important reason why the elections were regarded with cynicism and indifference by kammis and landless labourers was that they took it for granted that both sides were involved in a wide array of electoral manipulations which made a mockery out of the idea of fair elections. It was clear to everyone that the wealthiest and most powerful candidate was likely to win. This was not only because people believed that a powerful candidate was a more effective patron and because he would be able to obtain people's votes through patronage and cash, but also because he was more likely to be able to rig the elections in his favour. Once again Chowdri Abdullah had a distinct advantage when it came to both pre-poll rigging and polling day rigging by virtue of the fact that he was the incumbent union council nazim and that he was aligned with the ruling PML-Q coalition. This didn't mean that his opponents were merely rendered victims of General Musharraf's government, and that they didn't have their own means of rigging elections in their favour, however. It is worth emphasising this point because both the printed press and international observers, including the International Crisis Group, have tended to emphasise the rigging carried out by Musharraf's government. Although it is true that an overwhelming proportion of the rigging was carried out by the government, this didn't make opposition politicians paragons of democratic virtue. Another problem with focussing almost solely on rigging by pro-government supporters is that doing so seems to assume that Musharraf's military backed coalition had the monopoly of power whereas in fact opposition politicians could often wield their own

power against the ruling coalition by virtue of their local strangleholds and influence at various levels of government.

Chowdri Abdullah's access to government funds was one among many of the means at his disposal to carry out pre-poll rigging. Additionally, as the incumbent pro-government union council nazim, Chowdri Abdullah had an important degree of influence over the issuing of identity cards, which were necessary for voting, and enjoyed a significant measure of support from the local police. Because a large number of people in the union council didn't possess identity cards Chowdri Abdullah obtained them for people who were planning on voting for his brother. Dr. Shafique complained that through his influence on the issuing of identity cards Chowdri Abdullah was also able to create hurdles to obtaining them for people whom he suspected were planning on voting against him. Dr. Shafique also alleged that Chowdri Abdullah's faction managed to obtain up to two hundred fake identity cards for supporters. Although this figure may not have been accurate there is no doubt that fraudulent identity cards were issued. This was accomplished by having identity cards issued in the names of people who were on the electoral register but who had died and had not yet had their names removed from it. Chowdri Abdullah gave these cards to supporters who for whatever reason were not on the electoral register themselves. Some identity cards were also given to supporters who both already had one and were already on the electoral register simply so that they could present themselves to vote twice.<sup>193</sup>

Chowdri Abdullah also managed to use police support to undermine his opponents' chances of electoral success. One of the ways in which he did this was by using them to entangle his opponents in fabricated cases of abduction and theft. This was not only an effort to make his opponents lose money and time extracting

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<sup>193</sup> A former employee of Chowdri Abdullah showed me one of these identity cards, it had his picture on it but another man's name to go with it.

themselves from the police investigations (and possibly even to eliminate them completely from the electoral contest), but also to discredit them in the eyes of the electorate for their apparent involvement in criminal activities. On one occasion Chowdri Abdullah managed to get several people belonging to the coalition formed by Chowdri Nawaz Ali and Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana detained for the illegal possession of weapons as they were driving towards a political rally to be held in the village of Bek Sagrana. Chowdri Abdullah had heard about the rally and had called upon his contacts in the local police to stop them and check their cars for unregistered weapons. Far from unusual, the possession of unregistered weapons by politicians was commonplace, and given that his opponents, who were duly stopped at several police checkpoints, did have unregistered weapons with them, they were detained by the police for several hours and thereby prevented from attending the rally. When this happened Chowdri Haq Nawaz and Dr. Shafique were quick to conclude that Chowdri Abdullah had been behind the actions of the police since having three of their cars stopped separately on the same day was unlikely to be merely coincidental. The fact that I later heard a close supporter of Chowdri Abdullah boasting about how they had got their opponents into trouble with the police lends credibility to Chowdri Haq Nawaz and Dr. Shafique's conclusions about Chowdri Abdullah's involvement in the affair.

A few days after the unregistered weapons episode, Chowdri Abdullah allegedly tried to get Chowdri Haq Nawaz entangled in a case of buffalo theft. One night one of Chowdri Haq Nawaz's gunmen, who was actually covertly working for Chowdri Abdullah, stole two buffaloes and placed them in Chowdri Haq Nawaz's dera. Having done this the gunman fled to Chowdri Abdullah's dera under cover of darkness. The next morning before dawn the police, acting on a tipoff, raided Chowdri Haq Nawaz's dera to retrieve the stolen buffaloes and arrested two of his servants. The two servants

appeared not to know anything about the stolen buffalos and claimed that the first time they had seen them was that morning. Chowdri Haq Nawaz happened to be away that night but when he heard of the situation he appeared genuinely surprised and it took him little time to conclude that Chowdri Abdullah must somehow have been involved. This was later confirmed when he was summoned to the police station where the Station House Officer (SHO) wanted to file an FIR against him. Although the SHO was rumoured to be in cahoots with Chowdri Abdullah another officer who was on good terms with Chowdri Haq Nawaz told him, in my presence, that the person who had called to inform them about the stolen buffalos in his dera was none other than Chowdri Abdullah. In the end although the SHO threatened to place an FIR against Chowdri Haq Nawaz this never happened because Chowdri Nawaz Ali was able to use his own contacts higher up in the police hierarchy to prevent it. Nevertheless, Chowdri Abdullah was somewhat successful in his attempt to discredit Chowdri Haq Nawaz in the eyes of the public because the case was published in the Sargodha press. His success was limited, however, because most people in the village didn't read the papers and suspected political intrigue in any case. They were well aware that even though Chowdri Haq Nawaz might have been involved in a case of buffalo theft that Chowdri Abdullah himself was not above engaging in such activities. The foregoing examples illustrate well the chess game played by politicians at election time, marshalling their respective resources in the form of influence and contacts both offensively and defensively in a variety of shady gambits.

In the buffalo episode, Chowdri Nawaz Ali was able to mobilise some of his own contacts to counter Chowdri Abdullah's move against him. Later he was also able to pull strings with the local judiciary in order to obtain favourable results during the polling. The fact that Chowdri Nawaz Ali was a lawyer and had various friends in the



local judiciary meant that he was able to influence where the polling stations would be located. As an example of this influence, although in the union council of Gullapur Chowdri Nawaz Ali was unable to have the polling stations located in friendly territory he was at least able to ensure that they weren't located in enemy territory. This meant that the polling stations were located where the supporters of both factions were roughly equal in numbers and strength, and that no one faction would be able to take over the polling station wholesale.

In at least one instance Chowdri Nawaz Ali's influence within the judicial system also allowed him to have a polling officer placed who was favourable to his faction and was therefore prepared to overlook an array of electoral malpractices in favour of it. Even though Chowdri Nawaz Ali was unable to secure a favourable polling officer in Bek Sagrama, he did manage to have one that was favourable to his faction placed in Bukhuwala. The village of Bukhuwala, Chowdri Nawaz Ali's village of residence, wasn't part of the union council of Gullapur but was in one of the many union councils that Chowdri Ghulam Ali Midhiana and Chowdri Nawaz Ali sought to capture. In Bukhuwala the electoral contest was between Chowdri Nawaz Ali's candidate, who was a paternal cousin of his, and a Makhdoom from a neighbouring village who was part of the larger pro-government political block that included Chowdri Abdullah and the MNA Khuda Baksh Mekan. Because the Makhdooms were the pro-government faction they like Chowdri Abdullah had various advantages over their rivals which, among other things, included a judiciary that was manipulated in favour of pro-government candidates. Despite this Chowdri Nawaz Ali's contacts within the judiciary allowed him to obtain a favourable polling officer. However, because the judiciary was overwhelmingly influenced to favour pro-government candidates, the only way he was able to achieve this was by making the polling officer pretend to the Makhdooms that he

was working in their favour. Thus the Makhdooms were deceived into believing that the polling officer at the Bukhuwala polling station would work on their behalf while in fact on the day of the elections he overlooked a great deal of rigging which took place in favour of Chowdri Nawaz Ali's candidate. Chowdri Nawaz Ali's cunning in this case was greatly admired and praised by his followers and allies.

### **Polling Day**

From early morning on the day of the elections both factions were busy coordinating transport to transport people who had pledged to vote for them to the polling station. Chowdri Abdullah's brother owned the bus which provided the principal transport service between the village and Sarogodha. On polling day the service was suspended and the bus was used to bring supporters of Chowdri Abdullah and his brother back and forth between their villages and the polling station. Chowdri Abdullah also secured another bus through the government, which had hired a large number of buses for pro-government candidates. When it came to fetching more influential voters from zamindar biraderis, Chowdri Abdullah dispatched his Lexus Land Cruiser and his brother's new Toyota Corolla.

On Dr. Shafique's side there were no buses but the candidates managed to gather a number of vehicles from friends and supporters, including two pickup trucks which could be filled with a number of voters. Around the polling station, which was situated inside the village school, both factions set up large tents where people were offered meat, roti and sweet rice as well as cold lemonade (*skanjbi*) made with local citrus as an added incentive to come and vote. This gave the elections the festive feel of a wedding. In fact for many locals who had little to gain or lose in these elections polling day was very much seen as a festive occasion where they could obtain free food and drink as well as observe the village leaders and gossip about them. This gossip ran

from speculations about their chances of success in the polls to the various conspiracies surrounding the elections, as well as to the various quarrels between members of the two opposing factions in the preceding weeks. Many people, particularly the young, also looked forward to a bit of entertainment in the form of a quarrel during the polling. For many of the poorer villagers and children who weren't even going to vote this was an occasion to eat as much as they could, and some of them even ate and drank from the two enemy tents.

After weeks of campaigning and entanglements with the police as a result of Chowdri Abdullah's Machiavellian schemes the nerves of Chowdri Haq Nawaz and his supporters were frayed, and on the night prior to polling day Chowdri Haq Nawaz repeatedly declared that if Chowdri Abdullah continued with his interference during the polling he was going to take him on personally. He even declared that either himself or Chowdri Abdullah would have to die because it wasn't possible for both of them to coexist in the same village. Although in the end neither of them lost their lives there were various instances throughout the day when irregularities at the polling station almost did erupt into gunfights. The inside of the polling station was very disorderly and there were many people loitering in it who weren't officially supposed to be there. Some of these were chowdris from both factions who were there to look out for any irregularities in the polling. There were two reasons why it was they rather than the police and the polling officers who carried out this task. The first was that the police had insufficient staff to oversee the elections, and the second was that neither party was sure that either the police or the returning officers would be impartial, and they therefore demanded the right to oversee the proceedings themselves. In this instance it was Chowdri Haq Nawaz's faction that was particularly keen on overseeing the proceedings

given that its members knew that the police favoured Chowdri Abdullah. They also suspected the polling officers of favouring him too.<sup>194</sup>

Although the chowdris inside the polling station were supposed to put a check on polling irregularities, that didn't prevent some of them from trying to influence the results in favour of their candidate whenever their opponents were insufficiently vigilant. They did this by intimidating voters and looking over people's shoulders to see how they were casting their votes. In other instances some chowdris grabbed people's ballots from them and filled them in according to their own wishes. When quarrels between the two factions broke out it was generally because a member from one faction had seen a member from the opposing faction putting pressure on a voter and looking over the voter's shoulder as the selections were made. In one instance, for example, a chowdri who supported Dr. Shafique had seen a chowdri who supported Chowdri Ehsanullah whispering something into a kammi's ear presumably telling him how to vote, and then looking over the kammi's shoulder to make sure that he cast his vote correctly. Seeing this the chowdri who supported Dr. Shafique began to complain about the interference and soon a heated argument was in full swing with both parties started hurling accusations at each other and threatening to draw their guns. The quarrel ended only after the village Imam interfered and made all the parties involved hold each other's hands and raise them in unison while reciting the Islamic profession of faith (*kalma*). Chowdri Haq Nawaz however was left muttering about how by the end of the day either he or Chowdri Abdullah would be no more.

In addition to the chowdris there to oversee the polling process there were other people who tried, and were often successful in the effort, to cast their votes several times and who added to the disorder inside the polling station. One person admitted to

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<sup>194</sup> The fact that the police supported Chowdri Abdullah was later confirmed when the head policeman celebrated Chowdri Abdullah's victory once the results came out.

me that he had voted four times. One youth even told me that he had cast his vote twice for Chowdri Ehsanullah and twice for Dr. Shafique simply for the fun of it and because he didn't really care what the result of the elections turned out to be. One chowdri who wasn't even on the electoral register boasted to me about how he had cast his vote in favour of Dr. Shafique three times. There were several factors that made irregularities of this sort possible. To begin with, the chaos inside the polling station was such that the polling officers had a hard time following what was happening. Additionally there was the possibility, mentioned above, that certain polling officers were ready to overlook multiple voting in favour of one or the other of the candidates. Even polling officers who were impartial and honest appeared to want to avoid raising too many objections if someone was caught casting his vote twice because they were afraid of the chowdris. A friend of mine who worked as a polling officer on two occasions told me that polling officers preferred not to antagonise certain chowdris who were reputed to be violent by pointing out irregularities carried out in their favour. The fact that the ballots didn't have voters' numbers on them also meant that once they were inside the polling station people could try and pick up and cast as many ballots as they wished, and also that there was no way of telling how many times an individual may have voted after the ballot boxes were opened.

There were others who added to the disorder inside the polling station by being there to spy on behalf of the chowdris in order to discover if the people who had pledged their votes, sometimes in exchange for money, actually kept their promises. Some of these 'spies' also gave assistance to illiterate voters who didn't quite understand how they were supposed to vote to fill in their ballots, which allowed them to ensure that the voters cast them for the correct candidate. Finally there some people who were simply hanging around inside the polling station for the fun of it and for a

little bit of gossip. Once in a while police officers, who spent most of their time in the tents eating and drinking, would barge in and unceremoniously expel some of the people who weren't chowdris and who had no business inside the polling station. After a while, however, the same chaos would return and the police would eventually repeat the same exercise all over again.

