In this fascinating study, Richard Eaton recounts the history of southern India's Deccan plateau from the early fourteenth century to the rise of European colonialism in the eighteenth. He does so, vividly, by narrating the lives of eight Indians who lived at different times during this period, and whose careers illustrate particular social processes of the region's history. In the first chapter, for example, the author recounts the tragic life of maharaja Pratapa Rudra in order to describe the demise of regional kingdoms and the rise of interregional sultanates. In the second, the life of a Sufi shaikh is used to explore the intersection of Muslim piety, holy-man charisma, and state authority. The book's other characters include a long-distance merchant, a general, a slave, a poet, a bandit, and a female commander-regent.

Woven together into a rich narrative tapestry, the stories of these eight figures shed light not only on important social processes of the Deccan plateau across four centuries, but also on the complex relations between peoples and states of north India and those to the south of the Narmada River. This study of one of the least understood parts of South Asia is a long-awaited and much-needed book by one of the most highly regarded scholars in the field.

RICHARD M. EATON is one of the premier scholars of precolonial India. His many publications include The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760 (1993), India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750 (2003) and Temple Desecration and Muslim States in Medieval India (2004).
THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF INDIA

1.8

A Social History of the Deccan, 1300–1761
Eight Indian Lives

RICHARD M. EATON
University of Arizona

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
For my sister and brother-in-law

BETH AND ROSCOE SWARTZ

Celebrating fifty years of marriage
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Historians, to paraphrase the classical proverb, merely stand on the shoulders of their predecessors. In my own case, I must acknowledge many shoulders, and not only those of my distinguished predecessors, some of whom date to the fourteenth century. There is also a host of contemporary colleagues and friends who, in various ways, generously assisted me in my journey into the rich field of Deccani history. These include Balasubramanya, V. K. Bawa, Ninad Bedekar, Dilip Chitre, Devin Deweese, Anne Feldhaus, Stewart Gordon, Jo-Ann Gross, Sumit Guha, Syed Shah Khusro Hussaini, Pervaram Jagnanatham, Rochelle Kessler, Gijs Kruijtzer, Sunil Kumar, M. S. Mate, R. S. Morwanchikar, N. S. Ramachandra Murthy, Gail Omvedt, Aloka Parasher-Sen, Jaisingrao Pawar, Helen Philon, S. Fiaz and Frauke Quader, Velcheru Narayana Rao, M. Pandu Ranga Rao, Lee Schlesinger, David Shulman, Carla Sinopoli, Susan Stronge, Cynthia Talbot, Mahesh Tendulkar, Phillip B. Wagoner, and Eleanor Zelliot. To all I express my indebtedness and gratitude. However, I alone bear responsibility for any shortcomings in the study.

The idea for the book took shape in 1995–96 when I was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars in Washington DC. Much of the text was drafted in the autumn of 2000 when I was a fellow with Tucson’s Udall Center for Public Policy, and I completed the work in the academic year 2003–04 during a sabbatical leave from the University of Arizona. I wish to thank the officers of those three institutions for affording me the time and facilities to conduct the research for the study.

Most of the volume’s color illustrations were made from photographs I took while touring the Deccan in June and July 2001. Despite the trip’s several mishaps,¹ that monsoon journey was immeasurably enriched by the generosity of the many knowledgeable colleagues I was fortunate to meet along the way. I wish to thank Anne Feldhaus for going many miles out of her own way to take the photographs for Plates 4 and 5. For permission to reproduce the other illustrations in this volume, I wish to thank the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), the Chester Beatty Library (Dublin), and the American Council for Southern Asian Art (Ann Arbor). Finally, I thank Lois Kain for preparing the volume’s six maps.

¹ These include dropping my camera in the Arabian Sea at Janjira, getting suspended mid-air in Raigarh’s cable car because of a power outage, and being stranded in Bidar owing to lack of funds.
INTRODUCTION

There is properly no history; only biography.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1841)

In early January 1996, a fierce blizzard had just blanketed Washington DC in snow. Icy winds howled outside the narrow, Gothic windows that encircled my tiny study, perched high up in one of the fairytale towers of the Smithsonian Castle. While I tried to stay warm in that dilapidated but charming relic of the nineteenth century, my mind was a world away. I was pondering “the social history of the Deccan” on a cold day, part of a year spent as a fellow with the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars.

I first had to resolve some knotty conceptual problems, one of which was geographic in nature. Most historians of India write about, or simply presume, coherent core regions – that is, areas characterized by stable, long-term political and cultural institutions. Like magnets, nucleated political cores attract armies, scholars, foreign visitors, long-distance merchants, and crucially, court chroniclers. Ultimately, owing to the considerable data left behind by such groups, these regions also attract modern historians. This might explain why core areas like north India, Bengal, or the Tamil south are comparatively well covered in the historical literature.¹

But the Deccan is a relatively understudied region, partly because it has no enduring political or cultural center. To be sure, one finds sporadic periods of imperial rule from capital cities like Kalyana under the Chalukyas, Bidar under the Bahmanis, or Vijayanagara under its first three dynasties. But in history’s larger sweep, this dry and mainly undifferentiated upland plateau never possessed a single, perennial political core, no lasting hub of imperial rule on the order of Delhi or the Kaveri delta.

¹ Such centers also have an internalized conception of themselves as lying at the heart of cultural and/or political space, indeed, as having created such space. One need only think of the many chroniclers who wrote their histories while, as it were, peering out from the ramparts of Delhi’s Red Fort, or from any of the other great forts of the Mughal heartland.

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Indeed, this begs the nettlesome question of just what defines the Deccan and where exactly it is located. North Indians popularly conceive it as lying vaguely to the south of the Indo-Gangetic Plain, while Tamils and Malayalis just as vaguely locate it to the north of their native regions. Geographers have given precise-sounding definitions by using indices like rainfall, vegetation, soil type, and the like, or by citing prominent natural features such as the Narmada River or the Sahyadri Mountains (i.e., Western Ghats). Ultimately, though, I settled on the reasoning of one of India’s foremost chroniclers, Muhammad Qasim Firishta (d. 1611), himself a longtime resident of Bijapur. Ignoring physical geography altogether, Firishta mapped the region in terms of its vernacular languages, using for this purpose the metaphor of kinship. One of the four sons of India (“Hind”), he wrote, was “Dakan,” who in turn had three sons: “Marhat, Kanhar and Tiling” – that is, areas native to speakers of Marathi, Kannada, and Telugu. “Presently, these three communities (qaum) reside in the Deccan.” For Firishta, as indeed for twenty-first-century residents when queried on the matter, the Deccan comprises the territory today constituted by three linguistically defined states: Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh.

There still remained the question of how to write a social history of a region lacking an enduring geo-political center. For without such a center, the Deccan also lacks a unified and coherent master narrative of the sort often told for north India, with its neat sequence of Delhi-based empires. What, then, would hold together a social history of the Deccan?

The question followed me as I left my Castle tower one wintry day and walked across Washington’s Mall to the National Gallery, where the paintings of the Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer (d. 1675) were on special exhibit. As I joined the throngs of people who stood outside, shivering in the cold and waiting in what seemed an endless queue for admission, I wondered why Vermeer’s art was attracting such avid interest. A solution suggested itself when, once inside the crowded galleries, I realized that most of the artist’s work consisted of portraits of anonymous folk plucked from everyday life – a milk maid, a music teacher, a lace-maker, a student. It was not his several landscape paintings that drew most onlookers, but these finely crafted portraits with their distinctive

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play of light. In them, Vermeer seemed to have captured features and moods that, while true to the individuals he painted, were also instantly recognized as belonging to a shared, universal humanity. This, in turn, allowed viewers to identify with the artist’s subjects in a direct and compelling way. It was as though, when examining his portraits, viewers were peering into mirrors, seeing themselves reflected in the fabric of other times, other people.

It also occurred to me that when he conceived and executed his portraits, Vermeer, though he wielded a brush and not a pen, was actually tapping into the power of biography. For, simply put, people are profoundly drawn to the personalities and life-stories of others, a truth known to any parent who has been asked repeatedly by a child, “read that story to me again.” Wandering through the exhibit, I recalled how a student of mine once reacted to a text I much admire and had assigned – Eric Wolf’s Europe and the People without History. Noting the absence of any life-narratives in the book, my student wickedly remarked that the book should have been entitled Europe and the History without People.

