

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A New Language of Rule: Alwar's Administrative Experiment, c. 1838–58

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Abstract

Many rulers of newly formed Indian Princely States enacted substantial administrative reforms in the first half of the nineteenth century as they sought to reinforce their power and secure revenue in the wake of British colonial conquest. In one such case, the ruler of Alwar, Banni Singh, recruited Aminullah Khan, a former record-keeper in Delhi's colonial courts, to serve as *diwan* (chief minister) and undertake administrative reforms starting in 1838. These reforms focused on agrarian taxation, the civil courts, and the military, and included changes to the roles of local officials, methods of record-keeping, and the language of governance. The reforms were encoded in seven slim volumes of regulations and model forms, handwritten in Persian. Through a study of these regulations, I situate the reforms of Alwar's administration within Banni Singh's broader self-fashioning as a modern ruler in a Mughal mode and show how the reforms drew from both Mughal and colonial ideas of statecraft. The regulations represented a shift toward a legalistic conception of that state as seen in the ideals of good governance that they espoused, and they constructed contractual relationships among villagers, low-level officials in the districts, and the central state through the extensive bureaucratic procedures that they encoded.

In the 1830s, Maharao Raja Banni Singh (r. 1815–57), the ruler of the Indian princely state of Alwar, sought to reform the state's administration to increase revenue and shore up his position against political rivals. After his first attempt at reforms failed, in 1838 he recruited Aminullah Khan, who had previously been employed in the East India Company (EIC) administration in Delhi, to serve as *diwan* (chief minister) and oversee further reforms. As part of these reforms, a new set of regulations was created at some point after 1838. These regulations, which addressed land revenue procedures, the workings of the Diwani Adalat (civil court), and military organization, codified the state's bureaucratic procedures.

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Colonial observers saw Alwar's reforms as a straightforward and praiseworthy application of East India Company-style governance in a Princely State, and they upheld Alwar as a potential model for other Princely States.¹ However, the legal codes underwriting company rule were hardly stable texts and it would be hard to point to a singular model of Company rule that Alwar could have used, as the thousands of pages of regulations generated between the Cornwallis Codes of 1793 and the late 1830s for the Bengal Presidency and North-west Provinces suggest by their volume, regional variety, and constant revision. Moreover, the relationship of these regulations to the various modes of governance in place across northern India prior to the EIC's conquest was complex and contested; shared administrative terminology could mask significant conceptual shifts. Thus, Alwar's concise set of new regulations cannot be read as a simple transference of colonial regulations and ideas about the rule of law. Instead, they were part of a larger project of state-crafting that embraced elements of Persianate political culture popularized in India by the Mughals alongside regional Rajput practices and certain elements of colonial administration to produce what I call a "Mughal modernity." This mode did not seek a return to a Mughal past. Rather, it treated Mughal forms of law and administration as resources for the creation of a modern bureaucratic state.

In what follows, I show how Alwar, one of the many small Princely States in Rajasthan and Central India, which were subject to a British resident's or agent's oversight and intervention in internal affairs only intermittently before 1857, engaged ideas of state reform. Rather than re-tread well-known debates about the ideological underpinnings of colonial land revenue collection and their implications for ideas about property law,² I argue that Alwar's administrative reforms represented an engagement with both long-standing Persianate forms of governance and colonial innovations, resulting in a legal redefinition of the nature of state administration. By seeking to expand and regularize bureaucratic administration, the reforms constructed the relationship between the state and subject in abstract and contractual terms.

In practice, Alwar's reforms consisted of a refashioning of Persian document forms and practices that sought to expand their use in village-level governance and to centralize information through the bureaucratic administrative methods that they encoded. These reforms were aligned with the expanded bureaucracy, information gathering, and more extensive yet increasingly anonymized and standardized interactions with subjects that were hallmarks of the emerging modern bureaucratic state in the nineteenth century. Bureaucratic reforms, often effected through codification, were undertaken across a wide range of polities in this period—including

¹ Edward S. Haynes, "Imperial Impact on Rajputana: The Case of Alwar, 1775–1850," *Modern Asian Studies* 12 (1978): 448; and Edward Thornton, *Statistical Papers Relating to India* (London: J&H Cox, 1853), 16.

² Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement*, 2nd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); and Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1959).

European nation-states, the Ottoman Empire, and Meiji Japan—although the precise shape of the reforms varied with the political culture, formations, and pressures in each state.³ In colonial North India, the EIC's administration and law involved the reworking of the administrative frameworks of earlier regimes, especially those of the Mughals, in a series of regulations and codes.⁴

Alwar's new regulations represented the first time that that state attempted even a partial written codification of its administrative procedures. In that way, the reforms generated a new body of administrative and procedural law. The regulations clearly borrowed categories and forms from colonial frameworks—such as the posts of “collector” and “*lambardār*,” a cultivator who paid dues on behalf of his village⁵—but they also diverged in key ways, including embracing the use of Persian precisely when the colonial state stopped using it for governance. Although the genealogies of Alwar's new regulations cannot be definitively traced, the broad shift to treating the state in a legalistic manner is clear in both the way good governance is described and the specific contents of the regulations. The regulations as prescriptive texts projected an image of the state in its most ordered and perfect form and explicated the procedures, rights, and duties that would structure the relationship of the state and its subjects. The Alwar regulations emphasized agricultural cultivation and taxation and primarily depict rule through control of the rural.⁶ They also show how mobile elite bureaucrats affected reforms in Princely States through the transfer of experience and expertise across political boundaries.⁷ The engagement of Princely States with English colonial notions of statecraft came through multiple trajectories, not just through direct advice from residents, and had scope for local innovation.

³ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 72–74, 86–87; Yuichiro Shimizu, *The Origins of the Modern Japanese Bureaucracy*, trans. Amin Ghadimi (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); and Avi Rubin, “Modernity as a Code: The Ottoman Empire and the Global Movement of Codification,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59 (2016): 828–56.

⁴ Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Hayden Bellenoit, “Between Qanungos and Clerks: The Cultural and Service Worlds of Hindustan's Pensmen, c. 1750–1850,” *Modern Asian Studies* 48 (2014): 872–910.

⁵ The word for this colonial post was derived from the English “number” combined with the Persian possessive suffix “*dār*”; according to H.H. Wilson, the term referred to the number used to register with the collector. The rights and duties of the *lambardār* were defined in colonial regulations. H.H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms and of Useful Words Occurring in Official Documents Relating to the Administration of the Government of British India* (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1855), 309.

⁶ Neeladri Bhattacharya makes a similar argument for the establishment of colonial rule in 1840s Punjab. Neeladri Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest: The Colonial Reshaping of a Rural World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019).

⁷ Eric Lewis Beverley, “Documenting the World in Indo-Persianate & Imperial English: Idioms of Textual Authority in Hyderabad,” *Journal of the Economic & Social History of the Orient* 62 (2019): 1058.

