*Competing for Distinction: Lineage and Individual Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Sindh**

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Abstract

There is a long tradition of describing Sindh as peculiarly prone to Sayyid veneration. On the face of it, the biographical section of Tuhfat al-Kiram or Gift for the Noble, *an eighteenth-century history and geography written in Persian in Sindh, appears to confirm this idea. In listing the notables of Thatta, Sindh's premier city, the author, Mir 'Ali Shir Qani', orders them by groups, giving priority in his hierarchical arrangement to Sayyids. However, this article examines* Tuhfat al-Kiram *not as a transparent description of Sindh, but rather as a normative exposition of a Sayyid-led social order. It draws attention to Qani's project of reconciling individual excellence with lineage in a post-Mughal context without a discerning sovereign to uphold a meritorious order. By exploring Qani's silences, particularly on Hindus and women, this article investigates the anxieties that run through this text about the threat to the old Persianate elite of Thatta. This threat spurred Qani' to reimagine a social order in Sindh where claims of descent served to close off mobility in an otherwise meritocratic Persianate society. Sayyid priority in eighteenth-century Sindh was not an established fact, but a newly-fashioned claim, which remained contested and contradictory, even within* Tuhfat al-Kiram.

Keywords: Sayyids; Persianate culture; Sindh; tazkirah; Thatta; Kalhora; Qani; early modern South Asia

Introduction

British travellers, who ventured into Sindh in the nineteenth century, unfailingly noted the veneration that people reserved for Sayyids, the descendants of Prophet Muhammad. James Burnes, who visited the Talpur court in 1827–28, described "an unbounded and superstitious respect".[1] He wrote, "No person under any provocation would dare to abuse or strike [a Sayyid], unless at the risk of being torn to pieces by the populace; and in consequence of the privileges and immunities they enjoy, they flock from all the neighbouring countries

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[1]On the English East India Company's diplomatic relations with the Talpurs, see R. Huttenback, *British Relations with Sind, 1799–1843: An Anatomy of Imperialism* (Karachi, 2007).

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into Sinde, where, besides being the most insolent, useless, and lazy members of the community, they exercise a most baneful influence on the minds, and are a constant tax on the purses of the deluded inhabitants".[2] Sayyids, in his formulation, held an elevated position in the social hierarchy in Sindh for reasons entirely undeserved. Their descent obviated any need for individual accomplishment. The outcome of such a system was the corruption of Sayyids and their followers.

Some years after the British conquest of Sindh in 1843, Richard Burton, the great nineteenth-century explorer, who was posted there for seven years, systematised these notions of lineage-based hierarchy.[3] He schematised the region as a motley collection of tribes and races in a book tellingly entitled *Sindh and the Races that Inhabit the Valley of the Indus*. He divided the people of Sindh into 'stranger tribes', Sindhis, and Hindus.[4] Each set was further divided and subdivided. Burton placed Sayyids at the head of the first group of stranger tribes, signalling their social priority. Sayyids were followed by Afghans, Baloch, Jat, Memons, Khwajas, Mohanas, and African slaves.[5] In turn, Sayyids, too, were divided into Hasani and Hussaini 'races' and then by place of ancestral residence.[6] Burton notes that even though most Sayyids were Shi'ah and at odds with the Sunni beliefs more widely held in Sindh, "they were much respected by the commonality".[7] He calls Sayyids a priesthood, while underscoring their heterodox beliefs, suggesting that descent was more important to Sayyid authority even than the beliefs that they espoused.[8]

Descent in Burton's scheme was the general organising principle of society in Sindh. It facilitated group solidarities, but also marked the limits of social cohesion. Descent organised not just Sayyids, but also other groups. Ties of blood gave society in Sindh coherence and served as the basis for distinct customs and rituals. Yet, the presence of multifarious racial and tribal groups also implied that Sindh was socially and culturally fragmented, unable to transcend the hierarchies and divisions of descent. The role of British rule according to him was to mediate between antagonistic groups.[9] Burton's description, first published in 1851, attained considerable influence. By the turn of the century, it had become customary to describe Sindh as a conglomeration of different tribes and races, as also to accord Sayyids priority among these groups.[10]

Two generations of scholarship have enabled a reading of these works not as empirical texts, but rather as products of nineteenth-century colonial thought, freighted with concerns about governance, control, and legitimacy.[11] These works in turn left an indelible mark

[2]J. Burnes, *Narrative of a Visit to the Court of Sinde at Hyderabad on the Indus* (Edinburgh, 1839), pp. 75–76.

[3]On Richard Burton, see D. Kennedy, *A Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); A. Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, 2009).

[4]R. Burton, *Sindh and the Races that Inhabit the Valley of the Indus* (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 232–361.

[5]*Ibid*., pp. 232–257.

[6]*Ibid*., pp. 232–233.

[7]*Ibid*., p. 233.

[8]*Ibid*.

[9]*Ibid*., pp. 367–368.

[10]See for example N. Juggonath, *Sindhu jo Nirvaru* (Karachi, 1865), pp. 35–45; M.Q. Beg, *Qadim Sindh: Una ja Mashhur Shahr ai Manhun*, 7th edition (Hyderabad, 2014).

[11]See, for example, B. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi, 1988); N. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, 2001); K. Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, 2010); D. Gilmartin, *Blood and Water: The Indus River Basin in Modern History* (Oakland, 2015).

upon the society they sought to represent. Ideas like tribe and race were part of the ideological and intellectual apparatus with which the British apprehended the world.[12] The scrutiny of this conceptual apparatus has exposed the limits of colonial sources and spurred a reconsideration of historical approaches, but questions remain about how society was organised and imagined before the ascendance of ideas of tribe and race, among others, under colonialism.[13] This article, in studying the place of Sayyids in eighteenth-century Sindh, contributes to the social history of early modern South Asia.

Tuhfat al-Kiram (*Gift for the Noble*) is a Persian text, a history, geography, and *tazkirah* or biographical dictionary of Sindh and the world, written in 1767. Its author, Mir 'Ali Shir Qani', was a Persian poet and scholar, who spent much of his life in Thatta, the largest and most important city of early modern Sindh. While Qani' worked briefly for the Kalhora, the rulers of Sindh from 1737–82, *Tuhfat al-Kiram* was not a commissioned work. Containing over 1,480 biographical entries of notables of Sindh, it is a rich source on the social history of pre-colonial Sindh.[14] It opens a window on a society that was joined together by the ethical, social, and literary values of Persianate culture, which was the enduring legacy of nearly a hundred and fifty years of Mughal rule. It is a far cry from the visions of fragmentation and discord that colour colonial accounts.

At the same time, Qani', in his particular arrangement of biographical entries, puts forward his own hierarchical conception of social order. This model, like that of Burton a century later, accords the highest priority to Sayyids. Rather than take this as a confirmation of Sayyid eminence, this article reads *Tuhfat al-Kiram* as a normative text, in which Qani' seeks to reimagine social order in post-Mughal Thatta and Sindh. Transformations in political and social relations in the eighteenth century had encouraged Qani', who belonged not only to the class of Sayyids but also to the larger group of the Muslim gentry of Thatta, to rethink the limits of Persianate society and also the sources of hierarchical social order in the city. Individual merit—a Persianate value that Qani' continued to cherish—was tempered in his formulation by the reality of intergenerational transfer of power within families and by a defensive attempt to restrict social priority to descent groups like Sayyids alone.

In many ways, *Tuhfat al-Kiram* represents a unique text in the history of Persian literature in Sindh. Its sheer scale and ambition is evident across its three volumes. The first volume is a history of the world from the moment of creation down to Timur.[15] The second volume is a world geography, which describes the regions and cities of the world, as also its kings and notable peoples. The third volume is concerned with Sindh. Its first part offers a history

[12]For a history of these terms and their intersection with empire, see D. Sneath, *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York, 2007); A. L. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 2002).