That indictment points to the very different histories of biographical writing in the popular and the academic worlds. In popular culture, fascination with life-narratives has never diminished. In one form or another the genre has endured across the planet and throughout time, impervious to the fickle fashions of the academic world. For India, one has only to think of the Amar Chitra Katha comic book series, Bollywood’s blockbuster films, radio or television melodramas, or the standard fare available at bus, railway, or airport bookstalls. But in the academic world biography, though one of the oldest genres of history-writing, has had a more tortuous career. Just eighteen years after Emerson penned the dictum cited as the epigraph to this Introduction, Karl Marx signaled a virtual death sentence for the academic writing of biography. In 1859 he declared, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary it is their social existence that determines their consciousness.”

Ushering in the advent of social history as a new and exciting subfield within the broader discipline of history, this manifesto encouraged many to explore the past not by tracing the lives of individual actors, but by studying vast socio-economic forces. For more than a century, most social

4 Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1885; repr. Chicago, 1918), preface, 11–12.

5 Focussed as it was on class analysis and modes of production, Wolf’s Europe and the People without History (Berkeley, 1982) fits squarely within the tradition that had its roots in Marx. It is in no way a disparagement of Wolf’s enormous achievement to observe that his insights might have been made more poignant, and accessible, had they been illustrated with life-stories.
historians would view biography with a degree of suspicion; even today, the genre is seldom found in doctoral dissertations submitted to departments of history.

But by the end of the twentieth century a new trend became visible. In the 1980s and '90s some scholars had begun to view biography not as a genre inherently antithetical to social history, but as a vehicle that could be recovered and mobilized for writing precisely such history. Prompted by the truth of Emerson’s dictum and the genius of Vermeer’s art, I came to the same conclusion. Soon after returning from the Vermeer exhibit to my tower in the Castle, I resolved to write the present volume through the lives of several carefully chosen men and women.

There was yet another reason for embarking on this approach. By foregrounding the biographies of some of India’s precolonial figures, one could also reclaim for history subject matter that, having been largely abandoned by professional historians, has been eagerly appropriated by politically motivated myth-makers. “One of the remarkable features of the recent spectacular burst of creativity among Indian writers,” notes writer William Dalrymple,

has been that few writers are drawn either to serious biography or narrative history. Though Indian historians produce many excellent specialist essays and numerous learned journals, it is impossible, for example, to buy an up-to-date biography of any of India’s pre-colonial rulers.

Here perhaps lies one of the central causes of the current impasse. It is not just up to the politicians to improve the fairness and quality of India’s history. Unless Indian historians learn to make their work intelligible and attractive to a wider audience, and especially to their own voraciously literate middle class, unhistorical myths will continue to flourish.

There are, in short, compelling reasons why responsible historians should restore biography and narrative to their craft.

But how to do it? The aim in the present volume is to use the lives of vivid personalities as instruments to investigate and illuminate social processes fundamental to the history of the Deccan between the early fourteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries. Such processes include, among others, colonization,
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factional strife, élite mobility, slavery, inter-caste relations, and social banditry. It is not that the people whose lives I have chosen to highlight were the movers or the causes of such social processes. To argue in that manner would bring back the ghost of Great Man Theory, a kind of history-writing that one hopes is safely past. But individuals do embody microcosms of at least some, if not many, aspects of the social macrocosms in which they live. And since the individuals foregrounded in this volume lived through, and were thoroughly immersed in, particular historical processes, the aim has been to examine their lives with a view to elucidating those processes in a manner more tangible and accessible than is found in conventional social histories.

One should be clear, however, about the meaning of biography. Contemporary notions of the genre are shaped largely by positivist methodologies inherited from nineteenth-century Europe. The professional biographer of that era would have carefully assembled original sources—letters, memoirs, newspaper accounts, etc.—in an attempt to reconstruct a factual narrative of a person's life from birth to death. The product would be coherent, linear, tidy, and above all, "objective." Accounts of precolonial Indian figures, on the other hand, are in many cases not recorded or preserved by professional biographers, but live in the collective memory of communities. That is, they are socially constructed, meaning that a figure's life might be shaped to conform to a particular community's values or interests. When constructing a narrative of such a figure, then, one is to some extent also reconstructing the culture of the community that had preserved his or her memory.

Some might regard the recorded lives of precolonial Indians as hagiographies and not biographies, on the grounds that the lives of such figures have been, and continue to be, popularly mythologized, even sanctified. But it would be wrong to neatly pigeon-hole the source material respecting the people discussed in this volume as belonging to either category to the complete exclusion of the other. It is perhaps best to view biography and hagiography as genres occupying opposite ends of a continuum. Plotting the eight persons highlighted in this volume along such a continuum, those discussed in chapters 1, 2, 6 and 7—i.e., Pratapa Rudra, Gisu Daraz, Tukaram, and Papadu—would likely fall toward the hagiographical end, since much of what we know of their lives has been socially constructed. By contrast, those discussed in chapters 3, 4, 5, and 8—i.e., Mahmud Gawan, Rama Raya, Malik Ambar, and Tarabai—would occupy

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8 For example, the very name of the popular comic series Amar Chitra Katha suggests that figures drawn from Indian history are in some sense immortal (amat), rather than finite characters firmly rooted in specific historical contexts.
points closer to the biographical end, inasmuch as much of what we know of their lives derives from sources independent of a community’s collective memory. But they all would share at least some elements of each type.

The time period covered in the study is informed by one over-arching theme. As noted, the Deccan has no master narrative of its own. But it did have intense interaction with the peoples, cultures, and states of north India, which during our period became a sort of alter-ego for societies south of the Narmada River. Individuals, communities, and whole states defined their identity with respect to this colossus of the north, sometimes in opposition to it, sometimes in imitation of it. Indeed, the chronological limits of the study, 1300 and 1761, are defined by two profoundly important moments in the history of this interregional interaction: the ascendency of the Delhi Sultanate in Deccani affairs, and the defeat of the Marathas in the Third Battle of Panipat. Between these two moments there occurred a range of interactions between north India and the Deccan, but through it all, the preponderance of influence flowed from north to south, rather than the reverse. In fact, the careers of fully five of the eight figures in this study were defined by their relations with Delhi. Only that of Gisu Daraz served to connect Delhi with the Deccan in a creative way. The other four – Pratapa Rudra, Malik Ambar, Papadu, and Tarabai – all suffered invasions from the north, which for two of them proved disastrous.

Several considerations guided the selection of the figures whose careers are foregrounded in the volume. The first was that they represent as wide a spectrum of the total society as the source materials would permit: a maharaja, a Sufi shaikh, a long-distance merchant, a generalissimo, a slave, a poet, a low-caste rebel, and a dowager. Second, that they represent different subregions of the Deccan; there are two from Andhra, and three each from Karnataka and Maharashtra. Third, that their lives be distributed across the entire four-and-a-half centuries covered in the volume; at least one of the eight was alive during any given year between 1300 and 1761 (excepting several decades in the mid-seventeenth century). But the most important consideration was the degree to which their life-stories could shed light on some particular social process. These processes form the subject-matter of the eight chronologically arranged chapters.

The first chapter discusses the settling of the interior plateau by pioneering cultivators who, between the twelfth and early fourteenth centuries, displaced or incorporated indigenous pastoral groups. It then analyzes the diffusion into the Deccan of a new sort of state system, the transregional sultanate, which arrived with the conquest of the region by armies of the Delhi Sultanate in
the early fourteenth century. Following that conquest, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq attempted to colonize the Deccan with immigrants transplanted from Delhi. Chapter 2 explores that process, together with the roles played by Sufi shaikhs in providing an ideological and juridical rationale first for Tughluq colonialism in the Deccan, and later, for the successful revolt against Tughluq rule led by those same colonists and their descendants. That rebellion led to the establishment of an independent Deccani sultanate, the Bahmani kingdom.