After the voting had been completed by mid-afternoon, the hard core supporters of each faction stayed on around the polling station until nine o'clock in the evening when the results were released. Although the results were never officially published in the village, Chowdri Abdullah appeared to have won by a comfortable margin. People claimed that his lead in the village of Bek Sagrana was of about one hundred and fifty votes. The moment the results came out the supporters of Chowdri Abdullah began shooting rounds into the air with their Kalashnikovs and taunting the supporters of Dr. Shafique. That night celebratory shooting was heard until late, and over the next few days samosas and *jalebis* were distributed to supporters who went to congratulate (*mubarak dena*) Chowdri Ehsanullah and Chowdri Abdullah on their victory.<sup>195</sup>

There were no celebrations on Dr. Shafique's side although they comforted themselves with the idea that their faction was the more popular one and that Chowdri Abdullah had won only because of fraud. They alleged that he had played all sorts of tricks on them, purchased votes, tampered with the voting lists, and issued hundreds of fake identity cards. Chowdri Haq Nawaz was unable to contain his bitterness, and on the day after the elections he threatened to ban the Rajputs from using their community centre adjacent to his land because they had voted for Chowdri Abdullah. The fact that the secrecy of the ballot was not ensured meant that it did not take a long time for the

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<sup>195</sup> The giving of food was considered meritorious and was a way of gaining *savaab* or spiritual credit. The issue of feeding people and gaining *savaab* as a result of their gratefulness and their prayers will be explored in a following chapter.

chowdri to ascertain who had voted for whom. Chowdri Haq Nawaz was particularly angry with the Rajputs because he claimed that Chowdri Nawaz Ali had given them their community centre and had even provided some of them with government jobs. Following Chowdri Haq Nawaz's threat of eviction one of the Rajputs who used the community centre appealed to one of Chowdri Haq Nawaz's close supporters known to be a level headed man in order to stop Chowdri Haq Nawaz from taking action against them. The chowdri had reasoned with Chowdri Haq Nawaz and had eventually convinced him that he should be merciful, in part because evicting the Rajputs would only lessen his chances of winning future elections.

Although Chowdri Nawaz Ali's candidate was able to defeat the *Makhdoom* candidate in his home village of Bukhuwala (partly thanks to the friendly polling officer), it also became clear on the day following the elections that the alliance which included Chowdri Abdullah had managed to win the majority of union council seats in the area. This meant that they would be able to gain a district nazim favourable to their interests. Even though Chowdri Nawaz Ali vowed to contest the results through the local courts on the basis that they were the result of rigging, he and his allies would have to wait until 2008 in order to regain some of the political power that they had lost since Musharraf's takeover.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has shown that there is a substantial amount of evidence indicating that the intentions behind General Musharraf's devolution programme differed from its stated aims. It is true that Musharraf's devolution programme, in a departure from similar programmes implemented by his military predecessors, envisaged the abolition of the position of Deputy Commissioner and placed significant emphasis on popular

empowerment. However, evidence provided in reports by the International Crisis Group and as a result of fieldwork suggests that like previous local government schemes the devolution programme actually sought to consolidate the power of the government at the centre. To achieve this the programme was implemented without the participation of political parties in order to prevent the opposition from coalescing effectively and to keep politicians focused on local issues. Additionally the government consolidated its position through the local government programme by using it as a partisan device to dispense patronage to supporters and withhold it from opponents. Pre-poll and polling day rigging during local government elections in favour of pro-government candidates provides even further evidence of the way in which the local government system was used and abused in order to consolidate Musharraf's and his PML-Q coalition's hold on power.

Additionally, it was argued that even if we assume that Musharraf's devolution programme was actually well intentioned its apolitical nature meant that it was largely doomed to failure from the start. The apolitical nature of the programme consisted in the fact that it was devised by technocrats from above rather than being the result of a popular movement seeking political empowerment. It largely failed to address fundamental issues about the local distribution of political and economic resources and was therefore likely simply to reproduce elite factional politics under the cloak of a new institutional framework. The present chapter sought to demonstrate that this is in fact what happened in Bek Sagrana where the contest to gain control over the local government system largely took place within the dominant Gondal biraderi. There members of rival factions sought to consolidate their hold over the district government and thus over the means of distributing and obtaining patronage. It was shown that since the majority of locals had neither the funds to contest elections nor the contacts in



government necessary for the distribution of patronage required of politicians, no one who wasn't a zamindar, or even a Gondal, seriously considered the possibility of participating in elections unless it was with the support of an influential chowdri.

As a result the electoral process, described in the second part of the chapter, was largely seen and experienced by the majority of the local population as a contest between members of the elite in which the common man had little to gain in terms of political and economic empowerment. There were several reasons for this. First, the electorate was limited to a choice between two candidates that represented the same, albeit divided, elite class interests. Second, a significant number kammis and landless labourers were told how to vote by their chowdris. Third, widespread rigging meant that people saw elections as an exercise that determined which candidate was powerful enough to influence results in his favour rather than as a means of securing the will of the people; in other words, what determined whether a particular candidate won was seen as related to a candidate's political connections and economic influence. As a result the majority of the local population had a cynical and sometimes carefree attitude towards the elections such that for many polling day was more of a festive occasion of free food, gathering with friends and gossiping than an opportunity to use their vote in order to gain political power.

To conclude it is worth pointing out that anecdotal evidence suggests that the findings presented in this chapter are likely also to be relevant for higher-level provincial and national elections outside of periods of military government. I gathered from various conversations with Gondal and other rural politicians that during such elections they went around collecting votes in much the same way as they did during the local government elections described above. Just as during the local elections, candidates often had to fund their own campaigns because despite the fact that political

parties were participating they often lacked sufficient funds and relied upon powerful and wealthy candidates to fund their campaigns for them. Similarly, just as during the local council elections, powerful candidates were able to gain votes through a mixture of coercion, patronage and cash. Thus for the majority of the rural population in the Punjab elections under democratic rule weren't necessarily any more empowering for the masses than were those held under military rule. The principal difference between provincial and national elections as compared to local elections was that for candidates the costs involved were much greater in the former case, so that it wasn't uncommon during provincial and national elections for politicians to sell land and other assets in order to finance their campaigns.<sup>196</sup> It was largely assumed that once in power the money spent would quickly be regained.

There is also evidence to suggest that pre-poll and polling day rigging was just as widespread during national and provincial elections under civilian administrations thus further emphasising the point that political parties in Pakistan weren't necessarily any more democratic than the military.<sup>197</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that when in power political parties also tried their best to rig elections in their own favour (although possibly less successfully than their military counterparts) by strategically releasing government funds and transferring police officers and members of the local judiciaries. Often the local stranglehold of powerful landlords in certain areas made it possible for them to rig elections in their own favour without the need of support from the central government. Thus, for example, in February 2008, when General Musharraf started to loosen his hold over power by allowing both the PPP and the PML-N to participate in

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<sup>196</sup> Chowdri Mazhar Ali told me that the average expenditure during provincial elections was around eighty lakh rupees.

<sup>197</sup> It has, for example, been widely reported that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto rigged the 1977 elections by using the Federal Security Force, which he created, and the police in order to disrupt opposition campaign rallies (see Bennet-Jones 2002: 229).

elections, I learned that Ghulam Ali Midhiana's son had won a seat in the provincial assembly with a huge majority due to rigging. A close friend of mine, whom I remained in telephone contact with after fieldwork, acted as a polling officer during the elections and told me that because the polling was held in Midhiana's home village where opposition to him was weak, his supporters were able to takeover the polling station. Because the police had close ties with Midhiana they did nothing to prevent this. Without police support, and surrounded by Midhiana supporters, the polling officers were too intimidated to object to multiple voting by Midhiana supporters and Midhiana, who was poised to win in any case, won with an overwhelming majority.

## Chapter Six: The Islam of Power and the Islam of Powerlessness

This chapter raises the question of whether local Islam dominated by saints (pirs), with its personalised and hierarchical emphasis, might be the cause of personalised authoritarianism as Hammoudi (1994) argues,<sup>198</sup> or alternatively whether it is simply the case that pir-dominated Islam allows powerful individuals to make sense of and legitimise the existing social and political order.

Various Pakistani commentators, including Pakistan's ideological founder Muhammad Iqbal, have argued that pirs, much like saints in Morocco for Hammoudi, posed a serious obstacle to the establishment of a universal Muslim democracy in Pakistan.<sup>199</sup> Iqbal argued that the cult of saints, which he referred to as 'Persian mysticism' (Iqbal 1964: 81), was an obstacle by virtue of its creating a spiritual aristocracy pretending to claim power and knowledge not accessible to the average Muslim. Hammoudi claims that the absence of democracy in the Middle East is similarly related to the cult of saints. According to him authoritarianism in the Middle East is rooted in a deeply ingrained respect for authority that derives from the highly authoritarian relationship between Sufi masters and their disciples. He argues that large-scale organisations in Morocco such as government bureaucracies and political parties are governed by criteria of personal allegiance and faithfulness that replicate those governing the interactions between masters and their disciples in Sufi brotherhoods. He further argues that political authoritarianism in the Middle East has deep cultural roots.

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<sup>198</sup> As noted in chapter one, Hammoudi argues this to be the case for Morocco and large parts of the Middle East. Hammoudi's argument is relevant to this thesis for two reasons: because in Pakistan as in Morocco saints play a prominent social and political role, and because politics in Pakistan is authoritarian and personalised, as Hammoudi claims is the case in Morocco.

<sup>199</sup> The writer K.K. Aziz (2001) has recently added to this chorus by arguing that the cult of saints is a barrier to enlightenment that leads to the ignorance of Islam, denial of personal responsibility, quietism, feudalism, dictatorship and to moral corruption in social life.

It cannot be simply explained, he says, with reference to “class structures and dependency, the patronage system and the elites’ segmentary competition” because these explanations fail to explain “the apparent acquiescence to it of much of the populace” (Hammoudi 1994: 3).

The explanations put forward in this thesis for personalised authoritarianism, which emphasise dependency, the patronage system and segmentary competition<sup>200</sup> among the elites, are in fact better able to account for authoritarianism than is Hammoudi’s cultural explanation. Although certain pirs belonging to the local chowdri elite make claims to spiritual superiority these claims are generally contested by subordinate kammis. This suggests that the political quiescence of the masses isn’t related to belief among its members that they are spiritually subordinate as Hammoudi claims. Although it is true that the rural poor in Pakistan are not revolutionary, a purely ideological or cultural explanation cannot account for this fact. It is better explained by the fact that within the existing factional, patronage based political system their opportunities for collective action are limited. These limitations mean that passive acceptance and cooperation are pragmatic responses to their socially subordinate position.

Moreover contrary to Hammoudi it is not the social order that is the reflection of a culturally ingrained model of religious values; rather the opposite is more accurate. The material doesn’t demonstrate, as classical Durkheimian sociology argues (see Durkheim and Mauss 1963 [1903]), that people’s religious categories are the reflection of the social order as a whole but it does illustrate that the emphasis that individuals place on aspects of the vast Islamic tradition that they can draw upon reflects, or at least relates to, their own position within the social order. This is because individuals

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<sup>200</sup> Or factional competition according to this thesis.

emphasise aspects of Islam that help them understand, justify and give value to life experiences which are to an important degree shaped by their position within the political and economic order. Thus the local form of Islam espoused by dominant groups within the village reflects aspects of the existing personalised and hierarchical social and political order because it not only legitimises their position within it but helps them to make sense of their experience. Against this, the form of Islam espoused by poor kammiss places less emphasis on formal ritual and ideology emphasising hierarchy and instead puts greater emphasis on inner feelings and sincerity. This greater interior focus makes sense given that as a result of poverty and illiteracy kammiss are often unable to practice a more scriptural and ritual based form of religion: because of their poverty-level subsistence kammiss may often not have the luxury of time or the ritually clean clothes to perform their prayers, and because of widespread illiteracy kammiss may often not have access to a range of spiritual positions otherwise available scripturally. To them the exoteric Islam of the religious and political elites is the Islam of power and not the true Islam of love and devotion exemplified by the great figures of the faith who, in their eyes, were often persecuted and oppressed by the powerful.

### **Pirs in the Punjab: A Historical Overview**

Pirs in the Pakistani Punjab, in contrast to the saints of the Atlas (Gellner 1969) and to the Sheikhs of North Lebanon described by Gilsenan (1990, 1996), have often become important land-owners and power-holders in their own right. Historically the great Sufi pirs of the Punjab, such as Baba Farid of Pakpattan and Baha-al Haq Zakaria of Multan, established themselves as mediators between local Jat tribes and played a central role in their conversion to Islam. Ansari's (2003) work on the neighbouring province of Sindh indicates that many pirs played an important role in settling disputes between individuals belonging to different tribes. They also helped to foster the

possibility of cooperation between tribes on issues such as irrigation and trade. By virtue of their role as local mediators the influence of many of these pirs and their associated shrines grew. Although many of the major shrines in both the Punjab and in Sindh were originally founded by ascetic Sufis with little or no material wealth, many of them and their descendants came to form a wealthy landed aristocracy. This was the result of gifts from disciples, patronage from the courts in Delhi and later, British colonial patronage. Thus, for example, in the area of Pakpattan Sharif the descendants of the thirteenth century Pir Baba Farid came to form a “separate ‘Chishti’ caste possessing both economic privileges and ritual status vis-à-vis the local clans” (Eaton 1984: 349). The settlement report of 1892-99 for the district of Montgomery reports that the Chishtis owned nine percent of all the land in Pakpattan Tehsil (Gilmartin 1984: 224). Richard Eaton reports that this land was acquired by the Chishtis over several generations as a result of gifts (*futuh*) from disciples, as well as patronage from the Delhi court starting during the Tughluq Period in the 14th century.<sup>201</sup>

By extending their patronage to Sufi Shrines the various Delhi royal courts, and later the British and Pakistani governments, essentially sought to augment their local influence within their wider political frameworks. In so doing these different authorities increased the influence of those shrines and their guardians (*sajjada nishin*). Eaton reports that the Delhi court not only made donations to the shrine of Baba Farid in the form of land and magnificent tombs but also gave the guardians of his shrine revenue-collecting functions. He argues that as a result of the incorporation of shrines such as Baba Farid’s into the larger political structures centred in Delhi, the pirs adopted various symbols, terms and titles from the Indo-Islamic royal courts, including some pertaining to tax collection. He also draws a particular parallel between the *dastar bandi*

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<sup>201</sup> The Tughluq Period lasted from 1321 to 1398.

ceremony, in which a pir symbolically bestowed legitimate authority by tying a turban on a chief's head, and coronation ceremonies. All of this demonstrates that the development of shrines as centres of power had at least as much to do with political considerations as it had to do with the beliefs of the faithful. The implication of this for Hammoudi's argument is that it wasn't simply the political order that was a reflection of the beliefs and rituals surrounding the Sufi shrines but rather that these practices and beliefs were themselves shaped and informed by broader power structures; in other words the hierarchical relationship between pirs and their followers was affected and informed by worldly power.

In fact the evidence suggests that the social, political and economic influence of pirs was heightened through their interrelationship with worldly power and that this led to tensions with the more egalitarian ideals of renunciation that are also inherent to Sufism and Islam more generally. Sources suggest that the close relationship between pirs and the secular authorities was from an early date problematic because the ascetic ideal of poverty and renunciation that they were meant to embody came into conflict with the practice and displays of worldly power. Thus Baba Farid is reported to have "assiduously avoided contact with the mundane world of the court and its ministers" (Eaton 1984: 338). Diya' ad-Din Barani records that Baba Farid cautioned a Sufi travelling to Delhi with the following words: "I give thee a bit of advice, which it would be well for thee to observe, have nothing to do with *maliks* and *amirs*, and beware of their intimacy as dangerous; no *darwesh* ever kept up such intimacy, but in the end found it disastrous" (Elliot, H.M and Dawson 1964: 144).