Mughal Modernism and the Language of State

Over the last decade, scholarship on Princely States has emphasized the capacity of these states for reform on their own terms and their relationship to ideas of the modern.⁸ These studies show how modernism involved the remaking of relationships to the past as well as future orientations toward new forms. In other words, they attempt to situate modernism in terms of conversations oriented not only toward the British colonial state but also toward other political and cultural referents. At the same time, scholars focusing on the late Persianate world in South Asia have explored orientations to the past, particularly toward the Mughal Empire and Mughal political culture, as sites of creative engagement and of resistance to British imperialism.⁹ Most of this scholarship focuses on the cultural expressions and productions of the state and the Persianate world, including education, literature, history, and art. In Alwar, however, bureaucracy was a key site where the state negotiated ideas of modernity, often alongside cultural and aesthetic expressions. The entangled time orientations of these reforms—neither a return to the Mughal past nor a whole-hearted embrace of the ideals of Victorian utilitarian bureaucracy—were productive of what I call “Mughal modernity.”

Constructing “Mughal modernity” involved a conscious choice to incorporate Mughal political culture and forms of rule. Mughal political culture occupied an ambiguous place in both Rajput and colonial discourses of sovereignty and was but one possible resource. Rajput rulers had a long and complicated history with the Mughal court. Some Rajput dynasties formed close alliances with the Mughals, becoming prominent Mughal nobles and generals, and marrying their daughters into the ruling Mughal family; others frequently rebelled. As Mughal power waned in the eighteenth century, Rajput rulers drew on a variety of discourses of sovereignty to shore up their own authority, sometime simultaneously. For instance, Maharaja Jai Singh II, the founder of Jaipur, recreated Vedic kingship rituals that situated himself as an ideal ruler modeled after the Hindu deity Ram; he also held official roles in the Mughal court, adopted Mughal imperial practices, and negotiated revenue grants with the Mughals in order to consolidate his power.¹⁰ A couple decades later, an

⁸ Eric Lewis Beverley, *Hyderabad, British India, and the World: Muslim Networks and Minor Sovereignty, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Kavita Saraswathi Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013); and Janaki Nair, *Mysore Modern: Rethinking the Region under Princely Rule* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). For an early example, see Manu Belur Bhagavan, *Sovereign Spheres: Princes, Education, and Empire in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University, 2003).

⁹ Kumkum Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India: Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009); Michael H. Fisher, “Conflicting Meanings of Persianate Culture: An Intimate Example from Colonial India and Britain,” in *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, ed. Nile Green (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 225–41; and Mana Kia, “Indian Friends, Iranian Selves, Persianate Modern,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36 (2016): 398–417.

¹⁰ For more on Jai Singh II's engagement with the Mughal court and discourses of sovereignty, especially patronage, see Elizabeth M. Thelen, *Urban Histories of Rajasthan: Religion, Politics and Society (1550–1800)* (London: Gingko, 2022), 60–72.

ambiguous relationship to the Mughal Empire lay at the heart of the emerging Company Raj in Bengal. Late eighteenth-century English-language accounts of Indian history often painted a complimentary picture of “high” Mughal rule; at the same time, many such histories used Mughal despotism as a justification of EIC rule.¹¹ While early EIC administrators attempted to fashion their rule on Mughal models, this approach was contested, often internally inconsistent, and generally fell out of favor by the end of the eighteenth century.¹² Nevertheless, the forms and stylings of Mughal power were familiar to colonial officials and local rulers alike and remained available for adaptation in the nineteenth century, even after the exile of the last Mughal emperor in 1857.¹³

One of the features of the Alwar regulations that stands out is the choice to write these manuals in Persian. This suggested that Persian was a language of governance in Alwar, although there is little indication that the language was used extensively for administration there in the decades immediately before the regulations were composed. Furthermore, just one year before the Delhi Dewans arrived in Alwar, the British officially stopped using Persian for legal and other proceedings in favor of English and Indian vernaculars, especially Urdu.¹⁴ The politics behind this linguistic choice in Alwar drew on multiple factors affecting the culture of governance in the period: the lingering influence of Mughal political culture; the migration and recruitment of bureaucrats, artists, and other governmental and cultural elites to Princely States; and the mixture of political imperatives to appeal to the British and to reduce *jāgīrdār* (landlord) power in Alwar.

For Banni Singh, investing in Persian administration worked in several political angles: it drew on Mughal practices, attaching himself to a longer history and projecting Alwar into the past, even though Alwar was not a recognized Rajput “*waṭan*” (homeland) in the peak years of the Mughal Empire. His was not the only state to adopt or continue to use Persian well into the nineteenth century, and this choice shows that the use of Persian in Princely States was not restricted to Muslim-ruled Princely States, although Alwar was the Rajput state that took it the furthest. In addition to tapping into prestige politics, Banni Singh may have been seeking to alienate some of the *jāgīrdārs* in Alwar, kinsmen whose claim to power threatened his own, and who may not have had much knowledge of the language. Introducing Persian-language documents and procedures while promoting a centralized bureaucracy may have been a way to cut these *jāgīrdārs* out of the centers of power.

¹¹ These English texts were often based on Persian histories. Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History*, 190, 208.

¹² Bernard S. Cohn, “Law and the Colonial State in India,” in *History and Power in the Study of Law: New Directions in Legal Anthropology*, eds. June Starr and Jane F. Collier (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 131–52; Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–28; and Travers, *Ideology and Empire*.

¹³ Hannah L. Archambault, “Becoming Mughal in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of the Bhopal Princely State,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 36 (2013): 479–95.

¹⁴ This became official policy in 1837, although there were already trends in this direction earlier.

However, in using Persian, Banni Singh's administrators had to be careful not to exclude the landlords and cultivators whom they relied on for revenue payments. Even though the regulations were written in Persian and mainly describe Persian-language record-keeping, the administrators were conscious of the limitations of the use of Persian in Alwar, particularly in local settings. A summary of the regulations regarding taxation was written as a guide for landlords and cultivators, and a copy of this text and its Hindi translation was to be provided to each of the *lambardārs*.¹⁵ The regulations also order that various local documents should be written bilingually. For example, the *‘arż-i khizāna* receipt for the amount of money submitted to the treasury was to be written bilingually in Persian and Hindi.¹⁶ Likewise, the *chittīs* providing instructions to the *lambardārs* regarding the land survey were also to be provided in Persian and Hindi. These specifications suggest that while Persian was well known in central administrative posts in Alwar in the mid-nineteenth century, one could not assume that village headmen, such as the *lambardārs*, would be proficient in Persian.¹⁷ These limitations suggest that the move to Persian language records was most thorough in higher levels of government administration.