Chapter 3 examines the incorporation of the Deccan into global regimes of commerce in the fifteenth century, especially the networks that connected the Deccan with the Iranian plateau. The negative side of this early form of “globalization” was the emergence of a rift between “Deccanis” – i.e., descendants of north Indian migrants who had been born and raised in the Deccan – and chauvinistic “Westeners,” mainly Iranians, who hailed from points beyond the Arabian Sea. This rift would lead to the disintegration of nearly every Deccani sultanate between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Our knowledge of the southern Deccan has vastly increased in recent decades, thanks to the profusion of recent monographs on the state of Vijayanagara. But these studies tend to view that state in isolation from the rest of the Deccan plateau, in this respect following more than a century of Orientalist and Indian nationalist scholarship that walled off the study of the southern from the northern Deccan. Implicitly or explicitly, scholars writing within those traditions assumed that the state of Vijayanagara represented a Hindu bulwark against an expansive Muslim north, and that prior to the Battle of Talikota (1565) the peoples of the northern and southern plateau inhabited separate socio-cultural worlds. Investigating the processes of elite mobility and the diffusion of Persian culture across the plateau in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Chapter 4 questions the validity of these assumptions. In this way it urges the academic reintegration of the Deccan’s northern and southern halves, which have experienced more than a hundred years of scholarly apartheid.

Chapter 5 takes up the badly understudied topic of Afro-Indian relations, and more specifically, Africa’s role in the rise and fall of military slavery in the Deccan between the mid-fifteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. Tracing the career of a single slave from Ethiopia to Baghdad to Ahmadnagar, the chapter asks how the commercial system of the Arabian Sea basin, combined with the political system of the Deccan sultanates, supported the trafficking of military labor from Africa to India. It also examines why that trade began when it did, why it ended when it did, and what ultimately happened to the many military slaves imported to the Deccan.
Chapter 6 looks at the social base of non-Brahmin devotional cults, in particular the Varkari movement centered on Pandharpur, Maharashtra. In part, the aim here is to use the work of the devotional poet Tukaram to explore relations between Brahmans and non-Brahmins in the early seventeenth century. Beyond that, the chapter focuses on how vernacular devotional literature and the sultanates’ use of vernacular records in their revenue and judicial systems contributed to the formation of linguistic communities. For in the Marathi-speaking western Deccan, precisely such processes helped lay the groundwork for the appearance of a new political entity – Shivaji’s Maratha kingdom.

Chapter 7 shifts attention to Telangana, focusing on the brief and stormy career of a low-caste toddy-tapper who turned brigand during the chaotic aftermath of the Mughal conquest of Bijapur and Golkonda. This episode, it is argued, illustrates a phenomenon some historians have called “social banditry.” Moreover, inasmuch as examples of subaltern resistance to larger regimes of power are seldom documented before the nineteenth century, the case affords a rare glimpse of a precolonial counter-hegemonic movement. Along the way, it reveals much about caste, class, and communal relations at the micro-level of Telangana society.

The volume’s final chapter traces the rise of coastal Brahmans in the central institutions of the Maratha state founded by Shivaji, as well as the changing meaning of the term “Maratha” – and the social groups included within that category – during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both of those phenomena were related to the eruption of Maratha armies into the heart of the decaying Mughal empire in the eighteenth century – a movement that reversed a pattern of more than four centuries of north Indian pressure on the Deccan. The book closes with the culmination of that movement, the Third Battle of Panipat, which proved to be a turning point for both regions.

The debacle at Panipat also coincided with the growth of European power in South Asia, a phenomenon that would open up another, but not the last, chapter in the social history of the Deccan.
CHAPTER 7

PAPADU (FL. 1695–1710): SOCIAL BANDITRY IN MUGHAL TELANGANA

Traveling alone, Papra [Papadu] appeared in Hasanabad, a village two marches away that he himself had settled. Coming across a toddy-seller, he said to the man, ‘Bring me some good toddy.’ But despite the fugitive’s best efforts to disguise himself, the toddy-seller recognized his manner of speech. He scrutinized his face. He knew it was Papra.1

Khafi Khan (d. c.1731)

The visitor to Shahpur, located some fifty miles northeast of Hyderabad near the main road to Warangal, cannot mistake its two most prominent landmarks – the hill-fort, and the bust prominently situated in the village square. The bust is of Sarvayi Papadu, Shahpur’s most notorious native son. Commissioned in 1998 by the Telugu University, Warangal, this image of Papadu was sculpted on the basis of a portrait dating to 1750–80 (see Plate 12). In both the painting and the bust, the intense gaze in his eyes, his formidable moustache, and the falcon perched on his wrist all project a fearsome, swashbuckling demeanor.

Captured and executed by Mughal authorities in 1710 as a highwayman and bandit, Papadu would become celebrated in local memory as a hero who boldly defied imperial authority, indeed, most any authority. Shahpur’s other prominent landmark, the fort, rests atop a hill immediately to the north of the village and consists of a square, stone-walled compound built around a cube-shaped watchtower (see Plate 13). Here, between c. 1701 and 1709 Mughal troops besieged Papadu and his men no fewer than four times.

Papadu’s brief and turbulent career is of great interest from the standpoint of social history.2 His stubborn resistance to various forms of authority, and his manifest success in garnering support for his cause, forced people of diverse

1 Khafi Khan, Muntakhab al-lubab (Calcutta, 1874), 643.
2 Two kinds of sources enable a reconstruction of Papadu’s career: contemporary accounts recorded by his Mughal adversaries, and local legends subsequently recorded by folklorists. Despite their very different vantage points, the two sources converge on key aspects of his career, as is seen in J. F. Richards and V. Narayana Rao, “Banditry in Mughal India: Historical and Folk Perceptions,” in The Mughal State, 1526–1750, ed. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (New Delhi, 1998), 491–519. First published in Indian Economic and Social History Review 17, no. 1 (1980): 95–120.
backgrounds to make crucial choices. Moreover, since he aroused considerable concern in official circles, which in turn attracted the attention of imperial news-writers, his recorded activities allow us to glimpse fault lines in the social order that would otherwise have remained concealed from view. In particular, an analysis of his supporters and opponents reveals much about the alignments of caste, class, and religious community in this part of India around the turn of the eighteenth century. Papadu’s story is also instructive for its similarities, and contrasts, with other instances of “social banditry,” a form of rebellion that Eric Hobsbawm finds in many pre-industrial peasant societies. In order to probe these issues, however, we must first sketch out the socio-economic and political context of Papadu’s native Telangana – i.e., upland, northwestern Andhra – just before he emerged into the light of history.

FROM THE SULTANATE OF GOLKONDA TO MUGHAL HYDERABAD

When the Bahmani sultanate broke up into five regional kingdoms in the early sixteenth century, the kingdom whose borders most closely coincided with those of a pre-Bahmani state was the easternmost, the Qutb Shahi sultanate of Golkonda (c. 1518–1687). This kingdom mapped itself over nearly the same territory that formerly made up the Kakatiya kingdom, which had been extinguished in 1323 when Tughluq armies sacked its capital at Warangal and led its last maharaja, Pratapa Rudra, into exile (see chapter 1). As a result, the Qutb Shahi sultans of Golkonda inherited a culturally coherent territory with distinctive features that had evolved many centuries earlier. These included Telugu language and literature, castes of warrior-cultivators (Reddi and Valama), large-scale tank irrigation, Šaiva temples and monasteries, and nayaka chieftains who bore an ethic of courage and steadfast loyalty to their political overlords.³

Although it would be wrong to see the Golkonda sultanate simply as the Kakatiya kingdom reborn with a Perso-Islamic veneer, the Qutb Shahi kingdom certainly shared more continuities with pre-fourteenth-century Deccani society and culture than did any of the other Bahmani successor-states. This was especially true from the reign of Sultan Ibrahim Qutb Shah (r. 1550–80), who, as was noted in the previous chapter, had been steeped in the traditions of Andhra’s regional culture. The sultan not only patronized Telugu literature, supported Brahmins and temples, and engaged in large-scale irrigation works

in the style of a Kakatiya raja. He also assimilated into Qutb Shahi service many nayaka chieftains who proudly claimed descent from warrior-servants of the Kakatiya house, especially those serving its last dynasty, Pratapa Rudra. Taking care to recognize their prior claims, Ibrahim allowed these men considerable autonomy in the agrarian sphere while also integrating them into the state's central system. One way he did this was by entrusting them with the command of the eastern Deccan's great forts. He also played down the state's Islamic and Persian character vis-à-vis the nayakas, presenting himself, as John Richards notes, "as an indigenous king, ruling insofar as possible in the idiom and style of a Kakatiya, a Valama, or Reddi monarch."4