[13]The seminal work of pre-colonial social history remains C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770–1870* (Cambridge, 1983). Recent monographs on Mughal society and culture include R. Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (New York, 2005); S. Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia: Persian Literature in an Indian Court* (Cambridge, 2017); R. Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Oakland, 2015).

[14]It has been an important source for many histories of Sindh. For example, see G. R. Mihr, *Ta'rikh-i Sind* (Jamshoro, 1958); Beg, *Qadim Sindh*.

[15]On universal histories, see J. Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh, 1999); M. Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (Houndmills, 2001); S. Bashir, 'A Perso-Islamic Universal Chronicle in its Historical Context: Ghiyas al-Din Khwandmir's Habib al-Siyar', in *Historiography and Religion*, (eds.) J. Rupke, S. Rau and B. C. Otto (Berlin, 2015), pp. 207–223.

of Sindh from the early Hindu dynasties down to the Kalhora. The second part is a geography and biographical dictionary of Sindh, proceeding city by city and town by town across the region, listing the notables of each place. While others in Sindh had penned both regional histories and world geographies before Qani', his text stands apart in its simultaneous attention to world and region and its keen interest in looking beyond the histories of kings.[16] Those writing in Sindh after Qani' continued the Persian *tazkirah* tradition, but none returned to the social category of notables, turning instead to *tazkirah*s of Sufis or Persian poets of Sindh.[17]

The social and political context of Thatta is crucial to understanding Qani's project in *Tuhfat al-Kiram*. Thatta had been a seat of power since the end of the fifteenth century for the Samma, Arghun and Tarkhans.[18] Located on the Indus, at a three-day journey from the Arabian Sea and a two-day journey from its port, Lahri Bandar, Thatta was also a hub of trade, connected to ports in the Persian Gulf, East Africa, Gujarat, the Konkan, Malacca, Burma, Thailand, and Sumatra.[19] Even after its conquest by the Mughals in 1591, it remained an administrative and commercial centre, as also the seat of the provincial Mughal governor in lower Sindh. It was only in the eighteenth century that Thatta lost its administrative importance. At this time, an upstart force, the Kalhora swept away old *zamindar*s or local power holders in upper Sindh. When efforts at suppression failed, they were inducted into Mughal nobility. In 1736–37, the Mughal emperor went a step further and turned over the administration of lower Sindh, and its capital Thatta, to the Kalhora, too.[20] The Kalhora were neither familiar with Mughal political culture nor with the Persianate elite in Thatta. Their followers were called *sirayan* after the *siro* or upper region of Sindh, to which they belonged.[21] They built a series of new capitals in their power centre in upper Sindh, which by one scholar's count add up to eleven.[22] Thatta, located in lower Sindh, was never again to be an administrative centre. Yet, in the vacuum left between the Mughals and

[16]'Ali Kufi's *Chachnamah* (1216), Mir Muhammad Ma'sum's *Ta'rikh-i Sindh* (1601), Qasim Khan Beglari's *Beglarnamah* (1608), Tahir Muhammad Nisyani's *Ta'rikh-i Tahiri* (1621), and Mir Muhammad Jalal's *Tarkhannamah* (1655) are some prominent regional histories of Sindh before *Tuhfat al-Kiram*. Aminuddin Khan's *Ma'lumat al-Afaq* (1715) is an example of a world geography written in Thatta. A. Kufi, *Fathnamah-i Sindh al-ma'ruf bi Chachnamah*, (ed.) N. A. Baloch (Islamabad, 1983); M. Ma'sum, *Ta'rikh-i Sindh al-ma'ruf bi Ta'rikh-i Ma'sumi*, (ed.) U. Daudpota (Karachi, 2014); Q. Beglari, *Beglarnamah*, (ed.) N. A. Baloch (Hyderabad, 1980); T. Nisyani, *Ta'rikh-i Baldah-i Thatta al-ma'ruf bi Ta'rikh-i Tahiri*, (ed.) N. A. Baloch (Hyderabad, 1964); M. Jalal, *Tarkhannamah*, (ed.) H. Rashdi (Hyderabad, 1965); A. Khan, *Ma'lumat al-Afaq*, translated by M.A. Khan (Lucknow, 1873).

[17]Notable examples of each include Muhammad A'zam's *Tuhfat al-Tahirin* (1776) on the Sufis of Thatta and Muhammad Ibrahim's *Tazkirah-i Takmilah-i Maqalat al-Shu'ara* (*circa* 1890) meant to bring Qani's *tazkirah* of Persian poets of Sindh up to the end of the nineteenth century. M. A'zam, *Tuhfat al-Tahirin*, (ed.) B. A. Durrani (Karachi, 1956); M. Ibrahim, *Tazkirah-i Takmilah-i Maqalat al-Shu'ara*, (ed.) H. Rashdi (Karachi, 1958).

[18]On the Sammas, see R. Islam, 'The Rise of the Sammas', *Islamic Culture* XXII (1948), pp. 359–382.

[19]C. Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 10–12; M. Alam, 'Trade, State Policy and Regional Change: Aspects of Mughal-Uzbek Commercial Relations, c. 1550–1750', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* XXXVII (1994), p. 212. On the trade of Thatta during this period, see S. Subrahmanyam, 'The Portuguese, Thatta and the External Trade of Sind, 1515–1635', *Revista de Cultura* XIII/XIV (1991), pp. 48–58.

[20]For a detailed history of the Kalhora, see Mihr, *Ta'rikh-i Sind*, i and ii.

[21]S. Khan, *Ma'asir al-Umara*, (tr.) Muhammad 'Ayub Qadiri (Lahore, 1968), i, pp. 811–812.

[22]The most historically significant Kalhora capitals were Khudabad and Hyderabad. Khudabad was built by Miyan Yar Muhammad in 1701. It remained the capital of the Kalhora until 1750. Miyan Ghulam Shah built Hyderabad in 1768, which continued to serve as the capital of the Talpurs, who took power in 1782, until British annexation in 1843. For a detailed account of Kalhora capitals, see G. M. Lakho, 'Kalhora ja Takhtgah', *Mehran* III (1983), pp. 215–235.

the Kalhora, the gentry of Thatta was able to consolidate its social power in the city.[23] It was in this context of political isolation and social transformation that Qani‘ embarked upon the writing of *Tuhfat al-Kiram*.

In reading *Tuhfat al-Kiram*, I make three historiographical claims. First, even as individuals of Sayyid background were important through the history of Sindh, the idea of Sayyids as a coherent social group, and one which could claim priority within Thatta and Sindh, emerged only in the second half of the eighteenth century, finding its clearest expression in Qani‘s text. Even then, its acceptance remained less than universal. Second, even as Qani‘ asserted the priority of Sayyids based on their descent, he continued to be invested in older values of individual excellence and accomplishment upheld by Persianate *adab*, which Mana Kia has vividly described as "the social ethics and sensibilities by which an individual could perceive the values, stakes, and significance of their ways of being in the world".[24] Qani‘ sought to reconcile this older meritocratic and open culture with the new social and political realities of Thatta. *Tuhfat al-Kiram* shows both the longevity and the limits of Persianate *adab* in the post-Mughal world. Finally, Qani‘s attempt to close off upward mobility in Persianate Sindh by invoking descent was related to the rise of Hindu administrators whose access to employment, influence, and cultural capital threatened the older elite of Thatta.