Using Persian was also a cultural claim. Mughal political culture—the system of signs and symbols put in place by the emperors, including practices of governance, aesthetic and historical sensibilities, and the delineation of elites through the consumption of certain texts and art—outlasted the effective political power of the Mughals.¹⁸ By the time Banni Singh began to implement reforms in the 1830s, the Mughals had not had significant authority in the Alwar region for over 90 years, despite its proximity to Delhi. Banni Singh was also a Rajput, a community whose cultural reinvention as opponents to Mughals was well underway through the intellectual projects of James Tod and others in the early nineteenth century. Nevertheless, he embraced many aspects of Mughal political culture, including Persian as both a literary and administrative language. As distressed elite families in Delhi sold off libraries in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the leaders of emerging states, including Banni Singh, bought up manuscripts.¹⁹ Banni Singh's purchases built up an impressive collection of Persian manuscripts, alongside Sanskrit ones, in the royal library. Banni Singh also commissioned new Persian manuscripts, including a lavishly illustrated manuscript completed in 1852–53 of Sa‘adī's *Gulistan*, a key text on ethics for the classically trained Persianate nobleman

¹⁵ “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3660, 2, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Arabic Persian Research Institute, Tonk (hereafter APRI).

¹⁶ “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3659, 20; and “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3660, 20, APRI.

¹⁷ Alwar used Persian in state correspondence to the EIC during this period, even when colonial officials wrote to them in Urdu. “Alwar-Gurgaon,” 1851, file no. 1, 2, Rajputana State Agency, Boundary Vernacular Records, National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter NAI).

¹⁸ Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History*, 12–14, 134–38, 179.

¹⁹ Edward S. Haynes, “Patronage for the Arts and the Rise of the Alwar State,” in *The Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity*, ed. Karine Schomer, Joan L. Erdman, Deryck O. Lodrick, and Lloyd I. Rudolph (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1994), II:276.

as well as for the EIC servant studying Persian.²⁰ Thus, the move to use Persian for administration was part of a wider political project under Banni Singh.

Banni Singh's interest in Persian literary works and the arts and modes of rule of the Mughal court were supported by his active recruitment of displaced artists and bureaucrats. These figures often had ties to both Mughal and British colonial spaces and formed an itinerant diaspora of highly trained experts, whose recruitment could bolster the state's appeal to outside authority. In Alwar's case, it also produced claims to a "Mughal modernity" that reworked traditional forms into new configurations. For the illustrations of the *Gulistan* manuscript, he hired Ghulam Ali Khan, who was a former painter in the Mughal Court and also well known in the Company painting circuits. As Yuthika Sharma notes, the resulting illustrations did not reprise simply a favorite Mughal manuscript, but rather formed a series of paintings that combined the topographical elements of company painting and standard modes of miniature painting, thereby "creating a framework for them (Company and Mughal painting) to intersect and interact and, perhaps, be reconfigured altogether."²¹ As Janaki Nair has shown for Mysore, artistic representation was an important arena for the rulers of Princely States to express and re-conceptualize their ideas of modernism.²² Ghulam Ali Khan was crafting these paintings for Banni Singh during the same period when he employed the "Delhi Dewans" to undertake administrative reforms that also found new ways of combining Persianate and Company modes of governance. In both cases, Banni Singh recruited outside experts who deployed their understanding of both Mughal and company modes—whether artistic or legal-administrative—to bolster Alwar's prestige and power.

The Alwar Reforms and Regulations

Banni Singh pursued reforms to address the political and financial challenges to his rule that he had faced from the moment he was installed on the Alwar throne in 1815. Because he was a nephew to the previous ruler, Bakhtawar Singh, and still a minor at his accession, Banni Singh's hold on power in Alwar relied on the support of nobles and officials and was challenged by Bakhtawar Singh's illegitimate son Balwant Singh. A compromise to share power fell apart by 1823–24, and the Delhi Resident, David Ochterlony, intervened. Ochterlony's solution left Banni Singh as ruler of Alwar but split the state's territory in half, granting a portion to Balwant Singh. It also obliged Banni Singh to make annual payments to Balwant Singh of half of the revenue collected in Alwar, which introduced significant financial stress on his state.

²⁰ Thomas Holbein Hendley, *Ulwar and Its Art Treasures* (London: W. Griggs, 1888), ch. IX (unpaginated). The *Gulistan* remained an important part of EIC Persian instruction and assessment into the 1850s. James Henry Young, *The Revenue Hand-Book: Containing a Short Sketch of the Laws and Regulations in Force Connected with the Collection of the Government Revenues in Bengal and the North-West Provinces* (Calcutta: R. C. Lepage and Co., 1855), xxvii.

²¹ Yuthika Sharma, "In the Company of the Mughal Court: Delhi Painter Ghulam Ali Khan," in *Princes and Painters in Mughal Delhi, 1707-1857*, ed. William Dalrymple and Yuthika Sharma (London: Penguin UK, 2013), 47–49. Ghulam Ali Khan spent much of the 1840s working in Alwar.

²² Nair, *Mysore Modern*, 23.

The financial situation of the state was also strained by its limited revenue collection capacity. Colonial officials blamed revenue farming that led to exploitation instead of investment.²³ Another factor was the Meos's active resistance to the authority of Alwar state. The Meos cultivated up to one third of the agricultural lands in Alwar, much of it in the most productive and well-irrigated areas,²⁴ but they repeatedly refused to make revenue payments between the 1800s and the 1830s. Bakhtawar Singh and Banni Singh used brutal tactics to quell this resistance, such as disbanding large villages and resettling the Meos in smaller villages, and posting garrisons of soldiers to supervise their activities.²⁵ Furthermore, 15% of the state's land was assigned to other members of Banni Singh's Naruka Rajput clan in *jāgīrdārī*, which alienated revenue collection rights to these clan members.²⁶ While this helped shore up their political support, it also reduced the state's ability to capture revenue.

Banni Singh's response to these challenges was to attempt sweeping administrative reforms in the 1830s and 40s. These reforms were designed to distance members of his clan (*bhāibandh*) from administrative roles and bolster Banni Singh's claim to superior power over his kinsmen by creating a government that answered only to him. In his initial attempt, he elevated Surput Ram, a Jain administrator with ties to Jaipur, to the post of *diwan* in order to introduce sweeping changes to the state administration and revenue collection. However, Lt. Col. Abraham Lockett, who toured Alwar in 1831, thought that the project would fail because of *jāgīrdār* resistance.²⁷ In 1838, Banni Singh recruited another *diwan* from outside of his state, bringing in Aminullah Khan and his brothers from Delhi.²⁸ Throughout his reign, Banni Singh looked alternately to Jaipur and Delhi to shore up his power, so it is unsurprising that he recruited state officials from both locations.