With the advent of British colonial rule the tensions between worldly power and spiritual authority were further heightened as the political power of the pirs came to depend upon cooperation with foreign, non-Muslim rule. The British made significant



land grants to pirs throughout the Punjab and Sindh and intervened in the various succession disputes that seemed to follow almost inevitably upon the death of a pir. In the case of Pakpattan the British even tried to send the young successor to stewardship of the shrine (*sajjada nishin*) to Aitchison College in order to ensure future political ties between themselves and the shrine. However although many important pirs had come to accept their political position in the British system they largely continued to reject the idea that their incorporation into the British value system. Thus the mother of the young *sajjada nishin* of Pakpattan, whom the British were trying to send to Aitcheson College, wrote to the governor of the Punjab in 1936 telling him that various influential *sajjada nishins* persisted in “maintaining that the *sajjada nashin* should be a *darwesh* and he has no need of receiving the education which is imparted to the sons of rich families” (Gilmartin 1984). This excerpt illustrates that there was not only a tension between the authority of pirs and British values but, even more fundamentally, that there was also one between wealth and power and the simple life of renunciation of the *darwesh*. Gilmartin (1984) argues that Punjabi pirs attempted to reconcile such tensions between their politico-economic position and their religious authority by increasingly espousing variants of reformism aiming to reassert Qur’anic Islam. Like other reformists, such as those in the traditions of Deoband and of the Tabligh-e Jamaat,<sup>203</sup> pirs increasingly

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<sup>203</sup> For an account of the rise of the Deoband movement and its attempt to purify Islam of popular accretions and of the excessive veneration of saints see Metcalf (1982). For an account of the Tabligh-e Jamaat and its attempt to encourage Muslims to be stricter in the practice of their daily rites see Metcalf (1993). It is important to note that Muslims in the Wahabbi and Deobandi traditions are not the only ones to have undergone reform, and that Sufi shrines throughout South Asia also played an important role in religious reform through the Chishti, *Naqshbandi* and *Barelvi* movements among others. For an account of the rise of the Barelvi movement at the end of the nineteenth century and its systematisation of the theology surrounding the cult of saints see Sanyal (1996, 1998).

sought to reshape the political order through their moral force rather than through direct political action. However because this approach failed to challenge the structure of tribal and landed power of which the pirs had become an integral part, the dilemmas facing their religious authority remained. All of this indicates that the position of pirs in the political and economic hierarchy wasn't simply the result of personalised hierarchical values, and that although such values did exist they were in tension with other more egalitarian ones.

In independent Pakistan the prominent political and economic position of pirs, like that of other landlords, came to be seen as an obstacle to state power (Nasr 2001), democracy, and social progress. Muhammad Iqbal believed that Islam was a deeply democratic religion wherein all believers were equal before God and that Islam was therefore completely compatible with modern parliamentary democracy. However 'Persian mysticism', by virtue of creating a spiritual aristocracy pretending to claim knowledge and power not open to the average Muslim, posed an obstacle to the establishment of democracy.

Subsequently in his book *The Ideology of Pakistan* Muhammad Iqbal's son Javed claimed that enlightenment, liberalism and meaningful faith were impossible to achieve in the face of the paralysing influence of mullahs and pirs. Following this suggestion, General Ayub Khan set up the ministry of Auqaf set up to manage all religious endowments and in order to curb the influence of pirs by nationalising the management and care of shrines. This policy was subsequently maintained by Bhutto and extended by General Zia-ul Haq, who tried to incorporate the task of appointing Imams in rural mosques and paying their salaries to the Auqaf department. Katherine Ewing (1990) describes how all of these governments tried to recast the shrines and pirs light that they felt was congruent with government social and political goals. Thus

General Ayub Khan tried to rationalise the cult of saints by distributing pamphlets on the urs of important pirs that omitted any reference to their miracles and stressed their piety and role as social reformers. In order to further emphasise the secular role of the pirs in promoting social welfare he also built hospitals at various shrines. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was not as concerned with stripping the cult of saints of superstition as he was with stressing the popular social welfare imparted at the shrines. In a position that combined elements of Khan's and Bhutto's, General Zia emphasised the role of pirs in promoting social welfare policies aimed at a particular type of Islamisation, but returned to a policy designed to strip the cult of saints of superstition and stress the piety and Sharia-mindedness of the pirs.

#### **Pir Ahmed Abbas Gondal and his Descendants**

In June 2008, one year after his death, Ahmed Abbas Gondal was publicly declared to be a pir by another pir in Sargodha who belonged to the same Sufi brotherhood of the Qadri order as he had. The pir also declared that Ahmed Abbas's son, Dr. Muzaffar Abbas Gondal, was to be his successor. At the same time an upcoming urs in order to celebrate the anniversary of Pir Ahmed Abbas Gondal's death and union with God was announced. In the days that followed posters advertising the urs went up on the road leading to the village. The posters advertised the fact that Pir Muzaffar Abbas Gondal was holding an urs on behalf of Pir Ahmed Abbas Gondal who had built Astana-e Alam as a place of worship and had spent over Rs.500,000 on behalf of the poor over the years.

With over 300 acres of land to his name Ahmed Abbas Gondal had been one of the wealthiest landlords in the village of Bek Sagrana. Unlike many of his Gondal relatives he remained aloof from the violent factional politics of the area and devoted most of his life to God. Until his late thirties, and before 1971, he had lived in one of the

largest houses in the centre of the village. The two other large adjacent houses belonged to his relatives, the rival factional leaders Ghulam Baksh and Ahmed Rasool. At the time he had briefly worked as a lawyer after taking a law degree at the University of Sargodha. However he is said to have quickly renounced the legal profession because he believed that the corruption that plagued it made it incompatible with leading a pious life. Like his father before him Muhamamd Hayat was a devoted disciple (*mureed*) of Pir Alam Shah of the Qadiri order lineage (*silsilah*). In 1971, having noted Ahmed Abbas's piety, Pir Alam Shah designated him one of his emissaries (*khalifa*) and ordered him to build a Sufi lodge, known as an *astana*,<sup>204</sup> at a designated location at a distance from the village next to the irrigation canal. The astana was to be a place of peace where people could come into contact with God through the practice of remembering God by repeating his various names (*zikr*) and via Pir Alam Shah who like other pirs mediated between mankind and God, as will be explained below. Adjacent to the Astana, Ahmed Abbas was also to build a mosque. The astana was also to be a place where the poor could obtain free Islamic medication (*hikmatī dāvai*) and be freely fed during the monthly religious celebration of Gyarvi Sharif marking the anniversary of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Gilani's union with God.<sup>205</sup> Pir Alam Shah told Ahmed Abbas that the astana needed to be built in a peaceful and pleasant location for these purposes, at a distance from the village where corruption, violence and ignorance (*jahliyya*) reigned. The astana was named Astana-e Alam after Pir Alam Shah. It was an eight-pointed star-shaped building located next to the running water of a large irrigation canal in the centre of a four acre compound covered with tall fragrant trees. Many of the

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<sup>204</sup> The word *astana* literally translates as 'threshold'. The term alludes to its being a place where one can pass from this world into the spiritual realm of God.

<sup>205</sup> Abdul Qadir Gilani was an influential Sufi teacher who lived in Baghdad between 1077-1166 A.D. He is considered to be the figurehead of the Qadri order. In South Asia he is often referred to as Ghaus Pak.

trees were planted by Ahmed Abbas and included several mango and rubber trees which had grown to a considerable size over the years. The trees and the nearby irrigation canal made Astana a cool, shady place where people could escape the torrid heat of the summer months and find peace (*sukoon*) in the greenery. Green was the favourite colour of the Holy Prophet and it was thought to possess certain curative qualities including that of improving people's eyesight and making people that set their eyes upon it feel at peace. Ahmed Abbas also built two small mosques within the compound and placed hand pumps (*nalka*) next to them for to allow people to carry out their ablutions and have water to drink. The astana was to be a place of peace where wayfarers could stop on their way not only to devote some time to worship, but also to rest in the cool shade and quench their thirst. It was a place, much like the Sufi lodge described by Werbner (2003), that was meant to stand beyond the conflict-ridden, corrupt world that surrounded it, where people could become both physically and spiritually whole.

Over the years several kammi families who at one time or another worked for Sufi Sahib under seyp contracts or as servants and labourers built seventeen mud houses around the walls of the Astana-e Alam compound. The village Imam also moved in and erected the only other brick and mortar house at Astana-e Alam other than Ahmed Abbas's. Astana-e Alam also acquired its own shop. In this manner the place became a somewhat self-contained unit set apart from the village. This allowed Ahmed Abbas and his family to separate themselves from the factional conflicts that were raging in the village. Ahmed Abbas's desire to stay out of politics and the factional conflict that it inevitably brought was expressed by the fact that throughout his life he sought to remain impartial in the conflict between the Ghulam Baksh Ke and the Ahmed Rasool Ke factions. To this end he went as far as marrying his children into both factions: he had one of his daughters and one of his sons marry with the children of Hajji Sahib (the son

of Ghulam Baksh), and he had another son marry the daughter of Ahmed Rasool.<sup>206</sup> On the basis of the impartiality this provided him, during the local council elections described in the previous chapter, for example, Ahmed Abbas instructed all of the kammis living at Astana either not to vote at all or to divide their votes equally between both factions.

By virtue of his impartiality Ahmed Abbas acted as a mediator in some of the disputes between Chowdri Abdullah and Chowdri Haq Nawaz. I was told that Ahmed Abbas had frequently called members of both factions, including Chowdri Abdullah and Chowdri Haq Nawaz, to the astana and had asked them to settle their disputes at the time when factional conflict in the village was at its peak in the early 1990s. Although Ahmed Abbas never managed to establish lasting peace between the two factions he apparently did succeed in temporarily halting hostilities on a few occasions. During my stay in Bek Sagrama, when factional conflict had abated but was still latent, Sufi Ahmed Abbas didn't play a major role in the settlement of disputes between the factions but he frequently called on the village faction leaders to set aside their differences and jointly address matters relating to village morality. On one occasion Sufi Ahmed Abbas summoned both faction leaders and asked them to stop protecting bootleggers and drug dealers as well as to personally renounce alcohol on another occasion Sufi Ahmed Abbas summoned the village leaders in order for them to jointly address the growing concern of theft in the village. According to villagers theft of all kinds had risen dramatically over the years and many of them attributed this to the growing number of heroin addicts. One particular concern was the theft of citrus from the orchards at night. Sufi Ahmed Abbas proposed that all of the chowdri should set aside their differences

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<sup>206</sup> Had he established marriage ties with only one of the two factions his impartiality is likely to have been jeopardised as he would have been expected to support members of the faction with which he had established marriage ties. With marriage ties to both village factions, when they competed for votes at election time Muhammad Hayat could step back from supporting either.

in order to tackle the issue jointly. He proposed that they create a jointly funded patrol to go around the village at night. He further proposed that any thieves caught should be made examples by filing cases against them with the police. In both cases the results were similar. Although on both occasions the rival leaders expressed their deference to the pious old man, in the first case they didn't actually change their behaviour and in the second, although they agreed to the proposal, they never got together to implement the patrol nor was any consistent policy in dealing with thieves established.

Despite being a mediator and an advocate of village unity and Islamic morality, Sufi Ahmed Abbas reproduced the particularistic social values and practices of the surrounding social order in various ways. To begin with he was after all an influential Gondal landlord, and his close kinship relations with the factional leaders of the village meant that his impartiality ended where his interests and those of the Gondals of Bek Sagrana were at stake. Thus Sufi Ahmed Abbas had supported the struggle of his kinsmen against the Makhdooms and even claimed that Chowdri Abdullah's appropriation of their land was legitimate. He made this claim on the basis that the land appropriated by Chowdri Abdullah had once been given as an offering to a Makhdoom pir by an ancestor known as Kala Gondal. Kala Gondal had gained a son thanks to the Makhdoom pir's intercession but, Ahmed Abbas argued, since the son of the Makhdoom pir had produced no legitimate male offspring the land should revert to the Gondals. Like other Gondals Sufi Ahmed Abbas claimed that the current head of the Makhdoom lineage in Nawabpur was in fact the son of a Tarkhan who was adopted by the Makhdoom pir who had been unable to produce a son. Moreover Sufi Ahmed Abbas, despite making sure that he earned his livelihood through lawful (*halal*) means, had no qualms about using particularistic kinship relations in order to secure state resources and patronage when he needed them. Thus although he, unlike many of his

relatives, refrained from stealing irrigation water and electricity he used his kinship relations with the Ghulam Baksh Ke faction while Chowdri Mazhar Ali had been in power to obtain hand pumps (nalkas) from the government for use in Astana-e Alam. In other instances Sufi Ahmed Abbas had no qualms about using kinship and friendship ties to secure jobs and benefits for close relatives, friends, and clients. For Sufi Ahmed Abbas giving patronage to such people was part of the moral give and take (*len-den*) of life just as it was for his secular relatives. His moral outlook was therefore not necessarily any less particularistic than that of his relatives.<sup>207</sup>

Ahmed Abbas's vision of the spiritual order, and of a social order that was in line with it, was in fact a highly idealised version of the existing social order. Like the existing social order it was particularistic in its emphasis on kinship, hierarchy and patronage. It was idealised in the sense that, unlike the existing social order, it was an order where individuals knew their position in kinship and social hierarchies, where spiritual and worldly patronage flowed generously downwards from superiors, and where people were truthful and avoided the things forbidden (*haraam*) by Islam. For Sufi Ahmed Abbas the world was governed by God through a hierarchy of Prophets followed by a hierarchy of saints at whose head was Ghaus Pak. Just as higher ranking politicians and bureaucrats had greater powers and larger areas of jurisdiction so did higher ranking saints (although the areas of influence of the saints didn't correlate with worldly and political jurisdictions). Thus if Ghaus Pak governed the entire world those saints just below him governed continents and those below them might govern countries. At the bottom of the spiritual hierarchy saints might govern geographical

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<sup>207</sup> It is interesting to note that after Sufi Muhammad Hayat's death his elder son, Dr. Muzaffar Abbas, was unable to maintain his father's impartiality towards the two Gondal factions within the village. The reason for this was that Dr. Muzaffar Abbas had married Chowdri Abdullah's sister and was therefore bound to be partial towards Chowdri Abdullah.



areas no larger than a union council. Worldly hierarchies and spiritual hierarchies were in fact often explicitly compared by people. It was quite common for a comparison to be made between the intercession carried out by saints and the worldly patronage provided by politicians. When, for example, Ahmed Abbas's younger son explained to me the need for saintly mediators between humankind and God he argued that just as it wasn't reasonable or realistic for people in need of patronage to try to contact the President directly it was similarly unreasonable for most men to try and directly reach God. Thus, he argued, if a person wanted better roads in his neighbourhood he should try to contact local politicians in his constituency and not President Musharraf. Similarly if a person required help from spiritual authorities it was most realistic for him to approach an accessible pir rather than to try and approach Ghaus Pak or even God Himself.<sup>208</sup>

Whereas politicians could only provide ephemeral worldly goods to their clients, saints could provide their disciples and supplicants with access to the infinite generative powers that flowed down from God through the hierarchy of Prophets and saints to humankind. Saints were seen as channels through which God's power (*takat*), as well as his grace (*barkat*), flowed down to humans. Barkat was a generative and fertile quality that descended from God and inhered in people and things. It was the source of all fertility, order, prosperity, and well-being on earth. If the crops were abundant and people were healthy and strong, if there was social order and harmony—these were due to God's barkat flowing down. If on the other hand there was scarcity, people were sickly and weak, and there was social strife, it was because God had cut off the flow of barkat as a result of people's immoral behaviour. In fact it was widely believed that in the present era barkat had become scarce because people had strayed from the straight

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<sup>208</sup> This argument was often used against Deobandis who were sceptical about mediation by saints and who frowned upon the attribution of divine powers to saints, seeing it as a violation of the principle of the Unity of God (*tauheed*).

path of Islam. Because people had forgotten God and now followed their own personal greed and impulses, men fought against their brothers and parents, fornicated, stole, committed adultery and consumed alcohol. The result was that people were unhappy and suffered from spiritual, social and even physical want. The fact that even milk, considered to be a crucial source of vitality, was diluted with water was a sign of the lack of barkat of the times. It was even believed that the absence of barkat was evident from the perceived fact that people were nowadays weaker, sicklier, smaller and even darker skinned than in previous generations. Elderly chowdris told me about how in previous generations men were much taller and stronger. Such men had been able to work for an entire day having consumed a single glass of buffalo milk—undiluted, it was observed—in the morning. They told me that even further back in time, when Prophets still appeared on earth and people were truly pious, humans were powerful giants who lived hundreds of years.