Sayyid priority in *Tuhfat al-Kiram*

The literary genre Qani‘ uses to construct social order in Thatta and Sindh is the *tazkirah*. Marcia Hermansen and Bruce Lawrence have theorised Sufi and poetic *tazkirah*s as memorative communications that by remembering heroes authenticate and imagine urban spaces as sites of Persian poetic culture or Muslim sacrality.[25] Mana Kia, in her study of eighteenth-century Persian poetic *tazkirah*s, argues that authors of these texts construct their poetic persona in relation to a self-selected aterritorial community of poets, both contemporary and historical.[26] Where the former draws attention to place-making, the latter looks at self-fashioning. What joins these works to each other and to this article is a common understanding that *tazkirahs* were not passive mirrors of social reality, but rather interventions seeking to shape the world.

The *tazkirah* in *Tuhfat al-Kiram* constructs a hierarchical social order in the city of Thatta, which in turn is positioned at the head of the region of Sindh. It stands apart from the *tazkirah*s studied by the aforementioned scholars in that it is not limited to Sufis or poets. Instead, the *tazkirah* concerns itself with the *buzurg* or the greats or elders of Sindh. The category of *buzurg* both encompasses and exceeds poets and Sufis. While Qani‘ has written a

[23]C. A. Bayly has noted the parallel rise of the Muslim gentry, including Sayyids, in eighteenth-century north India. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, pp. 230–238.

[24]M. Kia, 'Space, Sociality, and Sources of Pleasure: A Response to Sanjay Subrahmanyam', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* LXI (2018), p. 266.

[25]M. Hermansen and B. Lawrence, 'Indo-Persian Tazkirahs as Memorative Communications', in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, (eds.) D. Gilmartin and B. Lawrence (Gainesville, 2000), p. 152.

[26]Mana Kia, 'Contours of Persianate Community, 1722–1835' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), pp. 256–309.

tazkirah of Persian poets of Sindh and another of Sufis, his more expansive interest in *Tuhfat al-Kiram* relates directly to his concern with constituting social order in this text.[27] Rather than commemorate a specific community of poets or saints, he assembles the Persianate notables of Sindh with their diverse claims to social priority into a fixed hierarchy.

In the beginning of the third volume on Sindh, Qani‘ declares it a compilation of earlier works, while also recognising the novelty of his effort. He writes,

> It is brought to the attention of the people of knowledge that [Qani‘] did not find mention of the region [*vilayat*] of Sindh in its totality, and particularly of Thatta, anywhere in the books of contemporaries and predecessors, even though this land abounds in people of rational and esoteric knowledge. For this reason, I made efforts to bring together material from a number of different books along with some reliable reports into a separate volume as a gift for the gathering of friends.[28]

Qani‘s claim that his text on Sindh is unprecedented suggests that he found earlier Persian histories of Sindh, which are sources for *Tuhfat*, to be less than adequate. Perhaps, it is their overwhelming interest in political history and their lack of systematic attention to the people of Sindh that disqualified earlier works such as *Chachnamah*, *Ta’rikh Ma‘sumi*, *Ta’rikh-i Tahiri* and *Beglarnamah*, among others.

At the same time, implicit in these opening lines is the acknowledgement that such texts already exist for other regions and cities, and that Sindh and Thatta, too, are worthy of attention. It is only if such texts existed for other places, that it would be possible for Qani‘ to feel their absence in the case of Sindh and Thatta. There is, in fact, a long medieval tradition of Persian histories of cities and regions, particularly relating to Herat.[29] In the eighteenth century, too, such texts were increasingly being written for regions such as Kashmir and Gujarat.[30] Histories written at the Mughal court had also become regionalised, recasting the Mughals as north Indian kings rather than universal sovereigns, and attending closely to the places and people of that region.[31] Qani‘s turn to the region of Sindh and the city of Thatta, therefore, are not indications of a turn inward, but rather a response to new trends across the Persianate world.

Finally, the correspondence between Sindh and Thatta in the opening lines is characteristic of Qani‘s approach in this volume more broadly. Despite his gesture towards the entirety of Sindh, his history in the first part of this volume often slips into a history of Thatta and lower Sindh.[32] Moreover, Qani‘ begins the second part of this volume with a similar pairing

[27]See ‘*Maqalat al-Shu’ara*’, British Library APAC Add. 21589; ‘*Mi‘yar-i Salikan-i Tariqat*’, British Library APAC Add. 21589.

[28]Qani‘, ‘*Tuhfat al-Kiram*’, British Library APAC Add. 21589, f. 254b.

[29]See J. Paul, ‘The Histories of Herat’, *International Society for Iran Studies* XXXIII (2000), pp. 93–115; C. Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in its Midst: Herat and the Mapping of Khurasan (15th–19th centuries)* (Vienna, 2014).

[30]For example, Muhammad A‘zam’s *Vaqi‘at-i Kashmiri* (1747) on Kashmir and ‘Ali Muhammad Khan’s *Mir‘at-i Ahmadi* (1761) on Gujarat. See A‘zam, ‘*Vaqi‘at-i Kashmiri*’, BL APAC Add. 26282; Khan, ‘*Mir’at-i Ahmadi*’, BL APAC Add. 6580.

[31]See, for example, K. Khan, ‘*Haft Gulshan-i Muhammad Shahi*’, BL APAC Or. 1795; L. Ram, ‘*Tuhfat al-Hind*’, BL APAC Add. 6584. Audrey Truschke has also noted this trend in some seventeenth century histories, where Mughal kings were ordered within a longer line of pre-Muslim Indian kings. See Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York, 2016), pp. 221–223.

[32]See, for example, his history of the Mughal period, where Qani‘ lists the Mughal governors of Thatta and ignores the governors of Bhakkar in upper Sindh. Qani‘, ‘*Tuhfat al-Kiram*’, f. 281a–4a.

of region and city: "May it not be hidden that upon becoming free from the writing of the conditions of the ranks (*tabaqat*) of kings and rulers of Sindh and Thatta, it is necessary to mention some of the cities and villages, along with a description of their *buzurg*".[33] Joining city and region, and using them interchangeably, is not uncommon within Persian writings of place.[34] In this case, it is an argument for the pre-eminence of Thatta within Sindh.

However, Qani' is careful not to elide over other cities and towns of the region. The geographically-arranged *tazkirah* in the second part of the third volume moves across Sindh from north to south. For each of the approximately eighty towns, cities, villages, and sites of Sindh that Qani' mentions, he offers first a brief description of the place and then a list of its notable persons. He starts at Multan and proceeds through the towns and cities of the districts of Bhakkar, Sewistan or Sehwan, Halakandi or Hala and Bathoro, culminating in the south in Thatta. Ending on Thatta is yet another indication of the priority of the city within Sindh. In sheer scale of information, too, Thatta stands apart from other places. Of roughly 1,480 biographical entries, a full 920, or around 60 per cent, are of people related to Thatta. Tellingly, no Kalhora capital gets its own entry, except Hyderabad, which is denoted by its ancient name Nerunkot, suggesting its inclusion was based on its historic importance rather than its association with the Kalhora.[35] This oversight is all the more glaring given that Qani' spent time in various Kalhora capitals looking for employment.[36] The exclusion can only be read as a purposeful snub: marginalising the Kalhora in his text, even as they had marginalised Thatta in their kingdom. Kalhora capitals may be centres of administration and power, but for Qani', Thatta was the jewel of Sindh.