Little is known about Aminullah Khan and his brothers, dubbed the "Delhi Dewans" in colonial reports. Aminullah Khan served as *sheristadar* (record-keeper) in the Delhi sessions court and his brothers also were said to have held posts in the British revenue and judicial service in Delhi. As such, they were part of the cadre of educated Indian bureaucrats in EIC service who were often in charge of record-keeping and document-issuing, especially in

²³ Shail Mayaram, *Against History, Against State: Counterperspectives from the Margins* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 173.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁵ Haynes, "Imperial Impact on Rajputana," 446–47; and Mayaram, *Against History, Against State*, 156–57, 170, 173.

²⁶ Edward S. Haynes, "The British Alteration of the Political System of Alwar State: Lineage Patrimonialism, Indirect Rule, and the Rajput Jagir System in an Indian 'Princely' State, 1775–1920," *Studies in History* 5 (1989): 39.

²⁷ Haynes, "Imperial Impact on Rajputana," 447; and Haynes, "The British Alteration," 42–43.

²⁸ Haynes, "Imperial Impact on Rajputana," 448; and Haynes "The British Alteration," 43. Some sources mention two brothers, others only one. They are unnamed in most sources, but may have been Fazullah Khan and Inamullah Khan, referred to as Alwar's *diwan* and *bakhshī* in correspondence from 1857; Thakurs Ranup Singh and Bharat Singh of Alwar to Shaikh Ahmad Hussain, tehsildar of Firozpur, 1857, " 'Mutiny' Papers," Box 62-F: 199/265, NAI.

Persian and Urdu. Aminullah Khan and his brothers likely belonged to the same elite, educated Muslim social milieu in Delhi as the famous modernist reformer Sayyid Ahmed Khan, who himself took up service in the colonial judicial administration, possibly as a *sheristadar*, in Delhi in 1838.²⁹

In Alwar, the so-called “Delhi Dewans” set about reforming revenue collection, the judiciary, and the army. British colonial accounts emphasize their role in switching revenue collection from in-kind to cash.³⁰ They are also credited with establishing separate civil and criminal courts, doing away with revenue farming, paying the military with cash instead of land grants, and implementing scrupulous record-keeping. This may have led to a more than threefold increase in state revenue collections.³¹ Alwar’s reforms earned glowing praise from colonial officials who saw the reforms as a modernizing move to the future. During his 1842 visit to Alwar, Lt. Col. John Sutherland wrote that “an experiment of great interest not only to Alwar itself, but to us, and to the States of Rajpootana generally, has been in progress in the Principality during the last four years, and appears to me to be working so well that results of the highest importance to the working of the State itself, and to that of the surrounding states may probably arise out of it.”³² This narrative was repeated and expanded elsewhere, such as in Edward Thornton’s 1853 *Statistical Papers Relating to India*, which declared the Alwar reforms of interest to the British government.³³

The Alwar regulations encoded the reforms implemented by Aminullah Khan. The regulations consist of seven slim handwritten Persian volumes, each addressing a particular aspect of the administrative organization of the government. The texts’ titles translate to: *Regulations for the organization of the improvement of cultivation and the employment of tahsildars (revenue sub-collectors); Regulations of the necessary particulars of the organization of the improvement of the villages and the cultivation of the peasants with respect to guidance for the zamindars and cultivators, etc.; Regulations of the Diwani Adalat (civil court); Regulations of the manner of appointing ziladars (district officers) for the increase of cultivation of the villages of the district; Regulations regarding measurement; Regulations regarding the revenue assessment of the country; and Regulations regarding the preparation of the inspection of the platoon [and] two pages on the organization of the regiment.* They provided precise guidelines for everything from the holidays observed by the *Diwani Adalat* to how to make a loan for agricultural improvement (*taqāwī*). Their authorship and date of composition are unknown; however, an internal reference to a regulation of May 1826 provides an early bound, while the seal of the Alwar Palace Library dated to 1862–63 CE provides the

²⁹ For a recent interpretation of modernism and Sayyid Ahmad Khan, see Margrit Pernau, “Fluid Temporalities: Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Concept of Modernity,” *History & Theory* 58 (2019): 107–31.

³⁰ P. W. Powlett, *Gazetteer of Ulwur* (London: Trübner & co., 1878), 22, quoting the Administration Report of Captain Cadell for 1871–72.

³¹ Thornton, *Statistical Papers Relating to India*, 16.

³² Quoted in Haynes, “Imperial Impact on Rajputana,” 448.

³³ Thornton, *Statistical Papers Relating to India*, 16.

outer bound of their date of composition.³⁴ They most likely date to the period 1838–57, during the peak of Banni Singh’s administrative reforms. Local memory recorded by colonial officials later in the nineteenth century also tied the regulations to this period. Several features of the regulations, such as interest rates and amounts of fines, were still in use in Alwar in the 1870s and attributed to the policies of the “Delhi Dewans.”³⁵

The layout and materiality of the texts emphasize their functional nature. They are bound in plain leather and the paper inside is unornamented. They follow the typical layout of Islamic manuscripts but in a very simple style, featuring unadorned rectangular or triangular headpieces on the first folio, catchwords, red ink border-rules, and rubrications for section divisions. The texts are written in Persian in a scribal *shikasta-nastaliq* hand. With its minimal differentiation of various letters, this script style presumes a reader familiar with the contents. The volumes may have served as both collations of regulations and reference field guides for administrative officials of the state. The texts were small and lightweight enough to carry with one, perhaps even in a pocket, and their contents included sample documents and forms for recording information. In most of the volumes, the sections and subclauses of the text have descriptive titles, and in many there are short marginal summaries of each clause, suggesting that they were designed with easy reference in mind. The linguistic register is formal, and the texts are replete with Perso-Arabic legal terms derived from Islamic jurisprudence and government practices, but they include some technical Hindawi/Rajasthani terms regarding local practices and limited borrowings of English terms like “collector.” Notably, the second volume, which was supposed to be provided to *zamindars* (village landlords), contains simplified versions of the regulations from the first volume.

Because records of Alwar’s administration prior to 1876 are scarce, it is impossible to assess the extent to which these regulations were implemented. I focus, therefore, on the regulations as an intellectual and legal project that illustrates the relationship of Princely States to colonial, Mughal, and Rajput administrative practices and the way that state administration became increasingly legalistic and bureaucratic.

Administrative Manuals and Revenue Regulations as Genre

The Alwar regulations were the product of composite intellectual and textual traditions. Although they have a heavy imprint of British colonial ideas of state, they simultaneously engage a long history of Persian writing on statecraft. The titles and present cataloguing of the Alwar regulations places them between two related genres: “*qānūn*” and “*dastūr al-‘amal*.” Although these terms overlap considerably in their semantic range along the lines of “guide, custom, law,” a clear distinction emerged in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when *qānūn* gained widespread use as the preferred

³⁴ “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3662, APRI. The stamp is dated 1279 AH and 1919 VS.