By 1589, the Qutb Shahi house felt sufficiently secure in its position that Ibrahim's successor, Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, planned and laid out a new, unwalled city, Hyderabad, which was built across the Musi River just several miles from Golconda fort. The new city's graceful centerpiece monument, Charminar (1592), would in time become perhaps the most renowned symbol of Deccani culture. What is more, the old fort of Golconda and the adjacent new city of Hyderabad now became great magnets for wealth in the eastern Deccan. For one thing, the kingdom's monopoly on diamond production from mines located in its southern districts made Golconda the world's most important market for large diamonds. In Europe and America the very name "Golkonda" became synonymous with fabulous wealth.5 The reigns of sultans Ibrahim and Muhammad Quli also saw the rise to commercial prominence of the coastal city of Masulipatnam as the Qutb Shahis' principal seaport. By the close of the sixteenth century, textiles produced in the Godavari delta passed through Masulipatnam to markets throughout the Indian Ocean, attracting in exchange precious metals that flowed along the Masulipatnam–Hyderabad road to Golconda's treasury. With its political and administrative activities concentrated on the interior plateau and its commercial activities focused on the coast, the kingdom reached its peak of prosperity in the 1620s and 1630s.6

But it was also in the 1630s that the dark clouds of Mughal imperialism began to gather over Golconda's northern horizons, just as they had in Ahmadnagar four decades earlier. In 1636, the same year that the Nizam Shahi house was finally extinguished, its former territory divided between the Mughals and

4 Ibid., 10.
5 The founding fathers of Golconda, Illinois, hoping no doubt for the prosperity of their new town, certainly made this association.
Bijapur, Golkonda was compelled to sign a “Deed of Submission.” By the terms of this “agreement,” the Qutb Shahi sultan was required to remit to Delhi an annual tribute of 200,000 gold huns, and in his kingdom’s mosques the Friday sermon was to be read in the name of Shah Jahan, the Mughal emperor. To enforce the growing Mughal pressure on Golkonda, and also on neighboring Bijapur, Shah Jahan dispatched his eldest son, Aurangzeb, to serve as his viceroy for the Deccan. From 1636 until his death in 1707, first as viceroy and after 1658 as emperor, Aurangzeb would spend a total of forty years in the Deccan, which he was obsessed with subduing and annexing to the empire. He realized a major component of this grand plan when Golkonda finally fell to his armies in 1687, just a year after Bijapur had suffered the same fate. The Deccan’s last independent sultanate now snuffed out, a Mughal governor was installed in Hyderabad while a small cavalry unit escorted Abu'l-Hasan Qutb Shah, Golkonda’s last ruler, to the imperial prison in Daulatabad fort.

In their endeavor to bring the new province in line with the rest of the empire, the Mughals introduced many changes in the former Qutb Shahi realm. They collected revenue in cash and not in kind; they bureaucratized the revenue-extraction procedure by regularly rotating local officers; and they changed the monetary system from gold to silver, conforming to north Indian usage. Brahmin officials, who had occupied the highest levels of Golkonda’s government during the several decades prior to the conquest, were dismissed outright. And, not surprisingly given their pro-Turko-Iranian racial bias, the Mughals appointed many more Westerners than Deccanis to prominent administrative and military positions. All of the province’s fort commanders and most of its military governors, or fatujs, were Westerners. 

Perhaps most importantly, the Mughals practically reversed the Qutb Shahs’ policy respecting the employment of Telugu nayakas. Whereas the erstwhile sultans had integrated these chiefs into their central political system, the Mughals classified them as zamindars, which in the imperial lexicon denoted untrustworthy chiefs inherently hostile to Mughal interests. Accordingly, the new rulers kept Telugu nayakas at arm’s length, allowing few of them admission into the imperial service as ranked nobles, or mansabdars. The government was, however, willing to engage with those Valama or Reddi nayakas who controlled only small patches of territory, treating them not as high-ranking nobles but as hybrid local officials.

7 Richards, Mughal Administration, 64, 87, 91, 98.
8 Abu'l-fazl, the Mughals’ principal theorist, thought of the empire as a lovely garden, and zamindars as “weeds and rubbish of opposition.” Abu'l-fazl' Allami, Akbar-nama, trans. Henry Beveridge (repr., New Delhi, 1979), iii:143, 169, 376.
who were allowed to keep part of the assessed taxes in return for cooperating with the system.\textsuperscript{9}

In addition to these political changes, the imposition of Mughal authority also brought economic dislocations to the people of the eastern Deccan. The conquest itself was accompanied by widespread crop failures, together with famine, cholera epidemics, falling agricultural production, and finally, depopulation.\textsuperscript{10} All this was made worse by Aurangzeb’s policy of treating the province as a milk-cow for financing the empire’s wider projects. And by century’s end, the port of Masulipatnam had dried up as a source of wealth for the eastern Deccan. Within five years of the Mughal conquest, a Dutchman who had resided in the city for some time, Daniel Havart, published a book in which he blamed the port’s decline mainly on the Mughal invasion and conquest of Golkonda. Recent research, however, suggests that the port was already in decline by the early 1680s, just before the Mughal conquest. The Brahmin ministers who ran Golkonda’s government had replaced the Iranian faction at court with clerical (Niyogi) Brahmins, as a result of which the great Iranian ship-owners who had underwritten much of Golkonda’s long-distance trade simply withdrew from commercial activities in the kingdom. As this happened, the focus of Dutch and English trade gradually shifted from Masulipatnam to other ports around the Bay of Bengal.\textsuperscript{11}

A clear indicator of the eastern Deccan’s economic malaise after the conquest is seen in the diminishing number of trade caravans that traveled the province’s roads and safely reached their destinations. Obviously, the unhindered movement of such caravans was vital for the regional economy. But during the years 1702–04 no merchant caravans managed to reach Hyderabad, which for much of the previous century had been the Deccan’s principal trade entrepôt.\textsuperscript{12} Although this represented only one link in a chain of adverse factors that led ultimately to the final dissolution of Mughal authority in the Deccan, the failure of trade caravans to reach the provincial capital posed a major problem, to say the least. And one of the most immediate causes for this failure was highway banditry.

Here Papadu enters the picture. Though hardly the only highwayman working the roads of Mughal Hyderabad, Papadu attracted far more attention than did any of the others, both in official circles and in the collective memory of Telangana’s villagers.

\textsuperscript{9} Richards, \textit{Mughal Administration}, 132–33, 173.
\textsuperscript{10} ibid., 69. \textsuperscript{11} Subrahmanyan, “Port City,” 59–61.
\textsuperscript{12} Richards, \textit{Mughal Administration}, 221.
Papadu seems to have grown up in the village of Tarikonda, some twenty-five miles southwest of Warangal (see Map 6). There he belonged to the toddy-tapper (Gavandla, or Gamalla) community, a low caste that made their living extracting sap from palm trees, fermenting it, and selling the liquor product. According to a folk ballad collected in the early 1870s, Papadu’s first acts of defiance were directed as much at issues of caste propriety as they were at civil authority: he refused to follow the occupation of the caste into which he was born. When his own mother objected to his intention to abandon his proper caste-occupation, he replied,

Mother! to fix and drive the share,
the filthy household-pot to bear,
Are not for me. My arm shall fall
upon Golkonda’s castle wall.\(^{13}\)

A version of the ballad published in the early twentieth century clarifies the connection between abandoning one’s caste-occupation and taking on “Golkonda’s castle wall.” Papadu is said to have reasoned that toddy-tappers were ideally suited for positions of leadership, and even power, since their work required them to mobilize and coordinate the skills of a number of different caste communities:

When a toddy-tapper taps a toddy tree,
He has a liquor-seller make the toddy.
A basket-maker makes the knife basket,
And a potter makes the pots.
 Doesn’t such a man know how to be a ringleader?\(^{14}\)

Such motives should be read with caution, as they were attributed to Papadu by later balladeers who perhaps read into his life a logic that made perfect sense to them, but which cannot be corroborated by contemporary evidence. Moving to the basic events of Papadu’s life, on the other hand, we have the extraordinary narrative of Khafi Khan, a contemporary Mughal chronicler who compiled his account on the basis of official reports recorded by imperial news-writers. He records as follows.

\(^{13}\) J. A. Boyle, “Telugu Ballad Poetry,” Indian Antiquary 3 (January 1874): 2.
Sometime in the late 1690s Papadu assaulted and robbed his sister, a wealthy widow. With her stolen money and ornaments he gathered together a group of followers, built a crude hill-fort in Tarikonda, and began to engage in highway robbery, raiding merchants on the nearby artery connecting Warangal and Hyderabad. The first people to take notice of Papadu’s activities were local faujdars and zamindars, that is, military governors and hereditary Telugu landholder/chiefs. When these local notables drove him out of Tarikonda, Papadu fled clear to Kaulas, some 110 miles to the west, where he took up service as a troop-captain (jama’a-dar) with the zamindar of that place, Venkat Rao.  