His description of the city leads to a similar conclusion. Qani' describes Thatta as "the choicest and best city, the home of lords of esoteric knowledge and birthplace of masters of faith. In particular, its land is the mine of people of perfection".[37] He gives a brief history of the city, whose land was initially submerged under water until the Indus changed course. The Samma ruler Jam Nizamuddin ordered the construction of Thatta in 1495.[38] Qani' gives two stories for the name of the city. The first explains Thatta as a corruption 'Teh Teh' or 'Lower, Lower' referencing the migration of people from northern cities to Thatta. The second story suggests the name is derived from 'Thatt', the Sindhi word for a place of gathering. Qani' quotes Hakim Mir 'Abdul Razzaq Isfahani, a scholar in the employ of the Kalhora, who held that Thatta was a branch of the land of Greece, which is why so many people of excellence had been born there. He continues, "There is no other place in all of Sindh as pleasant and pure. Its mornings brighten the mirror of the imagination of sad hearts, and its evenings bring the joy of dawn to strangers. Its residents go every week, in groups upon groups, to the gardens of Makli".[39]

[33]*Ibid*., f. 288b.
[34]See Noelle-Karimi, *The Pearl in its Midst*.
[35]Qani', '*Tuhfat al-Kiram*', f. 309a.
[36]Qani', '*Maqalat al- Shu'ara*', f. 521b, 523b.
[37]Qani', '*Tuhfat al-Kiram*', f. 311b.
[38]This claim has been disputed by many scholars, who have found reference to Thatta in historical sources as early as the thirteenth century. S. P. Chablani, 'The Origin of Thatta', in *The Samma Kingdom of Sindh*, (ed.) G.M. Lakho (Jamshoro, 2006); H. Rashdi, 'Maklinama', in *Maklinamah*, (ed.) H. Rashdi, (tr.) N.A. Shauq (Jamshoro, 2011), pp. 122–140.
[39]Qani', '*Tuhfat al-Kiram*', f. 312a.

After this description of the city, Qani‘ proceeds to its people, writing that he will "mention the families of Sayyids, saints, scholars and people of excellence by group (*tabaqat*)".[40] *Tabaqat* has in common with class the idea of a hierarchically-ordered society. However, *tabaqat* are not arranged by economic status, but rather by prestige or priority.[41] Qani‘ moves systematically through seven different groups: Sayyids, *qazi*s or judges, religious scholars and other pious people, Sufi saints and their deputies, people of renown, calligraphers, and poets.[42] In addition, he mentions people of spiritual power buried in Thatta, on the Makli Hills outside it, and world-renouncing dervishes. Each group is introduced with a line on its significance, followed by accounts of individuals and families included in it. The introductory lines with their explicit and careful reasoning suggest that Qani‘s proposed order was not self-evident. He was not following an accepted logic in his arrangement, which is why an explanation was required.

For the first group, that of the Sayyids of Sindh, Qani‘ writes, "[I] begin with mention of the selected group of the people of the house of the prophet because they are the opening of the book of creation (*basmalah-i divan-i ijad*)".[43] He alludes to the cosmological idea that God's first act of creation, preceding even Adam, was the Muhammadan light (*nur Muhammadi*).[44] In his own account of the world's origin in the first volume, Qani‘ notes a dispute among scholars about whether God first made the Muhammadan light, the intellect, or the pen. He resolves this question by proposing that the Muhammadan light was the first reality followed by the intellect and pen, which were the first incorporeal and corporeal creations.[45] Muhammad's cosmological priority serves as justification for the Sayyids' social priority.

However, cosmology is not the only rationale invoked by Qani‘ for his particular order. Individual excellence and religious endorsement figure as important claims of eminence. The second group—that of *qazi*s—is introduced with the following words: "The group of the family of judges, which by its abundant virtue and excellence, was renowned among humankind and the refuge of the high and low".[46] The group that follows is scholars (*'ulama*) and the pious (*sulaha' o ahl-i taqva*). Qani‘ justifies the priority of scholars on authority of Prophet Muhammad's saying, "The scholars of my people are like the prophets of Israel".[47] Qani‘ explains the eminence of the pious with a Quranic verse, "Indeed the most righteous of you is the most noble of you near Allah" (49:13), saying that by this verse's authority, the pious have "precedence over all the tribes (*qaba'il*) and the learned (*shu'ur*)".[48] The next group, the people of Allah and the Sufi path, and their deputies, he describes as "associated with the grandeur of genealogy and acquirement, possessing the bounties of

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] On *tabaqat* literature, see Cl. Gilliot, 'Tabakat', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, (eds.) P. Bearman *et al.*; Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, 1968).

[42] *Mazhar-i Shahjahani*, written by Yusuf Mirak (d. 1639) at Sehwan in the seventeenth century, imagined social order as having the sovereign at its apex followed by his officials and then the people of religion. This last was divided into nine groups. Sayyids were the seventh out of these nine. See S. Alvi, 'Mazhar-i Shahjahani and the Province of Sindh under the Mughals: A Discourse on Political Ethics', in *Perspectives on Mughal India: Rulers, Historians, 'Ulama' and Sufis*, (ed.) S. Alvi (Karachi, 2012), pp. 28–50.

[43] '*Tuhfat al-kiram*', f. 312a-b.

[44] See U. Rubin, 'Nur Muhammadi', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition.

[45] '*Tuhfat al-Kiram*', f. 2a.

[46] *Ibid.*, f. 323a.

[47] *Ibid.*, f. 323b.

[48] *Ibid.*

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God and their own accomplishments, a blessing for the world, and a beautiful flower in the garden of knowledge and belief".[49] The descriptions suggest the dual importance of individual accomplishment and God's favour in distinguishing these groups. Notably, Qani' omits any reference to political authorities to ratify this hierarchical order.

Introducing the next group, Qani' writes, "[They are those] who have been distinguished by circumstance or ability. Some belong to renowned families. Though the previous account has also included mention of these notables, several names are mentioned here separately so that the reader may become acquainted with the difference of ranks (*maratib*)".[50] Three things become apparent here. First, Qani' is interested in rank or hierarchy, rather than simply delineating different but equal groups. Second, he is making an argument for a particular order, which he does not believe to be self-evident. Third, this is the closest he comes to stating his method of arguing for this order through the inclusion of exemplary people of each group. Qani' explicitly recognises overlap between these groups, yet keeps them distinct. For the last groups of calligraphers and poets, too, he admits that people have already been mentioned who excelled at both, but insists on noting a few people from each class.[51] A Sayyid may well be a calligrapher or a scholar a poet, but a calligrapher or poet without any other distinction could only be placed in the sixth and seventh ranks. This, Qani' believes, would be evident upon perusing the exemplary individuals included for each group. His *tazkirah* was designed not to reflect social reality, but as an argument constructed in favour of his vision of social order.

Qan's arrangement, with Sayyids, judges, scholars, and saints at the front, stands in sharp contrast to the hierarchical order of Mughal courtly texts. *The Institutes of Akbar* or *'A'in-i Akbari*, written by Abu'l Fazl on the order of Akbar in the final years of the sixteenth century, is a fine counterpoint not because it is representative of Mughal vision of social order across time, but because it brings out the dilemmas that Qani' was facing in the starkest possible terms. In *'A'in-i Akbari*, Abu'l Fazl fixes people around the axis of the emperor. At the end of the second book, he lists Mughal *mansabdar*s or nobles, followed by people of learning, poets, and musicians.[52] The list is temporally limited to people of Akbar's reign and arranged to reflect their priority at court. The inventory of nobles is arranged by descending order of numeric rank from the commanders of ten thousand down to the commanders of two hundred. Their ranks and names are the only details noted. Abu'l Fazl explains this by declaiming that "it does not suit the encomiast of the king to praise others".[53] He argues that an honest appraisal of people is impossible because propriety would require that he only "mention that which is worthy of praise, and to keep silent on that which cannot be approved".[54] As a member of the court, Abu'l Fazl finds himself unable to assess the worth of his peers. The emperor alone, standing above the fray, can ascertain the value of people. Imperial rank, therefore, is the only way to describe the nobility. Imperial

[49]*Ibid*., f. 328b.
[50]*Ibid*., f. 330b.
[51]*Ibid*., f. 332a–b.
[52]A. F. 'Allami, *'A'in-i Akbari*, (ed.) S. Ahmed (Aligarh, 2005), pp. 210–246.
[53]*Ibid*., p. 210.
[54]*Ibid*.