The lodges of the pirs stood in contrast to this social world devoid of barkat. The lodges were places where barkat entered the social world through the mediation of the lodge's original founding pir and his descendants. They were places where God's plenty flowed down to earth. This was most clearly illustrated through the practice of freely distributing food to disciples at the shrines. Many of the more important lodges and shrines had places known as *langars* where food was cooked for disciples and supplicants from large tin pots (*degs*) over fires. The most important ones held a perpetual langar, while some of the smaller lodges, like Ahmed Abbas's, only held a monthly langar on the occasion of Gyarvi Sharif. The langar was proof of the piety of a pir because it showed that the pir was generous. Such generosity could also be construed as the sign that a pir was a channel for barkat and abundance. In fact generosity was often construed as a sign of piety and therefore of the flow of barkat

through a person. This was because people who gave freely demonstrated their faith in God and were therefore rewarded by God with plenty. Thus pious old men who freely fed the poor often told me that the more they gave others, the more God gave them. They contrasted this with the behaviour of stingy people who, because they worshipped the world and its goods (*dunya parasti*) instead of God, never had enough of anything. In the case of great pirs their piety and proximity to God was such that disciples and supplicants considered that the langars at their lodges and shrines could never run out of food. This was vividly portrayed to me upon a visit to the Chishti shrine at Jalalpur Sharif where one disciple (*mureed*) explained to me how the langar at the shrine could never run out of food. He told me that during colonial times the British authorities had told the incumbent pir to cut down on food expenses at the langar because feeding thousands of disciples and supplicants for free would ruin him. The pir had apparently replied that the *langar* put no strain whatsoever upon his resources because it was God's endless barkat that flowed through it.

The barkat that flowed through pirs and their descendants was also evident in places like Astana-e Alam in a variety of other ways. As illustrated above, Astana-e Alam was a place of peace and greenery. It was a place where people could come to quench their thirst and seek remedies for illnesses. Ahmed Abbas hired a local Sayyid practitioner of Islamic medicine (*hakeem*) to attend patients at Astana-e Alam in the afternoons. People from all around the area of Bek Sagrana came to him to address ailments ranging from common colds to more serious cases of hepatitis. The hakeem combined herbal and religious prescriptions. The latter might involve the recitation of certain prayers and verses of the Qu'ran. The idea behind this was that physical ailments were also moral ones and that ultimately only God could make a person whole. The fact

that people who went to Astana-e Alam could become whole was, like the langar, proof of the fact that barkat flowed through Ahmed Abbas.

Additionally Astana-e Alam was a place where the disciples of Pir Alam Shah, including Ahmed Abbas, could quite literally connect with the infinite power of God through the performance of zikr. Zikr is a devotional act, generally associated with Sufism, whereby people remember, or invoke, God by reciting His ninety-nine names. It can be performed either in a group or individually. At Astana-e Alam the disciples of Pir Alam Shah, most of whom weren't from Bek Sagrana, generally performed zikr individually by either sitting on the ground in a cross-legged position or by sitting on their knees as people did during prayers (*namaaz*). They believed that through this they could acquire some of the supernatural powers of Pir Alam Shah. All of the disciples of Pir Alam Shah, including Ahmed Abbas's younger son, explained the performance of zikr at Astana-e Alam in terms of the modern imagery of electricity. They told me that when they performed zikr at Astana it was as if they pressed an electrical switch that enabled them to connect to a broader electrical grid. The 'electrical grid' was basically the network of saints who channelled God's infinite power and who by virtue of this governed the world. In this scheme Pir Alam Shah represented the local power station to which they could most readily connect. Ahmed Abbas's son explained that once connected to this 'electrical grid' people could become vehicles for God's infinite power, which he compared to nuclear power. As such, he claimed that through his connection with God by way of Pir Alam Shah his father could sometimes see into the future and also that his father had even greater powers that he didn't reveal to people.

Like other pirs Ahmed Abbas claimed privileged access to hidden divine knowledge. This included knowledge of revelations other than those contained within the Holy Qu'ran that had been secretly transmitted by the Holy Prophet himself to

Hazrat Ali and then down lengthy lineages (silsilahs) of saints. Knowledge of these revelations needed to remain secret because it was too complex for the common man to understand. If the common man gained access to this knowledge he would distort it and create social unrest. Thus, for example, Ahmed Abbas and his sons 'knew' that the Sharia expounded by the maulvis was simply a tool to keep social order, but that much of it was in fact inessential to the Islamic faith. This, however, couldn't be revealed to everyone. Ahmed Abbas believed that the spiritual value of fasting and praying was limited and that the purpose of the five daily prayers and of fasting during Ramadan was really to maintain individual discipline and social order. People who were close to God, like himself, had no need for them. As a result Ahmed Abbas rarely performed namaaz. Although he fasted during Ramadan—in order to maintain self-discipline—neither of his two sons did. Instead of the namaaz of the common people Ahmed Abbas and his sons performed zikr which gave them access to divine powers and knowledge reserved for a select few. Similarly Ahmed Abbas believed that heaven and hell, as expounded by the maulvis, was another device to keep people disciplined with the threat of eternal damnation. He believed that without the threat of hell society would quickly descend into anarchy as people would have no fear about the consequences of their actions. According to him the truth was that heaven and hell were states of mind. A person who was in contact with God was in fact in heaven while on earth. On the other hand those who were completely estranged from God because they were driven by selfishness (*khudgarzi*) were already living in hell.

Ahmed Abbas and his sons believed that it would be dangerous for the majority of people to gain access to some of the true divine knowledge (*haqiqi ilm*) to which they had access. Inherent in the vision of how power and barkat flowed down through the system of Prophets and saints was a strongly hierarchical view of the world. It was only

a select few who could gain access to the secret knowledge and powers of pirs such as Alam Shah. The rest of the world was too ignorant and immoral to be able to gain direct access to those things and had to rely on saints for their mediation.

To recapitulate, from the above account several parallels emerge between political mediation and spiritual mediation. Just as the political elite in the form of the landlords mediated between the common man and the higher authorities, the spiritual elite of pirs mediated between the common man and God. Moreover just as it was the duty of politicians to provide for and protect their clients, it was the duty of pirs to provide for and protect their disciples and supplicants. Politicians provided clients with political and economic patronage, while saints provided disciples and supplicants with spiritual 'patronage' as well as worldly patronage in the form of charity (food, free medication). Among many other things, spiritual 'patronage' could involve the intercession of a pir on behalf of a disciple or supplicant who wanted a son, who needed a cure for an illness, who needed medicine for sick livestock or who suffered from marital or other family problems. Pirs could also intercede with God in order to solve people's land and political disputes. It was also not uncommon for influential pirs to intercede with worldly authorities on behalf of those who appealed to them for assistance. Thus influential pirs could make their more powerful disciples obtain patronage for other less powerful disciples. This could involve help finding jobs or resolving court and police cases among other things. Although Ahmed Abbas's influence was localised and his spiritual following was restricted in comparison to many of the more important pirs of the Punjab, he sometimes interceded to obtain jobs for people and to resolve their disputes.

Ahmed Abbas's vision of the spiritual world also resembled the social and political order in that power, and barkat, flowed in it along personalised lines. For

example, kinship in the spiritual order played just as significant a role as it did in the social and political order. This is most clearly illustrated by the prominent spiritual position often attributed to the descendants of the Holy Prophet (as is the case in other places throughout the Muslim world). My informants believed that the prayers of descendants of the Prophet (sayyids) were more likely to be answered because the Holy Prophet himself had a particular interest in the wishes and wellbeing of his offspring. As a result a large number of pirs in Pakistan as elsewhere were, or at least claimed to be, descendants of the Holy Prophet. However, the importance of kinship in spiritual hierarchies wasn't solely restricted to the descendants of the Holy Prophet. In less exalted families as well sainthood was often inherited from father to son as in the case of Ahmed Abbas and his son Dr. Muzaffar Abbas, who made no claims to Sayyid lineage. Part of the rationale behind this was that the son of a pir was thought to be better placed than anyone else to get his father to intercede for supplicants. God Himself was also likely to have bestowed favour upon the descendants of a pir. It was also assumed that pirs passed on most of their secret spiritual knowledge to their sons and successors. It should also be noted that in Sufi brotherhoods people who were the disciples of the same pir referred to each other as *pir-bhai* meaning that their common affiliation to a pir made them brothers. Just as the children of the same father were blood brothers, the disciples of the same pir were spiritual brothers, and the relationship between disciples and their pir was regarded in much the same way as the relationship between father and son. Pirs, like fathers, were benefactors towards whom love, respect and loyalty were due. Also, *pir-bhais*, like blood brothers, were supposed to support each other in times of hardship. In one instance that I witnessed, a police officer who was about to order the demolition of a house illegally erected upon government land changed his mind when he noticed that the person whose house he was about to

demolish belonged to the same Sufi brotherhood as he did. He realised this when he saw that the owner of the house wore a skull cap (*topi*) with a thin red fringe around it signifying that he belonged to the same Chishti brotherhood of Pakpattan Sharif as he did.

Furthermore, just as personalised ties other than kinship, including friendship and patron-client ties, played an important role in the social and political order, so friendship and discipleship played an important role in the spiritual order. The role of friendship in the spiritual order was most clearly illustrated by the use of the term *wali* (which could be used as an equivalent for the term *pir*), which in Urdu indicated that a man was a friend of God. Thus the powers of intercession of pirs stemmed from the fact that as men who devoted their lives to God they were in some sense God's friends.

Previous chapters showed how good patrons were expected to have intimate personal knowledge of the lives of their clients, and this held in spiritual relationships between *pir* and supplicant as well. For example, it was shown that Chowdri Abdullah was praised for the fact that he remembered common villagers by name, and that he knew and remembered their problems. This often included knowledge of their intimate marital issues. Such intimate knowledge was an important factor in determining how effectively a patron dealt with clients' and it helped determine his popularity. In exchange for the patronage that they provided, patrons expected to obtain the deference and the political loyalty, as well as the services and sometimes the labour of clients. In a similar manner pirs such as Ahmed Abbas had intimate knowledge of their disciples' and supplicants' lives and problems because people who came to see them revealed their most intimate worries and secrets to them in order to obtain intercession and guidance. In exchange for their services pirs' demanded strict obedience from them.

Jamal Malik writes that rural pirs "guarantee the villagers' participation in divine



blessing (*baraka*) [sic], which is tied to strict obedience...and self sacrifice by followers of the pir” (Malik 1998: 188). In the case of the followers (known as *hurs*) of the powerful Sindhi landlord Pir Pagaro, self-sacrifice on behalf of their spiritual leader historically included waging jihad against the British (see Ansari 2003). More mundane examples of self-sacrifice by people for their pirs might include the provision of labour services, as well as making tributary offerings and gifts (*futuh*) to them. These labour services and offerings were supposed to demonstrate the love (*pyaar/mohabbat*) of disciples towards their pir and were therefore strongly distinguished from ordinary economic transactions.

As a sign of their devotion disciples frequently spent a couple of days a year at the shrine of their pir in order to help out with various chores. As Pnina Werber (2003) has illustrated, disciples helped with cleaning the premises of a shrine, helping with the langar, or serving tea and food to people. Even members of elite classes, used to having servants doing everything for them, performed such chores as a mark of their love and devotion towards their pirs. This was the case at Astana-e Alam where, on occasions such as Gyarvi Sharif, several Gondal chowdris would become involved in serving villagers food from the langar. Disciples of Pir Alam Shah and a handful of people who had become the disciples of Ahmed Abbas during his lifetime also occasionally came to Astana-e Alam to help out with maintenance and cleaning. On one occasion for example, a builder who was a disciple of Pir Alam Shah came to Astana-e Alam in order to repair some of the run-down structures around the compound. Kammiss who lived around Astana-e Alam also occasionally freely provided their labour services, although in their case this was not always out of free will. Ahmed Abbas believed that it was their duty to show their devotion to God by helping out. Their position as his kammiss and house tenants meant that they had little choice but to do so. Thus, as

previously mentioned, the Tarkhans living at Bek Sagraana had no choice but to help out with electrical work prior to the celebration of an urs for Pir Alam Shah because they feared that refusal might lead to eviction. As noted, they later complained that they would normally have received at least Rs.5000 for the work they had carried out.

The case of Muhammad Ashraf Ranjha further illustrates how pirs and their descendants received services and gifts in return for their spiritual 'patronage.' Muhammad Ashraf Ranjha was the village Imam, a pir, and a zamindar-smallholder. His grandfather became a pir in his home village of Bhukki as a result of the fact that following several years of drought and hunger he once ensured an excellent harvest through his prayers.<sup>209</sup> As a mark of their gratitude, villagers gathered four maunds of wheat on a yearly basis to give to him and, following his death, to his descendants. Because two generations later there were several descendants of the original pir living across several villages, the payment was rotated among them on a yearly basis. The village Imam and his siblings received the four maunds every third year.