³⁵ Powlett, *Gazetteer of Ulwur*, 46, 133, 187.

translation for “act” or “regulation” in India. The Alwar manuals comprise a blend of elements found in prior *dastūr al-‘amal* and *qānūn* texts: justifications for good rule, model forms and documents, systematized rules and regulations, defined punishments for the violations of the regulations, and technical details of how to conduct specific administrative procedures. They therefore sit at the conceptual intersection of regulations and handbook, law and instructions.

“*Dastūr al-‘amal*” was widely used in titles of Persian technical literature. In its most restrictive sense, it referred to instructions and charts for local revenue officials prepared under the Mughals and Mughal successor states, including the eighteenth-century Rajput states.³⁶ However, this term also served as a catch-all for a wide variety of manuals and handbooks. Such *dastūr al-‘amals* from the Mughal Empire and early colonial India included a mixture of administrative and accountancy manuals, revenue tables, letter-writing guides, and collections of model documents, mostly in Persian, but sometimes in regional vernaculars as well.³⁷ Except for some of the revenue collection charts, *dastūr al-‘amals* generally were not produced as official state texts but were instead written by elite bureaucrats to provide advice and training to junior scribes and clerks and to showcase their command of language and skill. Therefore, they were didactic bureaucratic guides rather than regulations per se.

Mughal administrative manuals, including *dastūr al-‘amals*, were widely copied in the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, perhaps as a form of nostalgia by elite bureaucratic families.³⁸ Copies were also procured by EIC officials seeking to understand or recreate Mughal forms of administration and patterns of revenue collection, especially during the mid-eighteenth century when EIC officials attempted to understand India in terms of its “ancient constitution.”³⁹ Mughal manuals were also used as pedagogic texts by EIC officials; some were printed explicitly for this purpose in excerpt or entirety with parallel English translations. For instance, Francis Balfour published *The Forms of Herkern* in 1781, praising its usefulness for the foreign beginner because it contained “the common forms of business and correspondence.”⁴⁰ New Persian manuals also were written for the EIC on the basis of Mughal norms, such as Chatter Mal’s *Diwan-i Pasand*, a revenue manual composed in the early nineteenth century in the Agra area.⁴¹ These texts provided definitions of administrative posts and functions that were integrated and adapted into EIC

³⁶ Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, 3rd ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 241–52. This usage is also found in Rajasthani-language records. S.P. Gupta, *The Agrarian System of Eastern Rajasthan, c. 1650-c. 1750* (Delhi: Manohar, 1986), 325–26.

³⁷ Najaf Haider has described several of these texts in detail. Najaf Haider, “Norms of Professional Excellence and Good Conduct in Accountancy Manuals of the Mughal Empire,” *International Review of Social History* 56 (2011): 263–67.

³⁸ John F. Richards, ed., *Document Forms for Official Orders of Appointment in the Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Burlington Press, 1986), 9.

³⁹ Nandini Chatterjee, *Negotiating Mughal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 125; and Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, 19–21.

⁴⁰ Francis Balfour, *The Forms of Herkern* (Calcutta: n.p., 1781), 4.

⁴¹ British Library MS Or. 2011. Bodleian Library MS S. Digby Or. 128. I was not able to see the *Diwan-i Pasand* due to Covid restrictions at the time this article was researched.

governance. In doing so, a new rigidity and hierarchization was introduced, even as formulaic understandings did not map to practices.⁴²

In addition to creating new audiences for *dastūr al-ʿamals* and related texts, the EIC also introduced new forms of Persian technical literature, including through translation of English works. From 1793 on, colonial regulations in the Bengal Presidency were issued in vernacular translations, which in this case meant Persian and Bengali, alongside English editions. The English regulations were heavily influenced by Persian administrative jargon adopted by the EIC. As Javed Majeed notes, the English regulations were so thickly strewn with Persian technical terms that they appeared “stranded between two administrative languages,” and the Persian translations actually read more succinctly and fluently.⁴³ However, Persian terms took on new meanings through this back-and-forth translation and may have been the spur for the rise in the use of ‘*qānūn*’ to denote a genre of regulations in India.⁴⁴ The translations also moved British ideas about the form and structure of regulations into Persian (and other languages). The English regulations were thick tomes compiling individual acts from a given time period. Each act typically consisted of a long descriptive title, a preamble stating when and why it was implemented, and the clauses and subclauses of the act, each with a short synopsis in the margin. Alongside of the official printed editions of the regulations of the EIC, a burgeoning market of unofficial digests, guides, and handbooks to the regulations emerged which included Persian editions aimed at the “native servant.”⁴⁵ As ideas about the governance of India changed and the EIC territories expanded, the volume of official publications of rules, regulations, and administrative handbooks proliferated. In Delhi and points west, including the Northwest Provinces and the Punjab, the Permanent Settlement was deemed an unsuitable arrangement, so from the 1830s the British sought to establish new modes of revenue assessment and collection. James Thomason set up new guidelines for the revenue settlement for the Northwest Provinces, which he published in 1850, and which formed the basis for ideas applied in the settlement of Punjab later that decade.⁴⁶

Thus, the Alwar regulations were written in a context of widespread circulation and production of British administrative regulations and manuals, as well as in a period when the ideas regarding revenue assessment were undergoing considerable change in neighboring regions. As *qānūn*, the Alwar regulations represented the order imposed by the state and a specific bureaucratic

⁴² Michael Mann, “A Permanent Settlement for the Ceded and Conquered Provinces: Revenue Administration in North India, 1801-1833,” *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 32 (1995): 245-69.

⁴³ Javed Majeed, “The Jargon of Indostan: An Exploration of Jargon in Urdu and East India Company English,” in *Languages and Jargons: Contributions to a Social History of Language*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 187-88.

⁴⁴ Nicholas Abbott has shown how this process affected the meaning of “*sarkār*.” “Bringing the Sarkār Back In: Translating Patrimonialism and the State in Early Modern and Early Colonial India,” in *State Formations: Global Histories and Cultures of Statehood*, ed. Greg Anderson, John L. Brooke, and Julia C. Strauss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 124-37.

⁴⁵ *A Catalogue of the Library of the Hon. East-India Company* (London: J. & H. Cox, 1845), 225-26.

⁴⁶ Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, 73.

vision of state affairs. Aminullah Khan and his brothers would have been familiar with the EIC regulations and acts, and clearly drew on them to build a set of texts that mirrored aspects of both the form and content of English regulations. For instance, the Alwar texts include clearly labelled subheadings, marginal summaries, and an initial statement of intent and purpose of the regulations, much like the printed EIC regulations.⁴⁷ Yet, there were also fundamental political differences in the creation of these texts. The EIC regulations were built on traditions of parliamentary rule and clearly identified their date of enactment and the authorizing, if unelected, legislative body of the Council of the Governor General. In contrast, Alwar “*qānūn*” is silent about its provenance. Other aspects of the text also suggest the combination of multiple layers of prior administrative practice and ideas of statecraft. For instance, the form of the sample documents and charts in the Alwar regulations harkens back to *inshāʿ* and *shurūʿ* collections in Mughal manuscripts and to the prescriptive forms of oaths and record-keeping included in EIC regulations.⁴⁸ Furthermore, many of the posts and duties described in the Alwar regulations align generally with the descriptions found in Mughal didactic literature such as ‘*Ain-i Akbari*, Abul Fazl’s description of the ideal functioning of the Mughal Empire from the 1590s, but the Alwar regulations show increased regulatory specificity, hierarchy, and uniformity.⁴⁹ In these ways forms and substance, separately or together, moved across political systems without necessarily carrying the content of those systems.