Reverting to his old ways, however, Papadu was soon back on the roads robbing travelers and merchants. Venkat Rao imprisoned him when he learned of this, but after several months the zamindar’s wife, believing that an act of compassion might cure her sick son, freed all the prisoners in her husband’s jail, including Papadu. At this point the careers of Venkat Rao and Papadu veered in opposite directions. In 1701 Venkat Rao threw in his lot with the Mughals, offering to serve the deputy governor in Hyderabad with his 500 horsemen and 2,000 infantry. Receiving a rank and a command of 200 horsemen, he became one of the few Telugu chieftains to have made the transition from zamindar to mansabdar; that is, he moved out of the group of indigenous landholder/chiefs whom the Mughals viewed as politically suspect, and joined the charmed inner circle of élite administrators.  

Papadu, on the other hand, resumed his lawless ways. Returning to his native district, he soon established himself at Shahpur, just several miles from Tarikonda. Here he had no difficulty gathering together a large number of followers, including a fellow named Sarva. Together, they built a crude hill-fort that served as their base for more marauding operations, whose victims this time included both Muslim and Hindu women. Such outrages now drew the attention of Mughal authorities and local notables alike. Khafi Khan writes that a delegation of merchants and “respectable people of all communities and castes” went straight to the court of Aurangzeb to demand justice. The emperor ordered action from Hyderabad’s deputy governor, who in turn dispatched the faujdar of Kulpak, a town about fifteen miles from Shahpur, to deal with Papadu. But the faujdar, an Afghan named Qasim Khan, was shot and killed by one of Papadu’s men in a skirmish near Kulpak.

Soon thereafter, most likely in 1702, the deputy governor himself, Rustam Dil Khan, resolved to besiege Shahpur and root out the miscreant

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15 Khafi Khan, Muntakhab, 631.  16 Richards, Mughal Administration, 229.
toddy-tapper. But after a two-month siege, Papadu and Sarva escaped, where-upon Rustam Dil Khan blew up the fort and returned to Hyderabad. At this point Mughal authority in the area appears to have vanished, for Papadu and Sarva quickly returned to Shahpur, gathered up their following, and replaced the former crude fort, now largely demolished, with a stronger one built of stone and mortar – the structure that stands today – and outfitted it with fixed cannon. But Rustam Dil Khan was unaware of these activities. He was also unaware of the favorable reception that Papadu’s name and activities were receiving in districts remote from Shahpur. Nor was he aware of how Papadu had consolidated his position within the insurgent movement. The rebel’s two principal lieutenants, Sarva and one Purdil Khan, had just quarreled with each other and engaged in a duel. After both men succumbed from wounds sustained in the duel, Papadu emerged in sole command of the movement. At this point he and his men began conquering neighboring forts. Papadu now seemed well on his way to becoming a regional warlord. Moreover, his ascendancy in central Telangana coincided in time with the two-year period, 1702–04, when no trade caravans were reaching Hyderabad. These two facts would not appear to be coincidental.17

Meanwhile, between May 1703 and December 1705, Rustam Dil Khan had been transferred to postings far from Hyderabad, possibly owing to his failure to deal effectively with the growing banditry then plaguing the province. But by early 1706 he was back in Hyderabad, determined to curry the emperor’s favor. In May of that year Dutch observers noted that the deputy governor had approached Riza Khan, another notorious bandit operating in Telangana, about suppressing Papadu’s growing insurrection. Khafi Khan reports that Rustam Dil Khan appointed a “brave soldier who was seeking work” to punish Papadu, and that this second attack on Papadu had also failed.18 It would thus appear that Mughal authorities had resorted to using one bandit to suppress another, an action indicative both of the government’s desperation and of the very low level of Hyderabad’s internal security.

Just over a year later, in the summer of 1707, Rustam Dil Khan resolved again to personally lead imperial troops against Papadu. Marching out to Shahpur with an imposing cavalry, the deputy governor besieged Papadu and his men for two or three months. But in the end Papadu was able to carry the day, not by force of arms, but by large sacks of money. Once received by Rustam Dil Khan, Papadu’s bribe achieved its aim of calming the deputy governor’s zeal for

17 Khafi Khan, Muntakhab, 632–33.
18 Richards and Narayana Rao, "Banditry," 498; Khafi Khan, Muntakhab, 632.
military operations. The siege lifted, the Mughal cavalry units quietly retraced their steps to their barracks in Hyderabad.\(^{19}\)

The deputy governor's ignoble retreat now emboldened Papadu and his men to plan their most daring heist yet—a raid set for April 1708 on Warangal itself. This was no minor village or even hill-fort. The former Kakatiya capital was still fortified with the moats, the forty-five bastions, and the two walls—one stone, the other earthen (see Plates 1 and 2)—that dated from Kakatiya times, plus the fortifications subsequently added by Bahmani and Qutb Shahi engineers. Probably the province's second largest city after Hyderabad, Warangal had by this time evolved from a political center to a major commercial and manufacturing hub, exporting its costly carpets and other textiles throughout India and even beyond. To Papadu, the city would have seemed ripe for the taking.

Two considerations informed the timing of his attack. The first was the distraction of authorities in Hyderabad, owing to both empire-wide and local politics. In February 1707 the aged Aurangzeb had finally died, throwing the whole empire into the turmoil that all parties knew would accompany the inevitable struggle for succession. In June the eldest of Aurangzeb's three sons, having defeated and killed one of his brothers, crowned himself Bahadur Shah. The new emperor now offered the governorship of Bijapur and Hyderabad to his other brother, Kam Bakhsh. But the latter, already the governor of Hyderabad, refused the offer and instead crowned himself "King of Golkonda" in January, 1708. This defiant (and oddly anachronistic) act set the stage for a final confrontation between the two brothers.\(^{20}\) From his roost in Shahpur, Papadu watched and waited.

Also determining the timing of the bandit's raid on Warangal was the approaching Muslim holiday of Ashura, which commemorates the day in AD 680 when the Prophet's grandson, Husain, was slain in Kerbala, Iraq. Representing the greatest tragedy in the history of Shi'i Islam, Ashura has for centuries been observed by Shi'as with intense mourning, including self-flagellation. But until recent times, Muslims and non-Muslims in many parts of the non-Arab world commemorated the day with parades of horses, elephants, banners, and visual representations of the Kerbala story. Urban neighborhoods would compete with one another over which one could create the most spectacular display for the occasion. In Papadu's time, residents of Warangal celebrated Ashura by making representations of Husain's tomb in Kerbala. Since

\(^{19}\) Richards and Narayana Rao, "Banditry," 498; Khafi Khan, Muntakhab, 633–34.
\(^{20}\) Richards, Mughal Administration, 236.
both Hindus and Muslims celebrated the holiday, the city’s entire population
would be busy making their preparations on the eve of the holiday.21 And, so
Papadu calculated, nobody would be minding the city walls.