In addition to this, the village Imam received various gifts and services from the villagers of Bek Sagraana. He was given gifts from people following a death in their family so that he would pass on religious merit (*savaab*) to the deceased. According to villagers and Muslims educated in the Barelvi Islamic tradition<sup>210</sup> that is dominant throughout rural Punjab, the living could pass savaab on to the dead and therefore increase God's favour towards them through their prayers. In villages around the Punjab the people considered the most qualified to do this were pirs and maulvis. Their knowledge of Islam and their greater proximity to God meant that their prayers were more likely to be answered by God. In giving gifts to religious leaders following a death

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<sup>209</sup> It was because the village had suffered so many years of drought and hunger that the village came to be known as *Bhukki*, meaning 'hungry.'

<sup>210</sup> See Sanyal (1996) for an account of the historical roots of this tradition as well as an account of its theology.

people showed generosity and therefore acquired *savaab* which could then be transferred to the deceased through the religious leader's superior prayers. Besides gifts following a death and various other gifts (that are beyond the scope of this chapter), Muhammad Ashraf and his elder brother also received daily gifts of bread (*roti*) from different households in the village on a rotating basis. In exchange for the meritorious act of giving *roti* the village Imam would offer his prayers on behalf of the villagers. The village Imam also obtained the labour of many of the village children in exchange for his wife and him teaching them how to read the Holy Qu'ran. Accordingly it was common to see young boys and girls sweeping the courtyard of Muhammad Ashraf's house.

### **Kammis and Spiritual Mediation**

The previous section focussed principally on Sufi Ahmed Abbas in order to illustrate how the religious practices and beliefs of an individual at the top of the village hierarchy promoted a hierarchical and particularistic vision of the social and spiritual order. In this section I will examine whether individuals less favourably located in the social hierarchy shared this vision and whether their political quiescence was related to the fact that they had internalised the view propounded by spiritual leaders, such as Sufi Ahmed Abbas, according to which they were spiritually subordinate.

Kammis and other individuals located at the bottom of the social hierarchy didn't unquestioningly accept the idea that they were spiritually subordinate. Not only did kammis often display a highly critical attitude towards particular figures of religious authority, including both pirs and maulvis, but they also often strongly contested the idea that they were spiritually subordinate. Moreover, although the kammis were generally ardent devotees of particular saints, they tended to place much greater emphasis upon inner states of loving devotion (*ishq*) than upon formalistic doctrine and

ritualism emphasising hierarchy and order. As such, although their spiritual understandings and practices didn't constitute an outright rejection of mediation and spiritual hierarchy, their greater focus upon individual inner states of being made their form of religiosity less concerned with the reproduction of the social status-quo. This was related to the fact that unlike people such as Sufi Ahmed Abbas, and to a lesser extent the village Imam, they had little invested in reproducing a status-quo from which they derived little benefit. Moreover, as indicated in the introduction, their lack of worldly capital, including that of power and status, prompted them to look inwards to identify value in their lives.

The dominant class of the village believed that the social subordination of the *kammis* was the result of a spiritual inferiority that stemmed from the fact that, like animals, they lacked self control and were driven by their lower carnal selves (*nafs*).<sup>211</sup> For them sober self-control and reason (*aql*) were the basis for honour (*izzat*), as well as for true faith; consequently, they were also the basis for social order. Men without self control became idle and indulgent. They lost control over their women and their servants. A man who let this happen was despised and was disparagingly referred to as a *beghairat*, indicating that he had no shame because he was unable control himself and others. A *beghairat* allowed the socially disruptive forces of the *nafs*, which should ideally be concealed and controlled, come out into the open. Therefore only a man of honour, and thus a man with control over himself and others, could properly practice Islam and prevent society from disintegrating. For socially dominant individuals Islam was therefore closely associated with notions of *izzat* whereby a man's worth was judged by his control over himself and others.

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<sup>211</sup> Similarly see Marsden (1997:60) for an account of how ex-Chitrali serfs were regarded as being animal-like by the region's former nobility.

Kammis were seen by the chowdris as inherently lacking self control and honour. They therefore needed both worldly and spiritual patrons to protect, guide and provide for them. The chowdris argued that the lack of self control was due to the less developed, more animalistic, nature of kammis and of Mussallis in particular. They claimed, for example, that Mussallis were sexually promiscuous. As mentioned in chapter two, chowdris believed that Mussalli women were sexually willing and indiscriminating.<sup>212</sup> They also claimed that the Mussallis' lack of self control was illustrated by the fact that they displayed excessive emotion in their everyday life and especially during funerals when they, particularly the women, wept and beat their chests. They also believed that Mussallis were incapable of any form of respectable form of work because they were too lazy and self-indulgent. According to a joke that was widely circulated among the chowdris, a Mussalli had once been employed by a chowdri solely in order for him to perform his five daily prayers but he had quit half way through his first set of prayers because he felt the task to be too arduous. The joke was meant to illustrate both the view that Mussallis were incapable of both hard work and of ensuring their own spiritual salvation.<sup>213</sup> Instead of hard work and spiritual discipline, it was said that the Mussallis earned their money through illegal activities, and when they weren't 'working' they were lying around, taking drugs and procreating. The chowdris claimed that the Mussallis wasted what money they had on useless frivolities and spent far beyond their means on weddings at the expense of meeting the basic needs of their families. Accordingly the children went around ill-clothed and filthy, and behaved like animals because their parents could not afford to send them to

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<sup>212</sup> What those who said this failed to mention was the fact that in instances when Mussalli women were apparently 'sexually willing' it was because a chowdri was in a position of power over them and their husbands.

<sup>213</sup> It must be noted that just as many landlords believed that kammis were incapable of handling their own worldly affairs and that they needed their firm guidance, pirs such as Muhammad Hayat believed that kammis were incapable of handling religious truth and that they needed the guidance of spiritually superior beings.

school. As they could not keep what little money they earned, they had to fall back on loans and servitude. Thus, the chowdris argued, Mussallis and other bonded labourers were themselves to blame for their servile condition.

Mussallis and kammis more generally did not accept that they were spiritually inferior and rejected most of the claims typically made by the chowdris. They accepted that there were some individuals among them who were involved in a variety of un-Islamic activities but rightly pointed out that this made them no different from many of the chowdris. Furthermore, kammis interpreted their behaviour not as being out of control and excessively emotional (*nafsiati*) but rather as passionate, impulsive, generous and self-sacrificing. The term that they often used to describe it was *jezbati* which indicated a nature that was willing to sacrifice itself for loved ones such as family and friends, as well as for the Holy Prophet Muhammad and for Islam. For them the fact, that they openly expressed their grief during times of bereavement—which chowdris and maulvis criticised—illustrated their loving nature and was not a sign of their sinful lack of acceptance of God’s will. The fact that they were derided for it by maulvis and chowdris was evidence of the shallowness of their own faith (*imaan*) which was only concerned with external appearances and not with love of their fellow beings. The Mussallis and kammis also claimed that the criticism they received from maulvis and chowdris for not performing their prayers as evidence of the fact that those people were solely concerned with outward appearances.<sup>214</sup> Thus although many of them accepted that they didn’t perform their prayers frequently, in some cases because they had no ritually pure (*pak*) clothes for the purpose, they claimed that true faith consisted in a pure heart (*pak dil*) and love for one’s fellow beings. For them performing prayers

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<sup>214</sup> See also Marsden (2005) for an account of how Chitrali villagers believed in the importance of heartfelt sincerity and compassion and how they criticised the local figures of religious authority (*dushmanan*) for their lack of these things.

with ritually clean clothes on was meaningless without a pure heart. They argued that although chowdris and spiritual leaders might perform their prayers frequently, they often performed them with an impure heart. For many of the Mussallis and kammis who claimed to hold love and self-sacrifice to be the essence of Islam, maulvis and pirs (including the village Imam and Sufi Ahmed Abbas) were concerned instead only with their own stomachs (*pet-parasti*)<sup>215</sup>. Many also argued that both the village Imam and Sufi Ahmed Abbas were simply interested in their social status and with obtaining gifts and services from people. Thus although many people appreciated the frequent generosity of the village Imam, others pointed to the fact that he took bread from poor people even though he was well off.<sup>216</sup> Even more people pointed out Sufi Ahmed Abbas's greed and stinginess because he had several bonded labourers whom he overworked in exchange for extremely poor wages.

The idea that for kammis Islam was about a clean heart (*pak dil*) and fervent, self sacrificing devotion (*jezbaat*) took many outward forms. Again the issue of grieving at funerals provides an example. Most of the Gondal chowdris in Bek Sagrana, as well as the village Imam, objected to excessive grieving at funerals on the grounds that it betrayed a lack of acceptance of God's will. They objected on the same grounds to the Shia rituals of self-flagellation (*matam*) during the Islamic calendar month of Muharram when people mourned the martyrdom (*shahadat*) of Hazrat Imam Hussain. According to the village Imam, self-flagellation was strictly forbidden in Islam because it involved harming the body which, as an invaluable gift from God, had to be treated with care.

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<sup>215</sup> A *pet-parast* was a person who worshipped his stomach just as a *bhud-parast* was a person who worshipped idols. Worshipping of one's stomach was just as much a form of idolatry as idol worship was.

<sup>216</sup> Although there were criticisms about the village imam including that he was the imam of the rich, many people appreciated the fact that unlike many of the chowdris he was generally the first to offer help to people. If someone needed a lift on a motorcycle to go to hospital, for example, he was often the first person that people would approach. Furthermore people often approached him for small loans and food. The wife of a heroin addict who lived next door to him and who was very poor often got her food from his family whenever she had run out of money.

For him even attending a Muharram procession as a spectator was a sin (*gunnah*) because it both condoned and encouraged an un-Islamic practice. But despite the village Imam's warning, many kammis nevertheless attended.<sup>217</sup> They told me that they attended because they wanted to demonstrate their heartfelt love and respect for Hazrat Imam Hussain, who had fought against the tyranny (*zulm*) of Yazid. For them Imam Hussain was in many ways a symbol of the struggle against tyrannical and unjust leaders. Several people explained to me that without Imam Hussain's martyrdom the Sharia would have ceased to exist because Yazid intended to modify it in order to suit his evil and tyrannical purposes. For them it was Hazrat Imam Hussain who had prevented tyranny from prevailing over Islam through his *jezbaat* and self-sacrifice. It is worth noting that the kammis sometimes compared certain chowdris in the village to Yazid. Although most of my informants agreed that self-flagellation with whips and razor blades was extreme, they nevertheless thought that it was an understandable demonstration of grief and support for a hero who had saved the Islamic faith. For them the heartfelt emotions expressed through *matam* was proof of people's love for the Holy Prophet and his descendants. One informant told me that the objections of *maulvis* were misguided because there couldn't possibly be anything wrong with expressing such heartfelt devotion. He also told me that the fact that one of the Holy Prophet's companions (*sahabas*), whose example Muslims were supposed to imitate, had smashed all of his own teeth with a rock after learning that the Holy Prophet had lost a single tooth clearly indicated that expressions of grief such as those expressed during Muharram by Shias were permissible.

The kammis' emphasis on the fact that true faith was about heartfelt devotion, and not simply about formal ritual and doctrine, was further illustrated by their

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<sup>217</sup> Although as Sunnis they didn't actively take part in the rituals.



appreciation for religious figures that had sometimes ignored or even gone against the Sharia as it was propounded by the religious and worldly authorities. For them truly pious men were often wandering ascetics (*malangs* and *fakeers*), who claimed no worldly privileges and were frequently scorned by temporal rulers and their stooges among the learned scholars of Islam (*ulema*). These wandering ascetics placed greater emphasis on internal practices that fostered purity of the heart and devotion than upon the external rituals of purification and worship associated with the Sharia. As the work of Katherine Ewing (1984) illustrates, Punjabi malangs saw themselves as being in such close proximity to God and with the purity of the sacred that they could not become polluted and so had no need for external rituals of purification. Ewing claims that the direct contact of malangs with God means that even bodily wastes are not polluting to them. Thus instead of emphasising the need for prayer and the ritually cleansing ablutions associated with it, malangs seek direct communion with God by inducing themselves into states of intoxication with the use of marijuana (*charas*). Views such as these relating to the relative or even total insignificance of external rituals of purification were widespread among kammi with whom malangs often had a shared social background.<sup>218</sup> This was clearly illustrated by an elderly Mirasi's statement that even a dog, the most impure of creatures, that had served any of the friends of God—including the Prophets, the companions of the Holy Prophet and the saints—would be dressed up as a man on judgement day and sent to heaven. He said that similarly a poor man who didn't perform his prayers because he didn't possess ritually clean (*pak*) clothes could also go to heaven. Moreover, like the malangs described by Ewing,

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<sup>218</sup> Although Ewing does not discuss the social background of malangs the evidence suggests that many of them came from kammi backgrounds. For example one malang that I met in Bek Sagrama when he came to visit his brother was a Mussalli. He led a nomadic existence living off alms and the money he gained from displaying his performing monkey that accompanied him everywhere. Yet another Malang that I met in Bek Sagrama was from a Mirasi family.

kammis often placed a great deal of emphasis on inner states of divine intoxication (*diwanagi*) as the true form of worship. They saw truly pious men as being intoxicated by their ardent love of God and their union with Him. Because they had achieved gnosis malangs realised the illusory nature of the ephemeral phenomenal world and therefore showed little concern for worldly matters. As a result they often dressed in rags and cared little for outward norms of worldly respectability. Their achievement of gnosis also meant that they often uttered things that were incomprehensible to ordinary mortals whose access to divine truth was veiled. This combination meant that ordinary mortals, and particularly the powerful whose interests they might challenge, mistook them for madmen (*pagalon*) when in fact they were intoxicated with divine love (*diwanas*). Thus there was a distinction between simple madmen, *pagalon*, who were entangled in ephemeral worldly concerns, and *diwanas* who appeared to be madmen because of their lack of worldly concern but who were actually in contact with ultimate truth (*haqiqat*).