Defining Good Governance

The Alwar regulations expressed ideals of good governance that charted a new direction for the state toward a hierarchical bureaucratic structure in place of the brotherhood (*bhāibandh*) structures of the pre-colonial Rajput state, in which a raja held power only through the support and contestation of his wider clan.⁵⁰ This becomes apparent in the overall structure and subject matter of the manuals, as well as in the rationales and admonishments sprinkled throughout the texts on why the regulations must be implemented. In the regulations, good governance was equated with efficient agrarian cultivation and revenue collection, and the image of the state that emerges is a blend of paternalism and bureaucratic tendencies. Paternal because of the overriding discourse of care and protection of the subject as peasant cultivator, the discourses of discipline, and the emphasis on direct observation of mid-level officials of the state; bureaucratic through the emphasis on record-keeping,

⁴⁷ See for example the format of *Regulations Passed by the Governor General in Council of Bengal: With an Index and Glossary: Vol. I. Containing the Regulations Passed in the Years 1793, 1794, and 1795* (London: J.L. Cox, 1828) and the preambles included in *The Persian Reader, Or, Select Extracts from Various Persian Writers* (Calcutta: School-Book Society, 1835), vol. III.

⁴⁸ *Regulations Passed by the Governor General in Council of Bengal* (London: J.L. Cox, 1828), I:103, 107 contain sample calendars for recording prisoners.

⁴⁹ H. Blochmann, ed., *The Ain-i-Akbari by Abul-Fazl-i-‘Allami Edited in the Original Persian* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1872) I: 280–89; and Chatterjee, *Negotiating Mughal Law*, 121–24.

⁵⁰ Mayaram, *Against History, Against State*, 177–83.

contracts, and the anonymity and abstraction of the state encapsulated in the use of the term “*sarkār*.”

The Alwar regulations focus on the *sarkār*, the district and village officials, and the cultivators. Concern for cultivation and the well-being of peasants in official discourse was nothing new; Mughal manuals and documents stressed the need to expand cultivation and protect the peasants from oppression so that they did not rebel or flee. The framing of revenue payments exclusively in terms of contract instead of as offerings constructed a legalistic image of the state rather than one of a personal relation of devotion to the ruler.⁵¹ In fact, the language describing the state is abstracted to such an extent in the regulations that if the library seals were not present, one would not know that these texts were from Alwar.

The primary concern was the contentment of the peasant cultivator and the increasing cultivation, thereby increasing government revenue. The centrality of the rural and agrarian world to the vision of good governance espoused in the manuals is captured in the content and length of the volumes. Five volumes focus on the roles of village and district level officials in the assessment of rural revenue and improvement of agriculture; the remaining two cover procedures of the Adalat Diwani or civil court, and regulations for maintaining a military platoon. In total, about four times as many pages are concerned with well-regulating the agricultural sphere than with other aspects of governance. Such a ratio is unsurprising given the centrality of agricultural revenue to Alwar’s finances, but it is also noteworthy what the regulations do not mention: towns and cities, herders and migratory cultivators, and artisans. Neeladri Bhattacharya argues that in neighboring Punjab, the agrarian village lay at the center of colonial rule, to the exclusion of other sorts of rural (and urban) spaces.⁵² This was also true of the vision of the state in Alwar in the 1830s and 1840s.

Most of the regulations open with programmatic statements about their objectives. For example, *zamindars*, *lambardārs* and *māl-guzārs* were advised of their duty of “caring for the poor and accurately executing justice” and village heads (*sardārs*) were instructed to remain attentive to the contentment and improvement of the peasants so that cultivation and revenue would increase and rebellion and resistance (*fitna o fasād*) would be prevented.⁵³ These statements repeatedly emphasized that the safety, contentment, and tranquility of the peasantry, obtained through just rule and the merits and care of government servants, was the key to increased agricultural output and revenues. In this depiction, the attainment of the lofty goals of government depended on the lowest levels of administrators carrying out their duties properly. Several

⁵¹ Janaki Nair describes a similar process of the move from tributary/gift-giving relations to bureaucracy and acceptance of the idea of “*legal king instead of a divinely ordained one*” (emphasis in the original) in Mysore between the 1830s and 1860s. Nair, *Mysore Modern*, 4, 10; for the ways that the EIC redefined *sarkār*, see Abbott, “Bringing the Sarkār Back In,” 134–35.

⁵² Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, 1–15.

⁵³ “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3660, 1–2; “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3663, 1, APRI. Bhattacharya also sees the threat of peasant rebellion as one aspect informing the paternalistic colonial state’s language of protection. Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*, 63.

of the texts close with instructions to follow the regulations, reiterating the aim of creating contented cultivators (*ra'āyā*) and declaring that those who follow the regulations would be held in high esteem. However, any government servant who contravened the regulations would cause evil and distress and face punishment, including dismissal and fines.⁵⁴ These concluding sections provided the stick for the opening carrot.

The texts also discuss particular examples of poor governance that were to be avoided by following the regulations. For example, proper demarcation of the boundaries of land was important because disputes between the landlords over lands with unclear boundaries could lead to unrest (*fisad*).⁵⁵ Government loans (*taqāwī*) made to individual cultivators sought to relieve peasants from the moneylender's usury, and appointing a single chief *lambardār* in a village would avoid mischief and plots regarding the division of shares in land and taxes.⁵⁶ The state aimed to protect the hapless cultivator from the depredations of powerful local moneylenders and the excesses of irrational rule. But underneath this rhetoric, the regulations sought to eliminate the influence of local power-holders who threatened the influence and revenue of the state.

The regulations were concerned with the behavior and personal qualities of the low-level administrator who was the face of government in the village. They declared that clerks, registrars, record-keepers, and tax collectors should be upright, clever, prudent, and/or meritorious. Alongside guidelines for the appointment, duties, and dismissal of these officials, the regulations established mechanisms to ensure that the officials upheld their responsibilities. Take, for example, the sample text of the *muchalkā* (covenant) that the *tehsildars* were to obtain from each *lambardār* (headman)⁵⁷ annually:

I, who am so-and-so son of so-and-so, the *lambardār* of village such-and-such, district such-and-such, acknowledge that I am appointed to the post of *lambardār* of village such-and-such. Therefore, I declare of my own free will and issue in writing that I shall apply myself to the increase of cultivation of the crops of the cultivated land in such a manner that the acreage will not remain fallow and the payments of government revenue will be completed. And while satisfying and gratifying the peasants of the village by the sentiment of sensible conduct and agreement, I shall not allow any type of excess or excessive revenue demand or infliction of distress on the condition of the peasants. And I shall know that

⁵⁴ "Dastur ul Amal," MS 3659, 33–34; "Dastur ul Amal," MS 3660, 23–24, APRI.