As Ashura fell on April 1, 1708, on the evening of March 31 Papadu’s
forces, comprising 2,000 or 3,000 infantry and 400 or 500 cavalry, approached
Warangal’s stone walls. One party blocked the roads while others hurled ropes
with slip-knots onto the ramparts, by which they scaled and breached the walls.
Once the gates were opened from the inside, Papadu’s main forces poured into
the city, as its unsuspecting residents were engaged in preparing for the next
day’s celebrations. For two or three days the intruders plundered the city’s shops,
seizing great quantities of cash and textiles. Carpets too bulky to haul away
whole were simply cut into strips. But the principal prize was the thousands
of upper-class residents who were abducted to Shahpur, where a special walled
compound was built at the base of the fort for their detention. Among those
taken were many women and children, including the wife and daughter of
the city’s chief judge. Presumably, Papadu seized these people in order to hold
them for ransom, since seizing the city’s poorer classes would have had no such
value.22

The Warangal raid completely transformed the character and the fortunes
of the former toddy-tapper. From part of his booty, Papadu purchased more
military equipment, which included 700 double-barreled muskets, state-of-
the-art weaponry likely acquired from Dutch or English merchants who still
called at Masulipatnam. He also began comporting himself in the style of a maja.
Élite bearers carried him about in a palanquin, and an élite guard accompanied
him when mounted on a horse. If he acted like a king, he had actually become
a parvenu landholder. For we hear that he raided passing Banjaras (itinerant
grain carriers) and seized their cattle, which he put to work plowing his fields
for him. Since he is said to have seized between 10,000 and 12,000 head of

21 Khafi Khan, Muntakhab, 634. In 1832 Ja’far Sharif, a Deccani Muslim and native of Eluru on the
Andhra coast, wrote an ethnography entitled Qanun-i-Islam in which he described Ashura as it was
celebrated in his own day: “On the tenth day in Hyderabad all the standards and the cenotaphs,
except those of Qasim, are carried on men’s shoulders, attended by Faqirs, and they perform the
night procession (shaghash) with great pomp, the lower orders doing this in the evening, the higher
at midnight. On that night the streets are illuminated and every kind of revelry goes on. One form
of this is an exhibition of a kind of magic lantern, in which the shadows of the figures representing
battle scenes are thrown on a white cloth and attract crowds. The whole town keeps awake that
night and there is universal noise and confusion . . . Many Hindus have so much faith in these
cenotaphs, standards, and the Buraq, that they erect them themselves and become Faqirs during
the Muharram.” Ja’far Sharif, Islam in India, or the Qanun-i-Islam: the Customs of the Musalmans
22 Khafi Khan, Muntakhab, 634.
cattle for this purpose, the agricultural operations he controlled must have been extensive. It is not clear whether these tracts were arable lands seized from local landholders, or uncultivated lands – forest or wastelands – that he brought into agricultural production for the first time. As for the latter possibility, we know of at least one village, Hasanabad, that he founded and settled. In any event, the evidence suggests that Papadu used plundered cash and cattle to acquire at least the trappings of royal status and the economic substance of a great landholder, though of course he lacked the pedigree of a hereditary Telugu chieftain (nayaka).

Flushed with the success of his Warangal raid, Papadu began planning a similar raid on Bhongir, a famous fort standing on a huge, barren rock between Shahpur and Hyderabad, just thirty miles from the latter city. As with his attack on Warangal, he again chose a day when he knew the population would be distracted – the feast of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, which fell on June 1, 1708. But this expedition was far less successful. Just before dawn his men hurled stones up to Bhongir’s parapets carrying ropes with slip-knots. But one stone missed its mark and dropped onto the house of the gatemen, who sounded an alarm, creating a general disturbance. To escape the botched raid, Papadu ordered his men to burn stacks of hay so that they could flee through the smoke undetected by the fort’s gunners. Despite this seeming fiasco, the attackers nonetheless managed to carry off many hostages, who again seem to have been seized for their ransom value. Papadu had promised silver coins to those of his men who captured females, and gold coins to those who took élite women.

In Hyderabad, meanwhile, the complexities of imperial politics prevented Mughal authorities from taking action against Papadu. Within weeks of the outrage at Warangal, Kam Bakhsh, the “King of Golkonda,” was in Gulbarga praying at the shrine of Gisu Daraz, presumably for help in his anticipated showdown with his older brother, Bahadur Shah. But his prayers would be of no avail. The emperor soon left Delhi and advanced to the Deccan to confront his younger brother, and in January 1709, the two armies clashed just outside Hyderabad. Shortly afterwards Kam Bakhsh died from wounds sustained in that battle.

The stage was now set for the highpoint of Papadu’s career. While in Hyderabad in January, Bahadur Shah gave a public audience, or darbar, and we learn from an on-site Dutch report that among those present who had

23 Ibid., 635. 24 Ibid., 635-36.
been received by the emperor was *den rover servapaper*, or the “bandit Sarayi Papadu.” Craving imperial recognition as a legitimate tribute-paying chieftain, Papadu on this occasion presented Bahadur Shah with the extraordinary gift of 1,400,000 rupees, in addition to large amounts of foodstuffs and other provisions for the imperial army. In return, the emperor bestowed upon Papadu one of the most prized gifts one could receive from a sovereign, a robe of honor.  

It had been twenty-two years since Hyderabad witnessed a royal audience in which a sovereign received subordinate chiefs, for since 1687 the city had been ruled by a governor and not a monarch. Bahadur Shah’s formal *darbar* would therefore have had special impact on an older generation who could remember the days when Golconda’s Qutb Shahi sultans honored Telugu *nayakas* in their *darbars*. In this light, for a low-caste toddy-tapper and notorious bandit to be given the dignity of a formal audience with the most powerful sovereign in India, and even to receive a robe of honor, surely galled the more respectable elements of Hyderabad’s society. Especially offended were those whose family members had been abducted by Papadu, such as Shah ‘Inayat, the most venerable elder of Telangana’s Muslim society. Soon after the public audience, Shah ‘Inayat led a delegation of high-born Muslims to lodge a complaint before the imperial court. While stating that he himself would not deal with a mere toddy-tapper – even though he had just honored him with a robe of honor! – Bahadur Shah instructed his newly appointed governor of Hyderabad, Yusuf Khan, to “eradicate” the man. The new governor in turn ordered a fellow Afghan, Dilawar Khan, to lead an expeditionary force against Papadu.  

Meanwhile, the receipt of a robe of honor from the Mughal emperor had not visibly affected Papadu’s behavior. In June 1709, we find him besieging the fort of a neighboring landholder, in the course of which he learned of Dilawar Khan’s expeditionary force advancing towards him. Preferring to confront the Mughals on his own ground, he lifted his siege and started back to Shahpur – not knowing, however, that at that very moment the captives he had imprisoned there were staging an uprising. Among their leaders was the local deputy *faujdar* (military governor), who happened to be the brother of Papadu’s wife. Using files that his sister had smuggled into the prison, the deputy *faujdar* and his fellow prisoners cut their shackles, overpowered their guards, and seized control of the fort while Papadu and his main force were still absent.  

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Papadu thus reached Shahpur only to be greeted by cannonballs fired from his own artillery by his own former hostages. Enraged at this turn of events and determined to force his way inside, he ordered his men to set fire to the fort's wooden gates. When the gates were ablaze, his men donned the blood-soaked hides of buffaloes they had just killed, and using these wet skins as shields they attempted to rush through the burning gates. But the heat was too intense; in addition, fallen timbers and heavy debris blocked the way for Papadu's charging elephants. At this moment Dilawar Khan's expeditionary force arrived on the scene. Unable to enter his fort and unwilling to engage the Mughal cavalry in the open, Papadu and his men took refuge in the walled enclosure at the base of the fort where they had been holding their captured hostages.\(^{28}\)

The situation seemed dire. By evening, with some of his more dispirited men having already scattered, Papadu abandoned Shahpur and took his army to his nearby fort at Tarikonda. When Yusuf Khan learned that Papadu was on the run, the governor sent 5,000 or 6,000 fresh cavalry to besiege Tarikonda, while Dilawar Khan remained behind in Shahpur collecting and inventorying Papadu's wealth and revenue accounts (\textit{mal wa hand-u-bast}). But then things bogged down. Papadu entrenched himself in the fort overlooking the town in which he had launched his career, while the besiegers failed to make any headway dislodging him. Months passed. Finally, Yusuf Khan resolved to attack Papadu in person, and so in March 1710 he marched out of Hyderabad at the head of 5,000 or 6,000 cavalry. Joining him were a number of local landholders who, clearly seeing Papadu as a threat to their own interests, mobilized between 10,000 and 12,000 cavalry and 20,000 infantry for the cause.\(^{29}\)

Despite the enormous host besieging him at Tarikonda, Papadu managed to hold out for several more months. Then in May, the governor offered Papadu's men double pay if they would defect. Exhausted and famished, many did. Finally, when Papadu ran out of gunpowder, he made his last, desperate move. To disguise his identity, he changed his clothing. Then, with a view to throwing pursuers off his trail, he placed his sandals and hookah by one gate of the fort while departing through another. For two days he traveled alone, incognito, with a bullet wound in one leg. Nobody knew where he was, not even his sons, who continued fighting in the fort.\(^{30}\)

Finally, he appeared in the village of Hasanabad, where he came across the shop of a toddy-seller. Papadu had reason to feel safe here, since he himself had founded this village and was in the company of a man of the same caste into

\(^{28}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 640-41. \(^{29}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 641-42. \(^{30}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 642.
which he had been born. Nonetheless, to be safe, he maintained his disguise. Taking a seat in the shop, he asked the proprietor for a glass of his very best toddy. The proprietor closely studied his customer’s face. It was his manner of speech, though, that gave him away. Realizing his customer’s true identity, the toddy-seller asked him to remain seated while he left his shop to fetch his best toddy.