Kammis frequently referred to Pir Shamsuddin of Multan, also known as Shah Shams Tabrez, as an example of how the Ulema and the worldly authorities often scorned wandering ascetics who spoke the truth (*haqiqat*). Much like the seventh-century Persian mystic Mansur Al-Hallah, Shamsuddin had claimed that when he spoke it was God and not he who spoke, and the Ulema accused him of blasphemy (*kufir*) and declared him to be an apostate (*murtadd*) deserving death. As a result he had gone into exile in Multan where he had been further reviled and driven almost to starvation by people refusing him food. According to a version recounted to me by a carpenter it was a poor man who eventually gave him some raw meat. The fact that it was a poor man who had given the meat was significant because for my kammi informant it clearly showed that the poor were among Shamsuddin's supporters. Like them he was reviled, denied the basic necessities of life, and treated with contempt by worldly and religious

authorities. The story goes on to describe that the poor man who had given Shamsuddin the meat couldn't cook it for him because he didn't have any means to do so, and no one else was willing to help. Eventually, because people hadn't left him any other choice, Shamsuddin held the meat up towards the sun, which came down out of the sky and roasted it for him. The sun also almost roasted the local inhabitants, who came running to Shamsuddin asking for forgiveness and pleading with him to send the sun back to its place.<sup>219</sup> In this manner the arrogant and the powerful of the land had been humbled and Shamsuddin, somewhat like Hazrat Imam Hussain, stood as a figure representing the struggle of the poor and of truth against worldly authorities, tyranny and hypocrisy (*munafiqat*).

The carpenter who recounted this version of the story identified with Shamsuddin and his plight for a variety of reasons. Although he wasn't as poor as many other kammis, he still suffered the stigma of being a kammi when it came to interacting with the Gondal chowdris. He frequently complained about how the Gondals treated kammis like animals without feelings, while simultaneously preaching to them about Islam. He had personally experienced this when he had worked for an abusive Gondal chowdri who was a renowned miser and alcoholic who would sometimes even preach to him about Islam when drunk. To him these Gondals were only interested in worldly power and status and they thereby entirely missed the point of Islam which was about worldly detachment, love, charity and brotherhood. He pointed to people such as Ahmed Abbas and described them as a political (*seasi*) pirs who displayed their pride (*maghruri*) through their large houses and new cars, and who mixed with powerful politicians. Moreover he contrasted them with unpretentious fakeers such as Shamsuddin who had owned nothing more than a prayer mat (*mussalla*) and a vessel to

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<sup>219</sup> According to my informants it was because of Shamsuddin's act that to this day Multan remained the hottest place on the entire subcontinent.

carry water (*lota*). The young Tarkhan also had personal reasons for identifying with Shamsuddin's plight. Upon returning from a visit to a shrine in Sargodha, his now octogenarian grandfather had once, much like Shamsuddin, claimed to be God before a large assembly of villagers gathered at the village darra. In subsequent years the old man had intermittently reiterated this claim. At the time of my fieldwork the old man walked around the village dressed in a frayed and dirty shalwar kameez carrying prayer beads in one hand and a long walking stick in the other, in the manner of wandering ascetics.<sup>220</sup> He was known to care little for human company and seldom spoke. When he did speak he made prophetic pronouncements that included warning villagers about me—the anthropologist who had allegedly come to pave the way for a British invasion of Pakistan. As had been the case for Shamsuddin most people other than his close kinsmen thought he was insane (*pagal*) and paid little attention to him. Moreover as in Shamsuddin's case it was the religious authorities that were the most intent upon denouncing his heterodoxy. The village Imam and his relatives, who happened to be the next door neighbours of the old man and his large family, claimed that the old man had lost his mind as a result of walking several miles on a devastatingly hot summer day. They called the old man a crazy fool and said that his statements were deeply blasphemous. Although the village Imam didn't openly confront either him or any of his descendants who endorsed his claims<sup>221</sup> the Tarkhan family was aware of his views. The young Tarkhan who recounted Shamsuddin's story would often take me aside in order to tell me not to listen to everything that the village Imam told me about Islam. He told me that sometimes men who were close to God, like his grandfather, uttered

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<sup>220</sup> Wandering ascetics who circulated around the countryside asking for alms generally carried prayer beads and a long stick. The long stick served both as a walking stick as well as for protection against the fierce and occasionally rabid dogs that people kept at their farmsteads. Some of these sticks were made out of metal and had a forklike end to them in order to pin down attacking dogs.

<sup>221</sup> For the sake of maintaining good neighbourly relations and because the claims didn't pose a significant threat to the imam's religious authority.

statements which people who were excessively enmeshed in worldly affairs couldn't understand. Without directly referring to his grandfather's claim, he explained that when the great Sufis, such as Shamsuddin, had claimed to be God, it was in fact not they who were speaking but God himself speaking through them. Thus they weren't personally claiming to be God as the village Imam accused his grandfather of doing, but rather they were claiming to be channels or vessels for God. According to him the reason that the village Imam failed to understand this was that he was far too concerned with superficial worldly matters. He believed that, like Sufi Ahmed Abbas, the village Imam was mainly interested in his material well-being, and the Tarkhan illustrated this by pointing to the fact that despite being well off he took bread from poor people on a daily basis. For him the fact that the village Imam was after all a zamindar, albeit a smallholder, and that he was on friendly terms with many of the village chowdris, meant that he was the Imam of the rich.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter has sought to illustrate the fact that in Bek Sagrana there was no single overarching model of Islam from which the existing social order might be derived. Instead people placed different emphases on different aspects of Islam depending upon their position within the social order. In arguing this I drew some inspiration from the book *Islam in Practice: Religious Beliefs in a Persian Village* (Loeffler 1998) where Loeffler documents the views on Islam of twenty-one individuals differently located within the social order of a Persian village. Loeffler sought to demonstrate the fact that individuals creatively draw upon the vast wealth of Islamic thought and tradition in order to make sense of and give value to their lives. He argues that individuals cannot be subsumed under monolithic identities like 'Muslim' or tribesman, but must instead be understood as active, thinking agents with different

interests, concerns and loyalties. This chapter similarly sought to show that people in Bek Sagrana creatively and selectively drew upon aspects of the Islamic tradition in order to make sense of and give value and legitimacy to their particular modes of existence. However the aim of this chapter was not to attempt to cover the entire range of religious views of people in Bek Sagrana (of which there are arguably as many as there are individuals in the village) but rather to propose a generalisation about the religious views of individuals at opposite poles of the social hierarchy who share similar access to political and economic resources. The point was not to deny that individuals within these groups had their different views on Islam arising from individual life experiences, but simply to show that their shared socio-economic position made them more likely to emphasise certain aspects of the faith at the expense of others.

The account that focused upon Sufi Muhamad Hayat illustrated how the Islam of the powerful was also the Islam of power. Ahmed Abbas and his sons' understanding of Islam was particularly revealing of this. Their vision of the spiritual hierarchy of saints clearly mirrored aspects of how worldly hierarchies were structured. It was a hierarchy where spiritual power and *barkat* flowed down from God along particularistic lines of kinship, friendship and discipleship, just as in the social world patronage flowed down from political leaders along particularistic lines of kinship, friendship and patron-client relations. It was also a hierarchy where *pirs* expected devotion, services, and gifts from disciples and supplicants in exchange for their spiritual mediation and charity. This was paralleled in landlords and politicians expecting loyalty and services from clients in exchange for patronage and protection.

Although many other Gondal chowdris in the village, and the village Imam, didn't share some of Ahmed Abbas's views on Islam (most notably his rejection of certain aspects of Sharia), they too emphasised aspects of Islam where deference played

an important role and where spiritual superiors provided spiritual mediation in exchange for loyalty, services and gifts. The village Imam, who was a proponent of Barelvi orthodoxy, went as far as saying that Sufi Ahmed Abbas was guilty of inventing his own religion just as, according to him, the Ahmedis<sup>222</sup> had done. Nevertheless, like Sufi Ahmed Abbas, he too positioned himself as a spiritual mediator who obtained gifts and services in exchange for spiritual intercession.

In contrast, the Islam of the kammis was the Islam of powerlessness. Although their Islam also drew upon a tradition revolving around saint worship they emphasised different aspects of this tradition. The religious figures that they revered, including Hazrat Imam Ali and pirs such as Shamsuddin, didn't resemble worldly patrons as much as they resembled the kammis themselves. Much like the kammis these figures were often scorned and oppressed by worldly authorities, and unlike 'political (*seasi*) pirs' as the grandson of the mystic carpenter called people like Sufi Ahmed Abbas, these figures had no concern for worldly things such as wealth, power and status. Their lack of concern with worldly matters was such that some of them, most notably the malangs, even rejected the exoteric rites of purity and worship associated with the Sharia. The kammis described here resembled the poor peasants described by Loeffler who believed that "true Islam does not consist in the fulfilment of formal ritual obligations" (Loeffler 1998). Instead they believed that true Islam was principally about sincerity and heartfelt, even passionate, devotion to God and the Holy Prophet. Arguably such an inward focus was related to the fact that, unlike wealthy landlords and pirs, they couldn't afford to make outward demonstrations of faith by virtue of their poverty and illiteracy.

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<sup>222</sup> The Ahmedis are a religious movement founded in the nineteenth century. Their origins lie in the teachings of Mirza Ghulam Ahmed who claimed to be the Messiah (*Mehdi*) and the prophesied redeemer of Islam, who was meant to come before the day of judgement anticipated by Muslims.

This chapter has argued that any attempt to explore Islam in the abstract, either as a set of theological doctrines or as culture, independently of its social mooring in concrete political and economic formations, is ultimately misguided. This means that to blame a particular form of Islam, in this case one that revolves around saint worship, for the presence of authoritarianism is also misguided. Islam is a vast tradition which people often creatively draw upon in order to make sense and give value to life experiences that are circumscribed by their socio-economic position. It cannot be reduced to anything as simple and singular as the master-disciple relationship for example. Therefore, it is the distribution of power, wealth and status that ultimately explains authoritarianism and associated authoritarian ideologies. In this light, saints are only an obstacle to democracy and democratic ideologies in so far as they wield disproportionate power and wealth.

Finally this chapter has also shown that the very ideology that was put forward by the dominant class in the village was turned against it by the subordinate classes. This brings to mind James Scott's claim that

The most common form of class struggle arises from the failure of a dominant ideology to live up to the implicit promises it necessarily makes. The dominant ideology can be turned against its privileged beneficiaries not only because subordinate groups develop their own interpretations, understandings, and readings of its ambiguous terms, but also because of the promises that the dominant classes must make to propagate it in the first place (Scott 1985: 338).

In Bek Sagrana this inversion of the Islamic ideology upheld by the dominant class of the village didn't take the form of overt struggle, and criticism of this ideology was never openly voiced. As in other aspects of their lives many kammis outwardly accepted the lectures given to them on morality and Islam by their social superiors. Whatever criticism they voiced was generally in hushed tones when they were well out of earshot of any chowdri. However, it is not too much to assume that accusations such



as those described in this chapter on the part kammi of a hypocritical betrayal of Islam by superiors could be stimulated to some form of action under the right circumstances, such as a militant movement.

On that score, I will expand the discussion in the concluding chapter beyond the limits of Bek Sagrana in order to explore the ways in which Islam was deployed by Pakistan's ruling classes in order to create national unity and deflect class conflict and the ways in which this has backfired. Moreover I will explore whether the militant Islamic movements that are now wreaking havoc in Pakistan and beyond can in some sense be seen as one of the few existing channels for the expression of class grievances by the increasingly proletarianized rural poor.

## Conclusion

“...In every village there were generally faction feuds raging. Active minds were busy...devising plans for dishing the other side, detaching members from it, and generally putting their own side ahead.” (Carstairs 1912)

“There aren’t any. Not real peasants. Not revolutionary peasants. The ones I have met are fighting *for* their feudal lords, not *against* them. They are fighting to preserve the status quo. They are fighting so that their feudal lords can keep them in their shackles. They are subverting the genuine class struggle of workers like me and you.”

Extract from the novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (Mohammed Hanif 2008)

“The equation of Islam and the central government encouraged arguments, some more pious and others, about Islam’s potential leavening effects on all forms of social divisiveness. Its categorical pronouncements on the right to own private property, matched by a very broadly defined concept of social justice, could pre-empt moves by ungodly communist ideologues to promote class conflict. For the landlords of west Pakistan, anxious to cut short all moves towards agrarian reforms, for the trading and commercial groups, determined to make a killing without let or hindrance, for the urban propertied classes, looking to secure and augment their wealth, and for a state needing to consolidate and expedite the processes of capital accumulation, Islam offered a moral escape from one too many awkward realities. As Liaquat Ali Khan pontificated, the people of Pakistan should ‘follow the teachings of the Prophet and not those of Marx, Stalin or Churchill[sic]’.

Extract from *The State of Martial Rule. The Origins of Pakistan’s Political Economy of Defence*. (Jalal 1999)

### **Deliverance or Danger: Militant Islam and the Rural Poor**

Since Pakistan’s birth in the wake of the traumas of partition in 1947, one of the dominant concerns of its ruling classes has been to establish the Islamic nature of the state. This concern diverted political attention away from agendas of fostering social equality and creating a more representative form of government; in fact, Pakistan’s ruling classes actively manipulated Islam in order to undermine such agendas.

Following Pakistan’s early commitment to the American side in the Cold War, Islam was deployed against leftist movements in order to prevent communism from gaining a foothold in the country. This was particularly the case during the rule of General Zia-ul-

Haq when the programme of land reform initiated by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was reversed as un-Islamic. During this same period left-leaning student groups virtually disappeared from university campuses and were replaced by the Islami Jamiat-i Tulabah, the student wing of the Jamaat-i-Islami.<sup>223</sup> Also, because at independence it had lacked a solid constituency, the Muslim League deployed Islam to give itself and the central government which it dominated legitimacy. The Muslim League also used Islam to create a sense of national unity in a culturally diverse population divided by extreme economic disparities. Most notoriously, the Pakistani government made use of Islam by sponsoring *Jihadi* groups to fight proxy wars in Kashmir and Afghanistan.

Jinnah himself, despite his secularist outlook, was quick to “take refuge in Islam to survive the cross-fire of provincialism and religious extremism” (Jalal 1999: 280). Unwilling to concede greater powers to centripetal provincial forces, Jinnah’s central government sought to establish itself as the guardian of the faith for which a huge number of people had sacrificed their lives at partition. Forces pressing for greater provincial autonomy and cultural recognition, particularly in East Pakistan and Baluchistan,<sup>224</sup> were quickly accused of seeking to undermine the sacrifices made for a Muslim homeland. From Pakistan’s earliest days the central government accused its critics of being Indian agents working against Islam.<sup>225</sup>

Lacking significant measures to address economic and power imbalances between regions or social classes, government-led Islamisation neither gave the central

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<sup>223</sup> See Nasr (1994) for a detailed account of this process.

<sup>224</sup> Urdu was made the national language despite the fact that the majority in the country was Bengali. This was one of a series of grievances that the Bengalis would have to endure as citizens of East Pakistan.