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discernment is the singular source of hierarchical distinction in Abu'l Fazl's schema.[55] No further examples or explication are considered necessary.

The Mughal sovereign's role of upholding hierarchical order was both theoretical and practical. He appointed nobles, elevated or decreased rank, transferred positions, and prevented office from passing unimpeded from father to son. Imperial recognition of individual merit was central to garnering political and social power. Yet, in Qani's Thatta, such a sovereign had not existed even formally since 1739. Social order could not be constituted around the court or the sovereign's ability to depute power and dispense patronage. In this altered political context, Qani' constructs his hierarchical order on the city and the region. Moreover, his groups are not limited temporally by a king's reign, but rather extend back in a continuous history. His categories do not include Mughal nobles or officials as a distinct group. Without sovereign discernment upholding them, his groups required new justifications. Assertions of Sayyid priority on the basis of descent from the Prophet is not enough on its own. Rather, the exemplary biographies that Qani' offers valorise individual excellence and accomplishment. Sayyid priority could not be confirmed by political authority, but had to be argued from within the values of Persianate culture, which, with its emphasis on individual excellence, continued to shape post-Mughal Thatta. Qani's biographies also introduce the family as a crucial means of intergenerational accrual and transfer of power and guarantor of social stability in the post-Mughal world. It is this tension between individual excellence and lineage in *Tuhfat al-Kiram* to which the next section turns.

Lineage and familial power in a society of individual excellence

The biographical notices of *Tuhfat al-Kiram* make clear that there was no dearth of Sayyids among the notables of Sindh. They constitute over 30 per cent of the entries on Thatta. However, the individuals noted were often renowned for reasons beyond prophetic lineage. Qani' may have started his *tazkirah* of notables in Thatta with Sayyids, but which ones he included and why they merited individual mention did not relate to prophetic lineage in straightforward ways. Learning and spiritual power were two qualities that continued to distinguish individuals. Moreover, Qani's *tazkirah* did not move through a series of individual Sayyids, but rather through Sayyid families. Arranged according to their arrival in Sindh, these families were identified by their historic place of origin as the Sayyids of Shiraz, Mashhad, Mazandaran, Sabzavar, Kashan, Bukhara, Astarabad and so on. This familial approach, which characterised the whole *tazkirah*, suggests that individual distinction intersected with lineage in ways that are not captured by the idea of Sayyid priority, even as Qani' used both to argue for his conception of social order.

Qani's description of the Sayyid family of the Anjavi Shirazi branch, which had the oldest roots in Sindh and constituted the first series of biographical notices in the Thatta section, elucidates the uneasy fit between Sayyid priority, individual merit, and familial power.

[55]This is a far cry from the realities of the early days of Akbar's rule. He started his reign under the overbearing viceregency of Bairam Khan. The early decades of his rule were also rocked by bitter factional struggles at his court. Even as Akbar amassed greater power over his subjects in later years, his authority was never unassailable. In the final years of his rule, his own son, Prince Salim, rose up in rebellion. While the rebellion was quelled, Salim had Abu'l Fazl, the architect of the ideal expression of Akbari sovereignty, assassinated, exposing, not without a touch of irony, the gap between ideals and reality.

Sayyid Muhammad and his son Sayyid Ahmad, Anjavi Shirazi Sayyids of excellence and greatness, came to Sindh in 1384 during the reign of Jam Salahuddin bin Jam Tamachi. Their date of arrival according to the Hijri calendar was 786AH, which Qani' notes is the numerical value of the Basmalah, the first line of the Qur'an, which is also recited at the beginning of every chapter of the book.[56] It means "In the name of Allah, the most merciful, the most kind". The theme of Sayyids as an inaugural people is repeated in this manner and the auspiciousness of their advent in Sindh confirmed by this sign.

The emphasis on individual excellence is everywhere in these biographies. However, merit here is often validated by divine and supernatural signs whose logic confounds modern notions of rational verification.[57] While these signs are rendered incomprehensible and arbitrary today, the very opposite of merit that is earned and deserved, they testified to individual greatness, both earned and endowed, in pre-modern Sindh. After recounting the first sign of the auspicious year of their arrival, Qani' narrates that Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Ahmad settled in the village of Murad Uthi in the parganah of Manchar, where Sayyid Muhammad passed away. Qani' writes, "It is enough as evidence of the greatness of this man that when his descendant Sayyid 'Ali II built a tomb on the Hills of Makli, there was no spirituality or purity here and it did not become a place of pilgrimage for people of God till he received instructions in a dream to transfer this great man's body from Murad Uthi".[58] A disenchanted, interests-based reading of this anecdote would ascribe agency to Sayyid 'Ali II, who would have strategically shifted his ancestor's body to his new but floundering construction. Conversely, Qani's telling ascribes agency to Sayyid Muhammad, whose greatness is confirmed by his posthumous dream communication.[59] Another notable element of this story is the additional role of people in confirming Sayyid Muhammad's excellence. It is ultimately their endorsement of Sayyid 'Ali II's shrine after the re-interment of his ancestor that distinguishes Sayyid Muhammad.

Sayyid Ahmad's greatness, too, is illustrated by such signs. He continued to live in Sindh after the death of his father, spending his time in the company of people of God. Qani' writes:

> He once travelled to Samui to meet Shaikh 'Isa Languti. Qazi Ni'matullah 'Abbasi, a learned man of perfection, was seated before the *shaikh*. The *shaikh* gave the Sayyid much honour and respect upon his arrival, but the *qazi* did not move at all. Upon the end of the Sayyid's visit and on his departure, the *shaikh* gave him greater and greater respect. The *qazi* asked why the *shaikh* gave him greater respect when the Sayyid turned. The *shaikh* replied, "I saw the axis of time (*qutb-i zaman*) from his posterior. If I am alive, I will pledge my loyalty to him and become his follower." [Meanwhile] the Sayyid had been hurt by the *qazi* and cursed him. When the *qazi* returned to his home, he lost his eyesight and could not understand the reason. At night, his daughter Fatima had a dream that she had married the Sayyid and had four star-like jewels,

[56]'*Tuhfat al-Kiram*', f. 312b.

[57]The significance of the occult, astrology, supernatural, and miraculous in shaping political and social life has been highlighted by other scholars, too. See A. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2012).

[58]'*Tuhfat al-Kiram*', f. 312b.

[59]For recent ethnographies of dreaming in the Muslim world, see A. Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter: Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination* (Berkeley, 2011), A. Taneja, *Jinnealogy: Time, Islam, and Ecological Thought in the Medieval Ruins of Delhi* (Stanford, 2018).

> one of whom lit the skies with its light. The *qazi* brought these two incidents before Shaikh 'Isa. On his instruction, he gave his daughter's hand in marriage to the Sayyid and brought him to live in his own house. As had been decreed, Fatima had four sons according to their own time: Sayyid 'Ali, Sayyid Ja'far, Sayyid Muhammad Sharif, Sayyid Muhammad Hussain. In the end, according to the custom of creation this great person died on 1 Muharram 845AH/1441AD. He was buried in the graveyard of the *qazi*s, which later became the graveyard of his Sayyid descendants.[60]

Miracles perform a central function in producing greatness. Sayyid Ahmad's curse upon the *qazi* is one such sign. The story also illustrates that respect for Sayyids was neither standard nor universal. 'Isa Languti's excessive obeisance to Sayyid Ahmad is occasion for surprise. Languti in turn explains his actions not by invoking deference due to all Sayyids, but rather as a mark of respect for the son that Sayyid Ahmad was to have. In Languti's vision and Fatima's dream, Sayyid Ahmad's eminence is guaranteed not by his ancestry, but rather by his exceptional progeny. Moreover, miraculous signs also require a sage like Languti to recognise, interpret, and announce. Just as people had verified Sayyid Muhammad's power by coming to his shrine, 'Isa Languti affirms and prophesies the power of Sayyid Ahmad's son.