⁵⁵ "Dastur ul Amal," MS 3663, 1–2, APRI.

⁵⁶ "Dastur ul Amal," MS 3659, 5–6, APRI.

⁵⁷ Baden-Powell traces the history of the term *lambardār* to the 1819 *Minute* of Mackenzie Holt, in which it was used for the representative of a group of people who are represented by a single number in the collector's register for payment of revenue. The term broadened over time to encompass a variety of headmen. It found its first legal use in Regulation IX of 1824. B. H. Baden-Powell, *The Land Systems of British India: Book III: The System of Village or Mahal Settlements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), II: 20, 23 fn 1, 285–88, 366. In Ajmer-Merwara, *lambardārs* were appointed as officials to replace *patels*.

I am accountable for all good and ill in the village. And I shall not oppose nor conceal any government order. And I shall not allow any cultivator to flee from the village. And except for the rights fixed by the government, I shall not take a single coin from the cultivators. If I should take an action contrary to this declaration (*iqrār*), I shall deserve the lawful punishment of the government. Regarding this, these few words have been written in the manner of a *muchalkā* and *iqrārnāma* (deed of declaration) as surety of reply of all items detailed about, so that it shall be documented in the future. Written on the such-and-such date, year such-and-such.⁵⁸

The terms enshrined in this covenant and the duties enumerated in the regulations showed that the *lambardār's* contract extended beyond the payment of taxes; rather the *lambardār* became a state appointee who served at the pleasure of the *tehsildar*. The covenant emphasized the *lambardār's* responsibility for fulfilling the government revenue contract and protecting the cultivators from any sort of oppression, and made him answerable for the condition of the village. The *lambardār's* responsibility for the village was emphasized elsewhere in the regulations as well. For instance, if a peasant fled the village after receiving a government loan, and the *lambardār* failed to inform the district officials, the *lambardār* would have to pay the interest on the peasant's loan.⁵⁹

The officials of the state were depicted as working together in a framework of virtue centered on protecting the interests of the peasant and thereby guaranteeing the financial health of the state. According to the regulations, the other component of good governance was bureaucracy, which through its authoritative records would compensate for any flaws in an official's character and render the countryside legible to the state.

Generating Bureaucracy

The Alwar regulations primarily encoded bureaucratic practices as legal obligations. They resonated with the wider information and documentation policies of the colonial state in India. C.A. Bayly's classic work, *Empire and Information*, highlights the anxieties of the colonial state regarding obtaining adequate information to govern and its paranoias about fraud and forgery.⁶⁰ Writing on early nineteenth-century Madras, Bhavani Raman describes the role of the colonial state in increasing the density of written record-keeping, changing the language of the relationship of land and labor through the adoption of abstract categories, and simultaneously raising new concerns over forgery.⁶¹ The Alwar regulations also exhibited a deep concern about the necessity of adequate records to avoid fraud and corruption, and posited good information

⁵⁸ "Dastur ul Amal," MS 3659, 7–9, APRI.

⁵⁹ "Dastur ul Amal," MS 3659, 5, APRI.

⁶⁰ C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch. 3; 153–54.

⁶¹ Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 16–17; ch. 5.

as the linchpin of good governance. Guidance was given on the type and form of records to keep and their transmission to the state, instituting new record-keeping procedures. While certain sorts of documents and records were left unexplained in the regulations—presumably because they represented well-known forms—the sample charts and documents included in the texts show innovations in record-keeping and document writing. The regulations also show a shift from household to state-centric record-keeping.

Centralized record-keeping was hardly a colonial invention, although the practices of the Company Raj influenced the shape it took in the nineteenth-century Princely States. By the eighteenth century, many Rajput states began keeping central records, including drafts of letters, copies of orders issued, and revenue assessments and collections.⁶² For example, in the 1720s, the kingdom of Jaipur kept financial records known as *arsatthās* of the districts (*parganas*) under its control, including Alwar, which recorded the revenue collection of all villages as well as the expenses of local government.⁶³ However, state record-keeping in the eighteenth or the nineteenth century was not able to disrupt local family record-keeping by hereditary local post-holders such as *qānūngos* and *paṭwārīs*.⁶⁴ Indeed, while the Alwar regulations sought to secure equivalent copies of local records for a central repository, they also specified that the village *paṭwārī* (registrar) was responsible for preserving records and sending any papers requested by the government.⁶⁵

The regulations discussed record storage in terms of security and future utility. For instance, the Adalat Diwani was to organize and maintain records of cases and give copies of the decision to the parties involved so that the case file would be available for future consultation.⁶⁶ *Tahsildars* were likewise instructed to keep a copy of any documents that they issued, so that if there was a later investigation, “the reality shall be known without trouble and resistance because of papers existing in the *daftar* (register or records room).”⁶⁷ Furthermore, every day their revenue collections and summaries of their actions were to be recorded in a book of daily accounts (*rūz-nāmcha*), a copy of which was sent to the central government at 10-day intervals as a safeguard against loss, destruction, and alteration of documents.⁶⁸ This made the *sarkār* the central repository of records from district and village posts. To facilitate record storage, the regulations specified the material form and format of documents. They stipulated the dimensions of paper to be used for various tasks,

⁶² Nandita Sahai, “‘To Mount or Not to Mount?’: Court Records and Law Making in Early Modern Rajasthan,” in *Iterations of Law: Legal Histories from India*, ed. Aparna Balachandran, Rashmi Pant, and Bhavani Raman (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017), 168–86.

⁶³ *Arsattha Records Alwar*, bundles 2 and 3 (VS 1782 and 1783), Jaipur State Records, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner. Gupta, *The Agrarian System*, 317–18.

⁶⁴ *Qānūngos* in Alwar in the 1870s held revenue assessment records (*mūzīnās*) and appointment deeds from the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Powlett, *Gazetteer of Ulwur*, 129, 136, 154, 158–61.

⁶⁵ “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3660, 9, APRI.

⁶⁶ “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3661, 1, 9, APRI.