Soon thereafter, he returned with the deputy faujdar and 300 soldiers. The officer was his wife’s brother, the same man whom Papadu had imprisoned in Shahpur and who had led the recent prison uprising. The men brought their quarry before the governor, Yusuf Khan, who spent several days questioning Papadu as to the whereabouts of his collected wealth. Then they hacked him to pieces. His head was sent to Bahadur Shah’s court; his body was hung from the gates of Hyderabad, both as trophy and as cautionary warning.31

PAPADU AS A “SOCIAL BANDIT”

The story of Papadu’s exploits raises a number of questions about the meteoric career of this Telangana toddy-tapper and the society in which he lived. Why did he appear when and where he did? Why was he betrayed by his wife and by a member of his own caste? In terms of class, caste, or religion, who were his supporters and who were his opponents? What was the economic basis of his movement, and what can his story tell us about the relationship between caste and wealth?

In his comparative studies of peasant rebellions, historian Eric Hobsbawm formulated the notion of the “social bandit,” which he defines as “peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions.”32 Crucially, the “social bandit” is embedded both socially and culturally in a community of peasants, from which he draws support and sustenance over and against his (and their) twin adversaries: the “lord” and the state. A rich literature in the form of folk legends or ballads often grows up around such figures – especially the subset Hobsbawm calls “noble robbers,” such as Robin Hood – precisely because they are so firmly rooted in their respective societies. They are not lone criminals, no matter how much the lord or the state might imagine or wish them to be. Indeed, they are potentially more dangerous than lone criminals, precisely because under the right circumstances social bandits can spark peasant revolutions, as happened repeatedly in the history of China.

which he had been born. Nonetheless, to be safe, he maintained his disguise. Taking a seat in the shop, he asked the proprietor for a glass of his very best toddy. The proprietor closely studied his customer’s face. It was his manner of speech, though, that gave him away. Realizing his customer’s true identity, the toddy-seller asked him to remain seated while he left his shop to fetch his best toddy.

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Other aspects of Hobsbawm’s “social bandit” thesis seem pertinent here. They flourish, he writes, “in remote and inaccessible areas such as mountains, trackless plains . . . and are attracted by trade-routes and major highways, where pre-industrial travel is naturally both slow and cumbrous.” They are likely to appear in times of pauperization and economic crisis. However, while they are certainly activists, social bandits “are not ideologists or prophets, from whom novel visions or plans of social and political organization are to be expected . . . Insofar as bandits have a ‘program,’ it is the defense or restoration of the traditional order of things ‘as it should be.’” 33 Hobsbawm further argues that whereas social bandits are part of peasant society, they are usually not peasants themselves. The latter, being immobile and rooted to the land, are typically victims of authority and coercion, whereas “the rural proletarian, unemployed for a large part of the year, is ‘mobilizable’ as the peasant is not.” To find bandits, writes Hobsbawm, “we must look to the mobile margin of peasant society.” 34

In all these respects, Papadu would appear to have conformed to Hobsbawm’s model. Ballads narrating his life and sung in rural settings attest both to his rootedness in peasant culture and to his celebration as a local hero. His inaccessible roost on Shahpur hillock, located near a major highway, helped facilitate his career as a brigand. The breakdown of Mughal Telangana’s economy and internal security in the early 1700s would have shaped the timing of his emergence. Though certainly an activist, he seems to have had no coherent ideology or program. And finally, his caste as a toddy-tapper placed him in precisely the niche where Hobsbawm predicts social bandits will appear — on the “mobile margins” of peasant society.

But what, exactly, constituted Papadu’s social base? Who supported him? One might seek clues to these questions by identifying the groups most concerned with preserving his memory. Here it seems significant that no single caste identifies the popular epic of Papadu, as told by balladeers, as their own. 35 This suggests that the movement never did define itself in terms of caste. Preserved and sung by generations of itinerant singers, the ballad appears to have been embraced by all castes of rural Telangana, if not, indeed, the greater part of the Telugu-speaking Deccan. In 1974, folklorist Gene Roghair recorded a ballad sung of Papadu in coastal Guntur district; exactly a century earlier, J. A. Boyle recorded another version of the same ballad in distant Bellary district, in eastern Karnataka. 36 Sites named in the ballad itself — i.e., those that

33 Ibid., 16–17, 20–21, 24. 34 Ibid., 25.
Papadu intended to attack – include only one in Telangana (Golkonda), two in southern Andhra (Nellore, Cuddapah), and one each on the Andhra coast (Masulipatnam), in southern Karnataka (Mysore), and on the Malabar coast (Cannanore). It thus seems that the “remembered” Papadu drifted far to the south of Telangana, but not to the north or west (see Map 6).

Nor does Papadu’s social base appear to have been defined by religious community. Historian and folklorist Velcheru Narayana Rao has noted that several highly educated literary people . . . show great interest in interpreting and re-creating the story in an effort to represent Sarayai Papadu as a model Hindu warrior against the Muslim tyrants. If their view gains wider acceptance, it is possible that the story will acquire epic-like proportions and status as a ‘true’ story.  

Evidence both from Khafi Khan’s narrative and from oral ballads, however, would argue against any characterization of Papadu as a “Hindu warrior.” The Mughal historian states that Papadu’s earliest roadside attacks targeted “wealthy women of the region, whether Hindu or Muslim,” and that in response to these attacks “merchants and respectable people of all communities” (har gaum) complained to Aurangzeb. And while the Hyderabad government mounted repeated attempts to root out Papadu’s movement, it was Hindu chieftains who first opposed him, and in the end, such chieftains would send many more cavalry and infantry against him than did the government.

Another way of addressing this question is to identify Papadu’s closest supporters. Two printed versions of his ballad (1909 and 1931) and an oral version that was tape-recorded in 1974 give virtually identical lists of his earliest followers. These include: Hasan, Husain, Turka Himam, Dudekula Pir (cotton-carder), Kotwal Mir Sahib, Hanumanthu, Cakali Sarvanna (washerman), Mangali Mananna (barber), Kummari Govindu (potter), Medari Yenkanna (basket-weaver), Cittel (a Yerikela), Perumallu (a Jakkula), and Pasel (a Yenadi). In terms of their cultural background, the first five are the names of Muslims, the second five those of caste Hindus, and the last three “are tribal groups of itinerant fortune-tellers, thieves, animal breeders, singers, and performers.” If these names are representative of Papadu’s broader movement, it would certainly appear difficult to characterize it as a “Hindu” uprising against “Muslim” tyranny. Rather, the oral tradition suggests that his followers included Hindus, Muslims, and tribes in nearly equal proportions. This is

37 Narayana Rao, “Epics and Ideologies,” 133.
confirmed by contemporary evidence, for we know from Khafi Khan that Papadu's closest lieutenants, Sarva and Purdil Khan, were a Hindu and a Muslim respectively.

It is more revealing to examine the same list from the standpoint of occupation. Among the Muslims mentioned in the ballad, three were of indeterminate occupation, one was a cotton-carder, and the other a police captain (kotwal). Four of the five Hindus belonged to the rural proletariat – a barber, a washerman, a potter, and a basket-maker – while the three tribal names suggest people at the outer margins, if not beyond the pale, of “respectable” society. In sum, most of Papadu’s immediate supporters, though diverse in point of religious community, clearly belonged to the lower orders of Telangana’s rural society.

A large category of supporters not mentioned in the ballad, but inferable from Khafi Khan’s account, were landless peasants. The sheer number of draft animals that plowed Papadu’s fields – between 10,000 and 12,000 head – suggests the presence of many agricultural laborers whom he could count on for support. When Papadu abandoned Shahpur for Tarikonda, Dilawar Khan spent three or four days assessing his account books (band-u-bast), which evidently refers to records of rent owed by peasants working his fields. And the speed and apparent ease with which he could mobilize thousands of armed men – and laborers to build his forts – suggests a depth of support that reached beyond the rural proletariat and into the region’s sizable peasant population.