Miracles were not the only means to ascertain individual merit. The life individuals led, the people they associated with, their literary, architectural, material, and spiritual accomplishments were all part of a matrix that rendered individual accomplishment meaningful. Qani' proceeds to narrate the lineage of Sayyid 'Ali, Sayyid Ahmad's first son, down eight generations to the eighteenth century. Sayyid 'Ali's grandson, Sayyid 'Ali II, is described as "exalted in the path of the nobles of piety".[61] He excelled in the Sufi path and performed the hajj many times. He is distinguished by his association with other great Sufis, such as Darvish Achar and was also a disciple of the renowned Sufi, Makhdum Nuh. What Mana Kia has called "lineages of learning and service" figure here as important markers of distinction.[62] Sayyid 'Ali II's worth is determined not only by his descent, but also by voluntary associations with Sufi masters, teachers and lords. Qani' continues to mention his architectural and literary accomplishments. Sayyid 'Ali II built the tomb on the hills of Makli, where Sayyid Muhammad's body was reinterred. Qani' says, "A large unparalleled group comes to receive its grace".[63] Sayyid 'Ali II has also left behind *Adab al-Mursalin*, a religious manual, as a *yadgar* or memorial. He died in 1563–64.[64] These markers of individual excellence, which adorn Sayyid 'Ali II, are not specific to his Sayyid lineage and in fact are very close to the notable accomplishments of other non-Sayyids in *Tuhfat al-Kiram*.

Discernible in the shorter biographies of Sayyid 'Ali II's six subsequent descendants is Qani's interest in narrating the transfer of social power across generations. Each descendant is noted as the successive trustee of Sayyid 'Ali II's shrine down to Mir Lutfullah, who was its head in the eighteenth century. Sayyid 'Ali II's son, Sayyid Jalal II, married a Tarkhan princess and was sent as an ambassador by Mirza Muhammad Baqi (r. 1567–85) to Akbar's court.[65] The family's position as custodians of an influential shrine appears to have been

[60] *Ibid.*
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] Kia, 'Space, Sociality, and Sources of Pleasure', p. 272.
[63] '*Tuhfat al-Kiram*', f. 312b.
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] *Ibid.*

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consolidated by their marriage to the Tarkhan rulers and their influence continued till the eighteenth century.[66] The spiritual accomplishments of Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid 'Ali II are affirmed by their followers and pilgrims, who, by visiting their shrine, make it a site through which social power is accrued and transferred within the family. Qani's scrupulous list of successive custodians affirms his interest in documenting social power. The only lateral line he includes within Sayyid 'Ali II's descendants enjoys a separate following among the Nehmardi hill tribe because of the spiritual power and miraculous nature of one of the descendants.[67]

Other Sayyid biographies in *Tuhfat* continue to braid individual distinction with familial power. The Mashhadi Sayyid Abu' Mukarram (d. 1655) became a *khalifah* of a Qadiri saint, who was a descendant of the founder Shaikh 'Abdul Qadir Gilani. Mukarram's affiliation with this Sufi order was not based on ties of blood, but of discipleship. Moreover, Jahangir gave him tax-free lands (*madad-i ma'ash*) on account of his excellence in religious knowledge (*zahiri 'ilm*). When Khusraw Khan Charkhas, a Tarkhan noble in Mughal service, built a Friday Mosque next to his mansion in Thatta, he appointed Abul Mukarram as its manager (*mutavali*). Posts and awards from the Mughal emperor and nobles continue to be remembered and celebrated in Qani's times, even after Mughal rule. However, only the Qadiri *khilafat*, according to Qani's biographies, was transferred down five generations to his own times, serving as the enduring institution to preserve and transfer power from father to son.[68]

The Sabzvari Sayyids of Thatta had in their family the post of *shaikh al-islam* or the chief of *mufti*s, who offered opinions on matters of Islamic law. This position was given by the Arghun rulers to Mirak Shaikh Mahmud in the early sixteenth century and was passed down across generations and political epochs to his descendant in Qani's time.[69] Mir Ghuruuri, a Kashani Sayyid, moved to Thatta in the early seventeenth century and was made the superintendent of the mint by Jahangir. This post was passed from Mir Ghururi to his son and then to his son's nephew, who died in the eighteenth century.[70] Qani' was acutely aware of the multiple sources of social power, deriving not merely from Sufi but also from political institutions.

Qani's attention to lineage speaks to a time when power and authority in the city was not directly derived from a central political authority, but rather accrued and passed within the institution of the family. Memories of old Mughal connections and access to Mughal posts remained important markers of power and distinction, but there is no sense in *Tuhfat al-Kiram* of a contemporary political power, Mughal, Durrani or Kalhora, shaping social order in the city. Non-hereditary delegation of authority, which had kept power centralised and built imperial order on individual merit rather than familial prerogative under the Mughals, is all but gone from Qani's Thatta.

Moreover, it is not simply that office in the city had become hereditary, but also that power in the city derived from the followings families enjoyed as Sufi saints and custodians of shrines. This power was by no means new. Families like that of Sayyid 'Ali II had enjoyed

[66] *Ibid.*, f. 312b–3a.
[67] *Ibid.*, f. 313a.
[68] *Ibid.*, f. 314b.
[69] *Ibid.*, f. 317a–b.
[70] *Ibid.*, f. 318a.

a following since well before the advent of Mughal rule in Sindh. However, with the attenuation of the king's power in the city, it may well have gained in importance. Certainly, authority derived from Sufi institutions has an overweening importance in Qani'ʿs work. Individual excellence and spiritual power are key explanations for this authority. However, rather than these merits being verified by the king, they are verified by followers. This sanction from below is latent in the story of the success of Sayyid 'Ali II's shrine, whose improved spirituality after the re-interment of Sayyid Muhammad is attested by the people who begin to visit the site. Similarly, Qani' repeatedly confirms spiritual power of various individuals and families by mentioning their following. While this does not by any means signal a democratisation of power, it does suggest that influence over people was seen by Qani' as an important testament of merit and a crucial ingredient of social power.

Despite his interest in social power, Qani' continues to valorise scholarly and literary accomplishments as markers of individual excellence. He scrupulously notes when people composed good verse, wrote a text, or excelled at various forms of learning.[71] Poets and calligraphers are accorded their own ranks, even if they are the lowest of the seven. Qani' had also penned a biographical dictionary of Persian poets of Sindh some years before writing *Tuhfat al-Kiram*. Yet, these accomplishments do not map clearly on to the acquisition of power, particularly in a time when patronage for literary activities had all but dried out. However, these are values that Qani' cherishes. In the preface of *Tuhfat al-Kiram*, he introduces himself through a review of his education in history and geography, as also his experience of writing letters, poetry, and history. As models, he mentions his ancestors Mir 'Abdullah Asil and Mir Jamaluddin, who had both written Persian histories.[72] However, nowhere in the introduction does Qani' mention his own Sayyid status.[73] In individuals, including himself, Qani' values literary and cultural accomplishments, even as he documents social power.

One crucial question remains unresolved in this account of Qani'ʿs construction of social order. If social power and individual distinction are central to the text and neither relates directly to Sayyid descent, then why is Qani'ʿs social order nevertheless built upon this category? It is not clear from Qani'ʿs text how and whether Sayyids constitute a coherent social group. The relationship between for example the Mashhadi Sayyid family and the Anjavi Shirazi Sayyid family or the Shukrullahi Sayyid family is not described. Where Burton's account of Sayyids a century later identifies endogamy as the key practice giving Sayyids social coherence, Qani' makes no comment on marriage practices, nor does he provide any other account of group coherence.[74] Moreover, people included in other groups in

[71]For example, he describes Mir Zainu'l-'abidin, a descendant of Sayyid 'Ali II, as "a man of perfection, a refuge for the greats, possessing laudable qualities. He was the head of the Sayyids in his own time and considered by many to be the seal of greatness, chief of the mighty, and having much knowledge. The text *Khair al-Bashar* or *The Best of Humanity* is known among his works. He composed masterly poetry and had the pen name Qani'". *Ibid*., f. 313a.