<sup>225</sup> See Jalal (1999: 280) for an account of this during the early history of Pakistan. Even today groups that challenge the authority of the state are branded as anti-Pakistan and therefore as enemies of Islam. The equation of Pakistan with Islam has meant that even groups that are challenging the Pakistani state under the banner of Islam, such as the Taliban, are being branded by the government as enemies of Islam. Rumours, encouraged by politicians, are circulating that the Taliban are in fact non-Muslim agents on the payroll of either India or America, and are working to destabilise Pakistan and so undermine the only power capable of defending the world’s Muslims with nuclear missiles.

government greater legitimacy nor fostered a sense of national unity. This became abundantly clear with the secession of East Pakistan in 1971 and with growing (and continuing) unrest in Baluchistan over provincial autonomy and shares in gas revenues. Without an institutional, democratic framework to facilitate the peaceful settlement of grievances, and with the often violent suppression of dissent, individuals increasingly made recourse to violence and agitation in order to redress their grievances. State-led Islamisation and the branding of political opponents as anti-Pakistan and anti-Islamic meant that political activity and agitation increasingly took place under the banner of religion.

By seeking legitimacy through Islam, the central government cleared the way for a wide array of Islamic ideologues to make their bid for power as legitimate opposition. Islam soon became the main point of contention between Islamic scholars from various traditions, all of whom vied to determine the extent to which the laws of the state were in accord with the teachings of Islam. In this way, rather than fostering national unity, state-led Islamisation engendered struggles between representatives of different Islamic traditions and eventually produced sectarian conflicts that have claimed thousands of lives in Pakistan to date. Islam in Pakistani society was never the monolithic identity that the ruling classes sought to portray. Not only did Pakistan's citizens belong to a variety of different Islamic traditions, including various different Shia and Sunni schools of thought, but those traditions themselves varied not only according to region but, as discussed earlier, also according to class. Without a sustained effort to bridge the gap between state and society, forging a sense of national solidarity through Islam was likely to fail and even to backfire.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> State patronage of Jihadi groups fighting proxy wars in Kashmir and in Afghanistan backfired by leading to the Taliban insurgency that now rages throughout large swathes of the North West Frontier Province and threatens to spill into the Southern Punjab.

Poverty, lack of investment in an education system plagued by corruption and teacher absenteeism and the channelling of government funds into religious institutions meant that both the rural and urban poor increasingly flocked to the Deobandi religious schools (*madrassas*) that mushroomed throughout Pakistan after independence.<sup>227</sup> The role of *madrassas* was particularly prominent in the Southern Punjab where feudal landlords much like the ones who are the focus of this thesis were opposed to villagers gaining a school education for fear that this might make them seek better employment and become more aware of their rights and more assertive in the process (see Abou Zahab 2002: 82). Several landlords, including the Gondals and some influential Shia landlords from Chiniot in the district of Jhang, told me that education gave villagers excessively high job expectations. One particular landlord from Jhang openly told me that if villagers gained education there would be no one left to work for them. Evidence further suggests that landlords in these areas also actively opposed the establishment of schools and that they frequently took over existing ones to use as *deras* or even cowsheds. According to one study conducted in 1998 there were 5000 ‘ghost schools’ in the Multan division and 800 in the Sargodha division (Abou Zahab 2002: 82) many of which were being used for purposes like the ones just cited. In light of the discussion in chapter four—where it was shown that the rural population was becoming increasingly, although not fully, proletarianised—it is likely that the landlords had a heightened awareness of the risk posed to their authority by increased independence and assertiveness on the part of their subordinates. For these reasons access to education occupied a key position between landlord control and the possibility of some emancipation from that control for the rural poor.

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<sup>227</sup> Estimates suggest that while there were only 150 *madrassas* at independence there were at least 2700 in the Punjab alone by 2001, and that while there were 24,822 *madrassa* students in 1960 their number increased tenfold to 249,534 by 2001 (Zaman 2002: 2).

A key factor within education was that of cost, which also affected the attractiveness of the madrassas. Poor families often sent their children to madrassas not just because of the general shortage of functioning schools<sup>228</sup> but also because this eased their financial burdens. Abou Zahab reports that sending children to madrassas meant that poor families had fewer mouths to feed since the madrassas lodged and fed their students and also provided them with an average of Rs.100 per month. In light of the evidence presented in this work it is possible that many poor rural families might prefer sending their children to a madrassa than to work with the local landlords (even though it is well known that students at madrassas are often treated brutally).<sup>229</sup> Sending children to madrassas might also diminish the possibility of poor households having to incur debts. In addition, a religious scholar in the family, and possibly even a Jihadi who might become a martyr (*shaheed*), could also significantly raise a village family's prestige and social status, and families of martyrs were also likely to receive some form of monetary compensation from whichever militant outfit of which their son had been a member. The combination of all of these factors meant that the Southern Punjab contained the highest concentration of madrassas in the province with 1619 registered madrassas out of a total of 2512 for the entire province (*ibid*).

While these madrassas, like the shrines described chapter six, sometimes played an important social welfare function, they were frequently a source of social division and conflict. Religious preachers at the madrassas spent a great deal of time denouncing

<sup>228</sup> Unlike the Basic Health Unit and the wedding hall for the poor which were being used by the Gondals for their own purposes (see chapter two) the school in Bek Sagrama was operational.

<sup>229</sup> Abou Zahab (2002:83) reports that physical abuse is the norm in many madrassas. This was corroborated by anecdotal evidence that I gathered during my time in Pakistan. Given the prevalence of physical abuse by teachers in the state school system, which I witnessed, reports of physical abuse in madrassas are credible. In Bek Sagrama few people sent their children to madrassas other than the one in the village meant for small children headed by the village imam. As pointed out in chapter four, the poor increasingly tried to avoid sending their children to madrassas or to work for landlords, where in either case they might be physically and mentally abused, by trying to apprentice them to mechanics, builders and other trades. Another reason for not choosing madrassas might be that there were few nearby Deobandi madrassas for the simple reason that the Deobandis hadn't made significant inroads into the area.

the heresies of rival schools of thought (not to mention the heresies of Christians and Hindus) and played a pivotal role in fashioning radical sectarian identities. Deobandi Sunnis were particularly vociferous in denouncing members of the Ahmedi sect as non-Muslim because of their alleged denial of the finality of Prophecy with the Prophet Muhammad, and they succeeded in having them officially declared as much by the Pakistani state in 1974.<sup>230</sup> The same religious leaders, particularly activists from Sipah-i Sahaba,<sup>231</sup> turned upon the Shias and sought to extend the anti-Ahmadi legislation to them, particularly during the Islamisation campaigns of the Zia era when Shias started pressing for separate religious education and objected to the imposition of a uniform Islamic tax (*zakat*). The result has been extensive violence between Shias and Deobandis with estimates suggesting that more than two thousand people were killed, with thousands injured and maimed, during incidents of sectarian violence from 1985 to 2005 (ICG 2005b:1).<sup>232</sup>

The central Punjabi district of Jhang, just south of the Sargodha district, was particularly hard hit by sectarian conflict. There the followers of preachers from rival Deobandi and Shia sects clashed in turf wars for the control of neighbourhoods and mosques. Deobandis also occasionally clashed with Barelvis whose style of saint-worship they denounced. Sectarian conflict in Jhang also appears to have channelled both rural and urban class grievances against the predominantly Shia rural landlords of the area. Sectarian leaders like Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi believed that the powerful Shia landlords that dominated the politics of Jhang were not only exploiting the rural population with their economic and political power but also with their spiritual

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<sup>230</sup> Some among the Shia leadership were also vociferous in denouncing the Ahmadis (Zaman 2002: 114) but it was the majority Sunni religious leadership that raised their voices most influentially.

<sup>231</sup> Sipah-i-Sahaba was founded in the 1980s by the Sunni cleric Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi to combat Shia influence. The organisation was declared to be a terrorist organisation and banned by General Musharraf in 2002.

<sup>232</sup> Also see Nasr (2000) for an account of the rise of Sunni militancy.

influence, because many of them were also pirs. Jhangvi believed that these Shia magnates were keeping the rural population ignorant of true Sunni Islam and that they were even gradually converting it to Shiism. Sipah-e Sahaba<sup>233</sup> (which Jhangvi had founded) wished to further the interests of the predominantly immigrant Sunni merchant population against the political power of the wealthy Shias.<sup>234</sup> The principal aims of the heavily armed Sipah-e Sahaba were to combat the local influence of the and also, more broadly, to ban Muharram processions, have the Shias declared a non-Muslim minority and make the Sipah-e Sahaba brand of Sunni Islam the official religion of the State.

Particularly relevant to this thesis is the fact that among the supporters of Sipah-e Sahaba, including many urban merchants, were people who had migrated to the cities from the countryside and who had experienced the high-handedness of landlords (see Zaman 2002:125). According to Zaman these people were particularly attracted to calls by Sunni preachers urging them to fight feudal oppression and “the ideological legitimisation offered for it” (*ibid*). Segments of the urban population were also attracted to Sipah-e Sahaba because of its appeal to the interests of the common man in “an urban milieu where administrative and judicial authorities are inefficient and corrupt, and are widely held to act in concert with the landed elite” (*ibid*). Jhangvi himself, a man of humble rural origins, is alleged to have spent time looking after the welfare of the poor. He was particularly noted for having spent time at government courts and police stations helping poor illiterate litigants whose chances of a favourable outcome were limited without the help of a patron.

Recent press releases concerning the Swat valley in the North West Frontier Province suggest that the Taliban, who are known to have close ties with sectarian

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<sup>233</sup> Sipah-e Sahaba signifies ‘army of the companions of the Prophet.’

<sup>234</sup> These Sunni merchants controlled eighty per cent of trade and business in the city of Jhang (Abou Zahab 2002: 86)



organisations throughout the country, also exploited class grievances in order to gain popularity and support. A *New York Times* article of April 17, 2009 reported that the Taliban were mobilising tenants against influential Taliban-opposed landlords. After putting the landlords to flight, the Taliban encouraged the tenants to cut down their masters' orchards and sell the wood for personal profit. It appears, however, that the Taliban had no consistent policy on the issue of land redistribution. In fact the *New York Times* article suggests that rather than redistribute the land, the Taliban simply took the place of the landlords by making the tenants work for them after the landlords had fled. However, the Taliban are reported to have acquired a degree of limited popularity by scrapping the elite-dominated official justice system and replacing it with rough-and-ready Sharia courts. The Taliban's Sharia courts were praised by some members of the local population, despite the violent punishments that they inflicted upon the condemned, simply because cases were decided rapidly and on the basis of their merits rather than upon influence and connections. Like Jhangvi in the Jhang region, the Taliban made it possible for some of the poor to obtain a semblance of justice that was largely unavailable to them under the hegemony of the landlords.

The cases of Sipah-e Sahaba and the Taliban clearly illustrate how the forces unleashed by the Pakistani elites to combat socialism (and therefore to allow them to retain their own positions of privilege) have turned against them. Although State-led Islamisation may have succeeded in seriously undermining leftist movements it did nothing to lessen the class grievances that fed them. These grievances are now being channelled through groups that raise the banner of Islamic justice against the very ruling classes who first deployed Islam in order to undermine class conflict among other things. Thus movements such as the Taliban and Sipah-e Sahaba are now accusing the Pakistani state of betraying the standards of Islamic morality and justice that it helped to

propagate. They see the state justice system as the instrument of a corrupt and westernised ruling class and want to replace it with what they consider to be a truly Islamic legal system where cases are decided on the basis of Islamic norms of justice rather than on those of personal influence and connections. The fact, illustrated in chapter six, that the Islamic ideology offered by landowning pirs to justify their privilege was interpreted against them by the subordinate classes further argues that Islam has become the language of class struggle.<sup>235</sup>

Nevertheless, given the preceding discussion it must be asked whether movements such as the Taliban and Sipah-e Sahaba regard redressing class grievances as a worthy and authentically Islamic end in itself or whether they simply exploit class grievances to further their own agendas. The available evidence seems to argue for the latter, as is often the case in revolutionary situations.<sup>236</sup> Islamic militias appear to be exploiting the resentment of the masses to further the narrowly sectarian and authoritarian aim of imposing their own version of Islam on people. The empowerment of the poor is largely incidental to their aim of purging society of what they regard as un-Islamic practices and of enforcing such things as the wearing of beards and *burqas*. Thus, militant Islamic groups do not seek to empower the masses as such but rather to concentrate power within the hands of a leadership that claims the monopoly over the interpretation of Islam. The results can take a heavy toll not only on individuals but on social and political frameworks which could otherwise serve the ends of democratic change under other circumstances. The following can be cited on this score: individuals

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<sup>235</sup> The work of Marsden (1995) also suggests that this is the case by showing how former serfs who were madrasa educated challenged the Chitrali nobility in elections in 2002.

<sup>236</sup> For Scott (1985) revolutions often fail to serve the interests of those in whose name they are carried out. For this reason he prefers to celebrate what he calls 'the weapons of the weak.' As argued in chapter four, however, the problem is that the weapons of the weak are often ineffective in practical terms. The choice need not be between the weapons of the weak and bloody 'revolution' though. Political reform and democratisation are a third possibility, but they depend upon whether the elite will relinquish at least some of their political and economic power, largely of their own accord.

in the rank and file of these groups are expected to obey their leaders and are used as 'foot-soldiers' whose lives are regarded as dispensable; they are required to fight and carry out suicide bombing missions, for example, in exchange for the promise of heaven but also in exchange for the promise of remuneration for the relatives that they leave behind upon becoming martyrs; in cases where these organisations provide avenues for individual upward social mobility they thereby weaken the unity of the subordinate classes; and finally, their narrowly sectarian outlook means that they violently suppress anyone who disagrees with them, crippling any kind of democratic political development of the subordinate classes. The claim of a narrowly sectarian outlook is evidenced by the fact that Sunni sectarian groups have been killing Shias and blowing-up Sufi shrines because they consider the types of worship surrounding them to be idolatrous, for example. In fact most of the more radical Deobandi groups seeking to challenge the established power structures are unlikely representatives of the rural poor because they are disdainful of Bareilvi Islam and the popular forms of religiosity that the majority of Punjabis embrace.

To summarise, militant Islamic groups in Pakistan exploit class grievances as a means to power but do not appear to address the grievances in a way that would create political and social stability or improve the lot of the Pakistani poor. Whether these groups continue to attract followers largely depends upon whether the Pakistani state persists in its failure to give the majority of its citizens a stake in the country's stability by at the very least providing real access to justice, healthcare, education and broader political representation. Toward this end, further measures could include the redistribution of wealth (principally in the form of land reforms), homestead reforms, micro-credit schemes to help indebted labourers<sup>237</sup> and possibly even policies of

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<sup>237</sup> See Lieten and Breman for suggestions for the elimination of debt-bondage that include debt

positive discrimination such as those implemented in India. If the state fails to provide at least some of these things then it is likely that the violent factional politics described in this thesis will persist. The result will be further political instability, not only because of the inherently unstable nature of Pakistani factional politics but also because disenfranchised segments of society will continue to join groups that take the law into their own hands either under the banner of religion or of national separatism as in Baluchistan.