⁶⁷ “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3659, 30, APRI.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 30–31, APRI.

writing the words “copy taken” on the outer fold of all documents copied, and binding certain types of records together.⁶⁹

The regulations also prescribed methods of writing down information. For example, they instructed administrators to record certain information in charts modeled on the tables or “calendars” used in EIC record-keeping. Thus, the *tahsildar* was to record information on cash advances (*taqāwī*) made to cultivators for agricultural improvement in a table listing each cultivator’s name, the number of bullocks they had, the amount of land they had, the amount of rupees they needed to purchase bullocks and seed, and any particular circumstances of the cultivator. The *tahsildar* was to sign and seal this chart with the *lambardārs* and *paṭwārī* as witnesses before sending it to the *sarkār*; loans would be made only after the chart was completed.⁷⁰ Similarly, model charts were provided for recording the imprisonment of indebted cultivators and for recording the status of village lands during the land survey.⁷¹ Most model charts followed the tabular visual design of EIC charts with information entered in rows, as opposed to the Persian traditions of recording information in nested vertical columns. The sample chart for land measurement, however, follows the Mughal Persian precedent more closely. This may be because recording land measurement was a more entrenched practice and followed the norms of older forms of record-keeping more closely.

While in most cases the regulations assumed that the officials concerned knew the typologies of the documents and record types mentioned, the texts include a small number of model documents: the *muchalkā* (covenant) for the appointment of a *lambardār* (translated in the previous section), an *‘arż-i khizāna* receipt for the deposit of revenue, a *ḥalf-nāma* (oath) for land measurement officials, the *muchalkā* of a *zamindar* (landlord) whose lands have been measured, and sample bonds of presence and payment (*ḥāzīr zāminī* and *māl zāminī*) for tax contracts.⁷² These model documents, like those in *shurūṭ* and *inshāʿ* texts, could be used by the administrator to generate the necessary documents by simply filling in the relevant details, such as name, location, and date. Notably, the models in the regulations focus on documents needed by low-level officials to respond to official orders or to provide surety to the central government, rather than on forms emanating from the central state, such as letters of appointment, which featured heavily in the administrative manuals of earlier periods.⁷³

Reform through office procedure and records management held real implications for cultivators. As Richard Saumarez Smith has shown for Ludhiana in

⁶⁹ Some regulations included explanations for the required uniformity: “Since by the reason of the decrease and increase of the width and length of papers sent [by] the *tahsildars*, total chaos arises in the arranging of papers of the register” *Ibid.*, 31. Papers of the land survey were to all be written on standard sizes—either single or double leaves of paper—so that they could be bound and preserved in one volume. “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3663, 16, APRI.

⁷⁰ A note of obligation (*tamassuk*) and declaration (*iqrār-nāma*) from the *lambardār* regarding repayment was also required. “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3659, 4, APRI.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 25; “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3663, 3, APRI.

⁷² “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3659, 7–9, 20; “Dastur ul Amal,” MS 3663, page 5–6, 8, 13, APRI.

⁷³ Richards, *Document Forms*, 32–78.

the 1850s, the creation of “stereotype forms” of documents locked in particular understandings about the relationship of the cultivator to the land.⁷⁴ Alwar’s regulations also fixed forms of relations between cultivators and the state and between local officials—some of whom, like the *lambardār*, may be seen in their contracted roles as both inside and outside the state—and the central offices of the *diwan*, and attempted to ensure a steady flow of precise information to the center. In doing so, the regulations aimed to shift the balance of information power and oversight from the village and district heads to the central state.

Conclusion

What started out as a promising set of reforms designed to reinforce the maharaja’s power, improve his finances, and rationalize state administration fell apart in the 1850s. In 1851, Aminullah Khan and his brothers were found to be embezzling large sums of money. They were dismissed from the post and imprisoned, although they were eventually fined and reinstated.⁷⁵ Their embezzlement of state revenue suggests the extent to which the reforms created and empowered bureaucracy at the expense of the king’s personal authority. It was the *diwans*, rather than the king, who enjoyed the fruits of increased revenue collection. However, succession politics eventually undermined their success. Banni Singh died on July 11, 1857 and was succeeded by his minor son, Sheodan Singh. Within the year, Aminullah Khan and his brothers were run out of the state over concerns about their influence over the new ruler and state administration. Although they retained an interest in Alwar affairs until the 1870s, they never returned.⁷⁶

The colonial state created a well-established and oft-repeated laudatory narrative in colonial reports of the 1840s and 1850s that the reforms Banni Singh implemented in Alwar were exemplary and a model for other Princely States in the region. John Stuart Mill even incorporated this narrative into his 1858 defense of British rule in India when he observed that “the Rao of Ulwur, on his accession, invited some of our native functionaries to conduct his administration, and reform it after the English model” as part of a larger claim about how English influence had improved conditions in the Rajput states.⁷⁷ Ironically, this was published just as British colonial officials in India pivoted

⁷⁴ Richard Saumarez Smith, *Rule by Records: Land Registration and Village Custom in Early British Punjab* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 36–37.

⁷⁵ Powlett, *Gazetteer of Ulwur*, 22, quoting from the Administration Report of Captain Cadell, 1871–72.

⁷⁶ Haynes, “The British Alteration,” 44–45, 48. Edward S. Haynes, “Changing Patterns of Dispute Settlement in Eastern Rajputana during the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Asian History* 13, no.2 (1979): 154–67. Although British accounts emphasized the *jagirdars’* opposition to the *Diwans*, Haynes argues that opposition from the bureaucratic cadre was critical.

⁷⁷ John Stuart Mill, “Memorandum of the Improvements in the Administration of India during the Last Thirty Years (1858),” in *Writings on India*, ed. John M. Robson, Martin Moir, and Zawahir Moir (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 152–53.

to sharp criticism of Alwar and the Khan brothers. These later assessments—perhaps colored by anti-Muslim sentiment after the 1857 uprising—saw the *diwans* as failures and supported their removal from the state.⁷⁸ Although the *diwans* themselves lost control in Alwar, some of their specific reforms remained in place, such as interest rates charged on tax arrears.⁷⁹ Other aspects rapidly fell by the wayside, including the use of Persian, which was replaced by English and Urdu. Furthermore, the structure of rule and central administration was radically changed with the introduction of a council to oversee state affairs, and direct British influence and interference in state affairs expanded rapidly and widely.⁸⁰

Despite the limited long-term impacts of the reforms, the regulations that underwrote them show the space for creative engagement with statecraft that was available to minor princely states in the period of company rule. Administrative reform offered a route alongside art and other patronage, to craft a language of governance that was intelligible, and thus read as legitimate, across Mughal and Company spheres. Rather than mere copies of colonial forms and regulations, the Alwar regulations showed the princely state's creative engagement with code-writing, bureaucracy, and legalistic conceptions of statecraft, and Alwar's participation in larger nineteenth-century conversations about the nature of modern governance.

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⁷⁸ Powlett, *Gazetteer of Ulwur*, 24. Haynes, "The British Alteration," 45; and Haynes, "Dispute Settlement," 159.

⁷⁹ Powlett, *Gazetteer of Ulwur*, 47.

⁸⁰ Haynes, "The British Alteration," 45–60.

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