[72]*Ibid*., f. 1b.

[73]He includes his name and the names of his two sons in the biographies of the Shukrullahi Sayyids of Thatta. However, he says no more about himself there. *Ibid*., f. 316b. Conversely for an earlier time, in thirteenth-century Sindh, Manan Ahmed Asif has noted the importance of claiming Arab lineage as a source of prestige for writers at Nasiruddin Qabacha's court. See M. A. Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 55–62.

[74]Burton, *Sindh and the Races*, pp. 232–233.

Qani's text derive social power from similar sources. The group of scholars are largely holders of office such as a judgeship in various parts of the Mughal empire.[75] The group of people of Allah draw authority from Sufi institutions such as shrines.[76] Some were also accomplished in Persian literature and learning.[77]

This contradiction between Qani's closed system of hierarchy and common sources of authority that cut across these groups can best be understood if *Tuhfat al-Kiram* is read as a prescriptive rather than a descriptive text. Through the exemplary biographies for each group, Qani' is making an argument for the position of the group within his social order. Sayyids are accorded the highest priority because of their social power and individual merit. The biographies are meant to persuade the reader of Sayyid eminence. With the biographies of each subsequent group, social power and individual merit diminishes, even if the sources of both remain theoretically open and shared. Anyone with spiritual authority could attain a following, anyone with political authority could become powerful, and anyone with a Persian education and learning could become culturally accomplished, but Qani's biographies propose that Sayyids have been preeminent on all counts. This is their claim to priority, not a straightforward appeal to their prophetic lineage.

In fact, Qani' proposes his closed hierarchical model to manage the openness of a city, which offered people many different routes to social power and distinction. Stability of social power had been worked out through its transfer within the family from generation to generation. Yet, these old families of Thatta remained under threat from Kalhora rulers, who were not particularly interested in incorporating them into government. Kalhora power was itself partly rooted in their own claim of spiritual power and Sufi institutions.[78] Moreover, their rule over Thatta and Sindh was conducted primarily through officials from northern Sindh and through an increasingly important group of Hindu administrators arriving in Sindh from the Punjab. While Qani' could do little to halt their rise or reverse Thatta gentry's own exclusion from power, he could in his work argue for a social order that in theory, if not practice, would guarantee the old guard of Thatta primacy on the basis of descent. Individual merit and social power are celebrated by Qani', even as he uses them to claim eminence for specific descent groups. In doing so, he reformulates these values as the preserve of a fixed group of people, inaccessible to the new political power on the scene in Sindh. While Qani' remains studiously silent on these figures of power, his male, Muslim, closed social order cannot be understood without reference to the new Kalhora political order. It is to Hindus and women, the groups absent from *Tuhfat al-Kiram*, that the final section turns.

[75]For example, Qazi Ibrahim served as judge of the army under Shahjahan; Makhdum Hamid was a local judge; Makhdum Abu'l Khair was one of the scholars working on Aurangzeb's *Fatava-yi 'Alamgiri*. *Ibid*., f. 324a–b, 324b, 324a.

[76]For example, Mulla Shaikh Ishaq's family controlled his shrine at Makli, which was a place of pilgrimage, while Miyan Kabir Muhammad Naqshbandi's descendants continued to hold his position as Naqshbandi master. *Ibid*., f. 328b, 330b.

[77]Muhammad Ashraf from a family of judges was a poet and calligrapher, while Makhdum Muhammad Mu'in is noted for Persian and Hindi poetry and for his knowledge of music, in addition to his scholarship in religious sciences. *Ibid*., f. 325a, 327b–8a.

[78]Mihr, *Ta'rikh-i Sind*, i, pp. 127–138.

Hindus and women in Thatta

The eighteenth century has been dubbed the Golden Age of the Scribe, particularly of the Hindu scribe.[79] This was as true in Sindh as anywhere else. Hindu scribes, known as *amil*s, rose up within the governments of the Kalhora and their successors the Talpurs. Their star remained ascendant into the nineteenth century. In his account of Sindh, Richard Burton claimed that twenty Hindus had administered Sindh for their Talpur masters.[80] "The princes had degenerated from the hardy savage virtues of temperance, sobriety, and morality affected by their progenitors", wrote Burton, "They required for pleasure the time demanded by business, and willingly intrusted to the hands of Hindoos—most unjust stewards—the management of their estates, and, in some cases, of their subjects".[81] He simultaneously drew a picture of *amil*s as a persecuted group, subject to arbitrary punishments, including death, torture, and forced conversion.[82] While colonial accounts of Hindu oppression appear overblown, they were not off the mark about their power.[83]

Hindus have long been a part of the social and economic fabric of Thatta.[84] Hindu merchants, called Bhaibands, had much of Thatta's trade in their hands. Though demographic estimates made by travellers are not exceedingly reliable, Alexander Hamilton, who visited Thatta in 1699, claimed that there were ten Hindus to every Muslim in the city.[85] When Henry Pottinger travelled across Sindh and Balochistan in 1809, he found communities of Hindu traders and moneylenders in every town and city, including Kalat, Karachi and Sonmiani.[86] These men were linked to the network of merchants based out of Multan and Shikarpur, which financed much of the trade between India and Central Asia.[87]

Under the Kalhora, a wave of immigration of Hindu scribes appears to have begun from the Punjab. This may well have been because of political dislocation in the Punjab or because the Kalhora, belonging to upper Sindh, were closer to the administration in Mughal Punjab. Bherumal Maharchand Advani, who penned a Sindhi history and biographical dictionary of Sindhi Hindus in 1946, identifies Aurangzeb's persecution of Sikhs and Hindus as a chief impetus for migration into Sindh starting in the end of the seventeenth century.[88] It is likely that as the Kalhora fought against Mughal control, they were eager to recruit qualified administrators and allies who were both familiar with Mughal administration but also not loyal to the Mughals.

[79]M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, 'Eighteenth-Century Historiography and the World of the Mughal Munshi', in *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York, 2012), p. 428.

[80]R. Burton, *Scinde or the Unhappy Valley* (London, 1851), p. 232.

[81]*Ibid*.

[82]*Ibid*., pp. 224–233.

[83]See M. Cook, *Annexation and the Unhappy Valley* (Leiden, 2016), pp. 21–68.

[84]Markovits, *Global World of Indian Merchants*, pp. 11–12. On Thatta's economy under the Mughals, see Subrahmanyam, 'The Portuguese, Thatta and the External Trade of Sind', pp. 48–58.

[85]A. Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies* (Edinburgh, 1727), i, p. 127.

[86]H. Pottinger, *Travels in Beloochistan and Sindh* (London, 1816), pp. 77–8, 344, 11–12.

[87]The history of these trading communities can be found in Markovits, *Global World of Indian Merchants*; S. Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and its Trade, 1550–1900* (Leiden, 2002); M. Cook, 'Getting Ahead or Keeping your Head? The "Sindhi" Migration of Eighteenth Century India', in *Interpreting the Sindhi World: Essays on Society and History*, (eds.) M. Boivin and M. Cook (Karachi, 2010), pp. 133–149.

[88]B. Advani, *Sindhu ji Hindun ji Tarikh* (Hyderabad, 2006), pp. 100–101.