It is an easier matter to identify Papadu’s opponents. The first delegation that complained to Aurangzeb of Papadu’s highway banditry included merchants (biyapari) and respectable people (shurat) of all communities and castes. However, while merchants were Papadu’s primary targets at Warangal, their community posed no military threat to him. Also opposing him were the military governors, or faujdars, whom Mughal authorities in Hyderabad had posted throughout the countryside with specified units of cavalry. But after 1700 the power and authority of faujdars in Telangana appears to have progressively diminished. In 1702, for example, the faujdar of Kulpak, only some sixteen miles from Shahpur, had been Papadu’s principal adversary; by 1709 the zamindar of that place was filling that role.

It was, then, the Telugu landholder/chieftains – zamindars, in Mughal terminology – who mounted the most effective opposition to Papadu. They well understood the threat that he posed both to rural society and to themselves. With their own inherited lands and armed militias, these chieftains were deeply invested in preserving the established order, which involved, among other
things, maintaining secure roads. Papadu’s only known employer, the zamindar Venkat Rao, threw him into prison when he was found to be involved in highway banditry. This was after zamindars of his native Tarikonda had already driven him out of their region for committing the same offense. Their most decisive challenge to Papadu, however, came when Yusuf Khan finally resolved to root him out of Tarikonda with 6,000 Mughal cavalry. On this occasion local zamindars raised a cavalry twice that size, in addition to 20,000 infantry. Evidently, these chiefs were determined to eradicate a parvenu who publicly claimed zamindar status, yet who as a lowly toddy-tapper had inherited neither land nor chieftaincy. Papadu’s receipt of an imperial robe of honor, which seemed to represent official acknowledgment of his status as a legitimate, tribute-paying nayaka-zamindar, provoked strong reaction. Landholders claiming descent from ancient nayaka families were simply incensed at such impudence.

Papadu’s receipt of an imperial robe of honor also aroused resentment from Telangana’s sharif community, that is, high-born, respectable, urban-dwelling Muslims who cultivated learning and piety. These included shaihks or judges (qazis) whose female relatives had been abducted to Shahpur, and who demanded that the state exert itself to uphold a certain moral order. Shortly after Bahadur Shah’s Hyderabad darbar, the most respected member of Telangana’s sharif community, Shah ‘Inayat, whose own daughter had been one of Papadu’s victims, took his complaint to the emperor. The latter replied that he would not stoop to dealing with a mere toddy-tapper, a response that so disgraced the shaikh that on returning home he shunned all human contact, fell ill, and died of bitter sadness. Nonetheless, the moral pressure he had brought to the court did bear fruit: the governor of Hyderabad, Yusuf Khan, was ordered to take decisive action against Papadu.

With such varied forms of opposition, how did Papadu hold out for nearly a decade? One answer perhaps lies in Hobbsawm’s observation that whereas the state might see social bandits as lone criminals, they are in fact entrepreneurs whose activities necessarily involve them with local social and economic systems. That is, bandits must spend the money they rob, or sell their booty. “Since they normally possess far more cash than ordinary local peasantry,” he writes,

their expenditures may form an important element in the modern sector of the local economy, being redistributed, through local shopkeepers, innkeepers and others, to the commercial middle strata of rural society; all the more effectively redistributed since bandits

40 Khafi Khan, Muntakhab, 638.
(unlike the gentry) spend most of their cash locally... All this means that bandits need middlemen, who link them not only to the rest of the local economy but to the larger networks of commerce.41

Were it not for the market, what else would Papadu have done with all the carpets and textiles he plundered from Warangal? How else could he have acquired his 700 double-barreled muskets?

For nearly a decade, Papadu, operating with substantial income and expenditures, occupied the center of a wide redistribution network. His income would have derived from direct raiding of towns and trade caravans, ransom demanded for the return of élite hostages, rent from landless laborers working on fields under his control, and the sale of stolen goods through complicit middlemen. His expenditures would have included purchases of weapons and supplies to maintain his forts, payment to his armed men, bribes for enemy combatants, “tribute” to the state, and the largess necessarily dispensed to his lieutenants and numerous underlings, as would be appropriate for a man who was carried about in a palanquin and was escorted by an élite guard. Clearly, the idea of the lone criminal is inadequate for understanding the wide range of Papadu’s operations.

That said, Papadu’s career exhibited a fatal tension between the considerable fortunes that he amassed, and his low birth-ascribed ritual rank as a toddy-tapper, together with the poor standard of living that normally accompanied that work. This tension seems to have had deep roots. There are hints that, even before he commenced his career as a bandit, members of his family were connected to wealth or authority. According to an oral version of his ballad, Papadu’s father had been a village headman (patil) and his brother a petty army commander (sardar).42 His sister, too, had married into considerable wealth. Indeed, it was envy for his sister’s money and ornaments, which he robbed, that had first stimulated his taste for banditry. It has been suggested that the disjuncture between the attained secular status of his family, and the low ritual status of his caste, might explain his flat rejection of his caste occupation.43 The same disjuncture might also explain why Papadu married a woman who, as the sister of a faujdar, was almost certainly outside the toddy-tapper caste.

In time, however, as Papadu became more successful as a bandit-entrepreneur, the disjuncture between his attained secular status and his low ritual and occupational status grew more acute. It reached its apogee with his brazen attempt to purchase political legitimacy by presenting a “gift” of

41 Hobsbawm. Bandits, 73.  
43 Ibid., 512.
1.4 million rupees to the Mughal emperor. After taking that audacious step before the full gaze of a public audience, his career immediately crashed, as the governor, the *sharif* community, and especially the Telugu *zamindars* all moved to crush him. It is hardly surprising that the high and mighty would strike down a toddy-tapper for having strayed so very far from his “proper” station.

More interesting is evidence of his rejection by his own people, a product of the social bandit’s fundamental ambiguity. As a poor man who refuses to accept the normal roles of poverty, and in Papadu’s case, the normal roles of caste as well, the bandit seeks freedom by the only means available to him: courage, strength, cunning, determination. “This draws him close to the poor,” notes Hobsbawm,

he is one of them. It sets him in opposition to the hierarchy of power, wealth and influence; he is not one of them . . . At the same time the bandit is, inevitably, drawn into the web of wealth and power, because, unlike other peasants, he acquires wealth and exerts power. He is “one of us” who is constantly in the process of becoming associated with “them”. The more successful he is as a bandit, the more he is both a representative and a champion of the poor and a part of the system of the rich. 44

As viewed from Shahpur, in other words, Papadu’s audience with the emperor could well have certified, at least for some, that their leader was “one of them.”

Six months after the Hyderabad *darbar*, his own wife betrayed him by supporting the revolt among Shahpur’s imprisoned hostages. It is of course possible that in a stressed situation, her loyalty to her brother – the *faujdar* she set free – proved greater than her loyalty to Papadu. On the other hand, Papadu’s betrayal by the toddy-seller in Hasanabad, which led directly to his execution, was a purely political act. There was no possibility of sibling loyalty being involved, as might have been the case with Papadu’s wife and her brother.

Papadu’s ambiguous and ultimately untenable position is suggested in the only surviving artifacts he left to posterity – the forts he built at Tarikonda and Shahpur. The ramparts of his square-shaped citadel in Shahpur have the same rounded, crenelated battlements that are found in Bahmani, Qutb Shahi, and Mughal military architecture (see Plate 13). And the imposing south entrance gate to that fort, its arched passageway measuring sixteen feet in width and twenty-eight feet in height, features a graceful pointed arch typical of the Perso-Islamic aesthetic vision. By Papadu’s time, these architectural elements had become thoroughly identified with the projection of Mughal power and

44 Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 76.
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authority. On the other hand, the cube-shaped stone watchtower that occupies the center of that fort’s compound, with its steps projecting out from its northern and eastern sides, is quite anomalous, finding no parallel in any center of Mughal power. Its only analog is the watchtower near the northern gate of Warangal’s fort, itself a post-Kakatiya structure randomly assembled from disparate blocks of stone.\textsuperscript{45} It is as though, in his defiance of Mughal authority, Papadu planted in the middle of his main fort the least Mughal-like emblem that would have been familiar to him.

Shahpur fort thus projects Papadu’s two sides: the would-be subimperial tributary lord comfortably integrated into the Mughal order and recognized by the emperor himself, and the rebellious Telugu son-of-the-land who defied any and all authority. In the society of his day, he could not have it both ways.

\textsuperscript{45} See N. S. Ramachandra Murthy, \textit{Forts of Andhra Pradesh} (Delhi, 1996), Warangal: Plate 8.