### **Contributions of this Study and Areas for Further Research**

This study of the rural Pakistani Punjab contributes to the anthropological and sociological literature on a part of the world that has over the years received significant media and scholarly attention for its chronic political instability and, more recently, for the rising tide of Islamic militancy which has plunged the country into a violent armed conflict between militants and the state. Through an ethnographic approach to the study of the state<sup>238</sup> and politics I have sought to make a contribution toward achieving a greater understanding of both in this region of South Asia. I believe that the material presented here on how factional, patronage based politics operates on the ground in a Punjabi village reveals a great deal about the causes of violence and political instability in Pakistan. It does so by showing how competition over control of the local institutions of the state in a winner-takes-all political game results in significant levels of violence magnified by the widespread availability of cheap automatic weapons. Moreover it shows how the appropriation of the local state institutions by landlord politicians itself leads to high levels of violence as institutions such as the police are used in order to harass, intimidate and even kill enemies and political opponents. Evidence presented in

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redemption schemes, micro-credit schemes, homestead and land reform (Lieten & Breman 2002).

<sup>238</sup> See Corbridge et al. (2005: 4). Also see Fuller and Harris (2001) who argue that states are best thought of as bundles of everyday institutions and forms of rule, and are therefore best studied ethnographically in order to avoid analytically reifying the state as a discrete or singular entity.

chapter two in particular shows how the state is appropriated and used to settle scores with political opponents even at the highest levels.<sup>239</sup> Another possibility suggested by this work, and that would benefit from further investigation, is that private fiefdoms beyond state control that make for the highly variable and unequal implementation of state law may provide spaces for militant groups to act and develop unhindered. Relatedly, this work may also help further understanding of how the violence and unpredictability that result from this personalised style of politics impinge upon the lives of all classes of people and fuel different types of regional and religious militant movements.

Furthermore this work helps elucidate the way that takeover of state institutions serves to consolidate the class position of Pakistan's landed elite and how this exacerbates the vulnerability of the rural poor. The rural poor continue to depend upon the goodwill of the landlords for their livelihoods, safety and access to government institutions. As illustrated in chapter four, the consequence is that they remain subject to the whims of landlords who can effectively decide whether or not they will have access to healthcare, a loan or justice in court. The poor also rely on the very landlords who are responsible for the haphazard law and order situation to protect them from predatory policemen and their own hired thugs (goondas). Whether or not the landlords decide to extend their patronage and protection depends upon their chances of gaining political support or labour thereby, or simply whether or not they are feeling charitable. As a consequence the rural poor need to maintain the goodwill of the landlords through insincere sycophantic behaviour that both degrades them and fuels their resentment.

For the landlord-politicians themselves life in the modern day Punjab is also insecure because sudden shifts in power, particularly following elections or military

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<sup>239</sup> Such as in the feuds between Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto that dominated Pakistani politics in the 1990s. See Bennet-Jones (2002) for an account of this.

coups, frequently result in dramatic reversals of fortune. Overnight they could land in jail, lose access to government patronage or lose control over the police and find themselves bound up in a variety of real or fabricated court cases. As a result their rivals may gain an advantage, and among other things could even start encroaching on their land holdings. What's more, landlords' lives are almost constantly shadowed by the threat of being gunned down by their rivals. Yet even this danger to their lives does not put the arbitrariness and aggression they face on a par with that of their subordinates. The landlords do not lead a hand-to-mouth existence, they are not verbally and physically humiliated on a daily basis, their women are not sexually molested at whim by other men, and, other than for political reasons, they are not routinely harassed by the police and goondas. Thanks to their influence and contacts they do not experience government institutions as the impenetrable edifice that their subordinates experience. After all, the landlords' influence means that they can literally get away with murder and then have their subordinates take the punishment. Perhaps even more surprisingly for these times, they can get away with flouting almost every Islamic moral injunction. Many of them drink alcohol, gamble, traffic drugs, protect and abet thieves, and have illicit sex with servants, prostitutes and mistresses.

In addition to documenting the factional, patronage based politics of a Punjabi village I have sought to explain reasons for it and to contribute thereby to the scholarly understanding of political factionalism in South Asia and beyond. In the process I also hope to have contributed to an understanding of the conditions that make greater labour assertiveness possible. I have argued that authoritarianism, powerful landed interests with control over the means of violent coercion, restrictions on political parties and the localisation of politics all contributed to preventing the political empowerment of the rural masses through the emergence of political coalitions that were representative of

either caste-based or class-based interests. I have also shown that factional political alignments were neither the result of a cultural bias in Pakistani society (let alone South Asian society more widely) nor the result of equal relations of exchange whereby landlords provided their clients with patronage and protection in exchange for political support, votes and labour. Instead, I showed that factional political alignments were based on highly unequal relations of exchange whereby the landed elite was able to extract political support and labour on terms that were highly favourable to itself with scant regard for the compensation offered to rural labourers in return.<sup>241</sup> The landed elite was able to do this through its appropriation for 'private' use of state institutions, its private control of various means of violent coercion and its ownership of the means of production (in this case mainly the land).

On the latter score, this work has sought to show that the landed elite's control over the means of production (the land) is an important but not in itself sufficient explanation for their continued stranglehold over the rural population of the Punjab and the continued importance of vertical ties of patronage between chowdris and kammis. It was argued that, in addition to landownership, control over the state and its various institutions was the key to understanding the continued political and economic clout of local landlords. Control over state institutions through political office and patronage networks was not only what permitted landlords to retain the upper hand over their local rivals but also, in part, what permitted them to control an increasingly proletarianized

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<sup>241</sup> This contrasts with Pettigrew when she claims of the Indian Punjab that clients that "are not those to whom favours are done, the victims of a system of charity that makes piecemeal adjustments to the inequalities of life. They have the capability to reciprocate for what they receive from a patron who is different from them only at that one point in time when they ask a favour." (Pettigrew 1975:20). See especially Gellner (1997) for a discussion of patronage and of how patronage ideologies falsely claim to be based on reciprocity.

population. Thus chapters one, two and three showed that landlords who did not engage in politics, or who did but stood in opposition to the government, not only risked being overtaken by their rivals but also risked losing much of their land and becoming entangled in either real or fabricated court cases. It was also shown that even extremely wealthy landlords, such as the Makhdooms or the Noons, could be relatively powerless in the face of less wealthy but more forceful, politically active and well-connected landlords such as the Gondals. It was also the case that landlords who were unwilling to make use of force and had no control over state patronage were unlikely to be able to control a rural population that was growing increasingly economically independent as a result of the growth of casual wage labour. This meant that landlords relied more and more on the threat of coercion and the capacity to grant and withhold patronage to gain both labour and political support. The result was that relations between labourers and landlords were increasingly fraught.

This work also made the case that the fact that the landed elite appropriated state institutions and put them to use for their own personal ends needed to be at least partly understood in terms of central government authoritarianism. I showed that the perpetuation of particularistic patron client networks maintained through face-to-face contact (which otherwise go under the name of 'factions') in rural Pakistan had as much to do with the landlords themselves as with authoritarian central governments. Thus chapters two and five in particular showed how authoritarian central governments helped undermine the impartiality of government institutions by repeatedly using the bureaucracy, the police and the judiciary to reward regime supporters and marginalise and harass opponents. In practice this meant that authoritarian governments effectively gave politicians who joined the ruling coalition free-rein to appropriate the spoils of power (and oftentimes engage in a diverse array of criminal activities) in order both to



consolidate their own political clienteles and economic clout and to undermine those of personal rivals. Central government authoritarianism, particularly during the Zia regime, perpetuated the landed elite's capacity to build factional clienteles by reversing rather than deepening land reforms which would have deprived landlords of some of their economic muscle. If repeated military interventions hadn't prevented the emergence of mass popular movements such as the one witnessed during the rise of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, it is likely that disenfranchised sectors of society could have started to enter into formal politics as happened in parts of India. This could have gradually led to the replacement of factional politics with class- or even caste-based politics. Although the emergence of disenfranchised groups into politics may not have put an end to corruption and the private appropriation of state institutions by politicians (as is illustrated by the rise of the Dalits in Uttar Pradesh, who made their own use of such practices), it would at least have redistributed power across broader segments of society. Arguably this might have given Pakistani citizens less reason to rise up against the state through regional separatist movements or Islamist insurgencies.

Lastly, this work shows that the power structures it documents weren't unchangeable 'traditional' structures that Pakistanis were condemned to reproduce perpetually because of some deeply ingrained cultural bias or model. It is important to emphasise this point in light of Hardiman's (1982) criticism of studies of factionalism<sup>242</sup> which he claims show that Indians are incapable of any form of politics that aren't fractious and based on 'vertical' patron-client networks. Here I argued that even though General Musharraf's devolution programme simply ended up reproducing the previously existing factional political structure, it did so because it failed to radically alter the social distribution of power and because it was probably not fully genuine in

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<sup>242</sup> Ranging over those of authors such as Washbrook (1973), Weiner (1967), Bailey (1969), Lewis (1958), Nicholas (1965) and Brass (1965).

pursuing its stated aim of democratisation. Therefore the principal reasons why the devolution programme resulted in 'business as usual' didn't necessarily have to do with culture as such. In any case, the discussion of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's rise to power made it clear that class politics were indeed possible in Pakistan. In fact the discussion on militant Islam showed that it was impossible to discount the importance of class and class grievances as political forces in Pakistan. Similarly the discussion of the role of *biraderis* in politics in chapter three showed how medium-sized, economically independent landholders were often likely to create horizontal alliances amongst themselves in order to assert their interests against those of bigger landlords.<sup>243</sup> This was shown to have been the case among the Bek Sagrana Gondals before they ceased having the Makhdoods as a common external enemy to unite them, and the upward mobility of some Gondals came to divide their ranks. The reason that upward social mobility caused division was because increased economic and political power meant that Gondal leaders could increasingly rely on clients rather than upon their fellow Gondals for political support. This pointed to the fact that patronage based factional politics crucially depended upon the existence of political and economic inequalities. Chapter six further argued that patronage politics didn't have its roots in an ingrained cultural model. It did this by showing that the particularistic religious values surrounding the cult of *pirs* weren't the cause for the particularistic practices evidenced in the political sphere.<sup>244</sup> Instead the opposite was argued to be the case, namely that the religious values embraced by different segments of rural society could be seen as rationalisations, drawing selectively from a vast Islamic tradition, of the social world as they experienced it.

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<sup>243</sup> Hardiman (1982: 206) similarly argues that 'lesser' Patidars in Gujarat often acted as a class and didn't necessarily follow the dictates of 'superior' Patidars.

<sup>244</sup> Lyon (2004) makes a culturalist argument of this type when he claims that patron-client ties reflect asymmetrical cultural norms that Pakistanis are socialised into from childhood.

From the above it emerges that inequality in the social distribution of power combined with the personalisation of state institutions are the principal conditions for the persistence of vertical patron-client ties. Given that without the personal appropriation of state institutions landlords and politicians are unlikely to be able to dispense the patronage required to build personal clienteles, I conclude by pointing to the need for vital further research into how state institutions, and in particular the police and the judiciary, are used by landlords to reinforce their own power, and how in the process they contribute to inequality and instability. Following Brass's analysis of Uttar Pradesh,<sup>245</sup> this work has argued that control over the police and local courts is central to the exercise of political power in the rural Punjab. Further research in this area would clarify how rural strongmen work with the police and the courts in order to consolidate their political power and enrich themselves through political abuse and criminal activities. Moreover such research may provide useful insights into the law and order conditions that make it possible for militant armed movements to flourish. Such research is particularly important also because these force and influence-based manipulations of state institutions of justice provide ammunition for militant religious movements such as Sipah-e Sahaba and the Taliban, who rally supporters around the call to replace a corrupt, arbitrary and oppressive system of law-and-order with their own brand of Sharia law. Thus militant Islamic groups exploit the absence, as actually experienced by individuals, of Weberian-type state bureaucratic institutions in which opportunities to pursue individual interests are kept in check by legitimate procedures, processes and audits. The call of many militant Islamic groups appeals to the rural and urban poor who know all too well that it is the usurpation of state power by individuals that makes their lives so oppressive and unpredictable. Research on the Pakistani police

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<sup>245</sup> See Brass (1997) or (1984) for a shorter review of political trends in Uttar Pradesh from the 1960s to the 1980s.

and judiciary is therefore not only vital to a deeper understanding of “politics as usual” in Pakistan, but should also be considered a top priority in understanding and dealing with the growing challenges posed by militant religious movements.

## Appendix One: Land Distribution and Occupation by Biraderi

**Table One: Land distribution and occupation by Biraderi in Bek Sagrama**

Status Category	Number of households	% of total land owned	% of working population as daily wage labourers	% of working population for a Chowdri	% of working population that is self employed	% of working population in government jobs	% of working population in private sector jobs
<i>Zamindars:</i>							
Gondal	13	77.5	16.7	4.2	62.5	8.3	8.3
Rajput	14	9.7	0	4.9	47.6	19	28.5
Sagrama	14	4.8	25	4.2	50	4.2	16.6
Lurka	5	0	66.7	0	0	0	33.3
Ranjha	3	1.46	0	33.3	50	16.7	0
Guru	2	0.53	25	25	50	0	0
Gog	2	0.53	0	0	100	0	0
Khokar	1	1.1	0	0	100	0	0
Theim	1	0	50	0	0	0	50
Jara	1	3.05	0	0	100	0	0
Dhulaya	1	0.53	0	0	50	50	0
Sayyid	1	0	100	0	0	0	0
<i>Kanuns:</i>							
Kumhar	8	0.3	66.7	5.6	16.7	0	0
Machi	8	0	52.9	23.5	5.9	11.8	5.9
Mochi	5	0	75	0	25	0	0
Pawli	5	0	53.8	15.4	30.8	0	0
Lohar	3	0	28.6	14.3	50	7.1	0
Tarkhan	3	0.5	0	0	100	0	0
Mussalli	15	0	70.8	29.2	0	0	0
Deendar	3	0	55.5	44.5	0	0	0
Mirasi	2	0	100	0	0	0	0
Darzi	1	0	75	0	25	0	0
Pirhain	1	0	66.6	33.4	0	0	0
Nai	6	0	53.8	0	38.5	7.7	0

**Table Two: Land distribution and occupation by Biraderi at Astana-e Alam**

Biraderi	Number of Households	% of total land owned	% of working population as daily wage labourers	% of working population for a Chowdri	% of working population that is self employed	% of working population in government jobs	% of working population in private sector job
Mussalli	13	0	33	38	16.7	0	12.5
Mirasi	3	0.46	33.3	66.7	0	0	0
Tarkhan	1	0			100		
Pirhain	1	0	100				
Gondal	2	95			50	50	
Ranjha	1	4.44					
Nai	1	0					

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