The Advanis, who comprised some five hundred families by 1946, began their career in Sindh with Divan Adumal, who moved from Multan in the first half of the eighteenth century to serve in the Kalhora army. His descendants went on to attain high posts in the government.[89] The Ahujas also moved from the Punjab during Kalhora rule and were given land to cultivate in Naushahro Abro near Shikarpur.[90] Other Hindu and Sikhs, who arrived in Sindh, found employ with the Kalhora, too. *Amil*s soon came to hold many high positions in government. Divan Gidumal was the minister of various Kalhora and Talpur administrations.[91] Divan Jethmal served as the governor of Shikarpur.[92] He operated his own mint and struck coins in his name.[93] Munshi Wali Ram Advani served as the chief minister for a Talpur ruler, Mir Nasir Khan, while Munshi Autra Malkani served as the revenue minister of another Talpur, Mir Sobedar Khan.[94]

Despite their growing numbers and influence, Qani‘ does not mention a single Hindu in the 1,480 biographical entries for Sindh. The closest he comes is to mention Shaikh Badiyah Virdas, a Brahmin buried on Ganjah Hill, who is described as "one of those who has renounced the world in favour of the One God".[95] This indicates that Virdas was a convert to Islam. Cultural facility in Persian and Persianate values does not appear to be an adequate criterion for inclusion of Hindus in *Tuhfat al-Kiram*. Many Hindu administrators were accomplished Persian poets and writers.[96] Shaivak Ram ‘Utarid, a son of Thatta and head secretary (*mir munshi*) of two Kalhora rulers, left behind Persian poems and a volume of Persian letters.[97] Qani‘ organised poetic gatherings (musha‘arah) with ‘Utarid.[98] He also included an entry on ‘Utarid in his dictionary of Persian poets, where he described their relationship as friendly (*rabita-i dustana*) and preserved a poem to convey the depth of their affection (*ikhlas*) for each other.[99] Qani‘ was also on friendly terms with at least two other Hindus, Daulah Ram and Lala Asaram, and notes conversations with both in his dictionary of Persian poets.[100] Yet, he passes over his accomplished friends in silence in *Tuhfat al-Kiram*.

Qani‘ explicitly admits his intentional exclusion of Hindus in his political history of Sindh in *Tuhfat al-Kiram*. He complains that for over twenty years, between 1749 and 1770, all governors but one appointed to Thatta have been non-Muslim. In an act of defiance, he refuses to name any of the non-Muslim governors, resuming his list only with the Muslim official appointed in 1770. Qani‘ ends his political history with a prayer, "May God continue to bless this city of Muslims with Muslim governors".[101] This religious particularism stands in contrast to Qani‘s friendships with Hindus. Moreover, Qani‘ does not shy away from

[89]*Ibid*., pp. 192–195.
[90]*Ibid*., pp. 222–224.
[91]*Ibid*., p. 109.
[92]*Ibid*.
[93]*Ibid*., p. 116.
[94]*Ibid*., p. 109.
[95]‘*Tuhfat al-Kiram*’, f. 309b.
[96]The increasing participation of Hindus in Persian literary culture is a broader and well-documented phenomenon across the Mughal empire. See Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*; Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*.
[97]See S. ‘Utarid, *Insha’-yi ‘Utarid*, (ed.) K. Naushahi (Hyderabad, 2013).
[98]Qani‘, ‘*Maqalat al-Shu‘ara*’, f. 526b.
[99]*Ibid*., f. 490b.
[100]*Ibid*., f. 458a, 482b.
[101]‘*Tuhfat al-Kiram*’, f. 288b.

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mentioning 23 Hindus in his dictionary of Persian poets of Sindh.[102] This suggests that while Persianate culture and community continued to be open and non-denominational for Qani' in theory and practice, he was reconceptualising social and political order in the city as led singularly by Muslim men.

Tuhfat al-Kiram's Muslim order was not descriptive, but rather prescriptive, consciously excluding some of the most powerful and influential people in Sindh. This order was further closed off by reserving the first rank for the Sayyid lineage group and the next three ranks for Islamic judges, scholars, and saints, blunting the openness of the existing social order in Sindh. Qani's commitment to individual excellence was curbed by the political situation he found himself in. In other words, *Tuhfat al-Kiram* is Qani's response to the predicament of the old elite of Thatta, who had been shut out of state power by the Kalhora.[103] While they had been able to retain and even consolidate social power in the city after the end of Mughal rule, they were helpless to prevent the rise of new groups patronised by the Kalhora, except by rethinking social order itself.

Qani's social order was also remarkably male. He mentioned only one woman, Bibi Nur Bahari, in the biographical entries on Sindh. Nur Bahari was a saint buried in the market of Nasarpur and is remembered as the second Rabi'a, evoking the most famous female Sufi saint in Muslim history.[104] This constitutes a marked shift from earlier texts. Bakhtavar Khan's seventeenth-century history, *Mir'at al-'Alam*, which was a major source for *Tuhfat al-Kiram*, has an entire section devoted to female saints numbering nearly thirty entries.[105] Fakhri Haravi had compiled a dictionary of female Persian poets for Mah Begum, the wife of a sixteenth-century Arghun ruler of Sindh.[106] Qani's exclusion of women is all the more striking since it is precisely in the eighteenth century when literary production by women and about women grew, even as women assumed positions of political eminence and as literary patrons in the Persianate world.[107]

Qani's silence on women is unusual even in eighteenth-century Sindh. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Shah 'Abdul Latif Bhittai (d. 1752) composed verse on mystic love in Sindhi, which would later become the most significant work of literature in the language.

[102]Their names are Asaram, Udairam, Bishan Gopal, Balchand, Thariyah Mal Baina, Tegh Mal, Munshi Chaturbhuj, Partab Rai Khushdil, Banvali Das Khushnud, Darkahi Mal, Daulat Rai, Daula Ram, Inchand Dastur, Chandar Bhan Rahib, Sri Ram, Mahtab Daula Ram Shauqi, Shaivak Ram 'Utarid, Tik Chand Farhang, Kafir, Shaivak Ram Mukhlis, Migraj, Parsaram Mushtarab, Bhupat Rai Wahshat. '*Maqalat al-Shu'ara*', f. 457b, 458a, 461a, 461a, 462a, 463b, 465b, 468b, 468b, 469b, 470a, 470a, 470a, 474a, 476b, 481b, 490b, 495b, 511b, 515b, 520b, 520b, 523b.

[103]Scholars have pointed out resentment in north India against a new class of powerful merchants and shop-keepers that rose in eighteenth-century Delhi after the invasions of Nadir and Ahmad Shah. One has called them the *umara'-yi jadid*, and noted their participation in Urdu literary culture. See M. A. Syed, 'How Could Urdu Be The Envy of Persian (Rashk-i-Farsi)! The Role of Persian in South Asian Culture and Literature', in *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order*, (eds.) B. Spooner and W. Hanaway (Philadelphia, 2012), pp. 298–299.

[104]'*Tuhfat al-Kiram*', f. 303a.

[105]Bakhtavar Khan, '*Mir'at al-'Alam*', BL APAC Add. 7657, f. 109b–111a.

[106]On *Javahir al-'Aja'ib*, see Maria Szuppe, 'The Female Intellectual Milieu in Timurid and Post-Timurid Herat: Faxri Heravi's Biography of Poetesses, "Javaher al-Ajayeb"', *Oriente Moderno* XV (1996), pp. 119–137.

[107]On the growing presence of women in Persian literature, see S. Sharma, 'Fa'iz Dihlavi's Female-Centered Poems and the Representation of Public Life in Late Mughal Society', in *Affect, Emotion, and Subjectivity in Early Modern Muslim Empires*, (ed.) K. Rizvi (Leiden, 2018). Mughlani Begum became an important figure in the Punjab in the 1750s after the death of her husband and the governor, Mu'in al-Mulk. Ghulam Hussain Khan wrote *Ta'rikh-i Dil Afruz*, a history of Hyderabad Deccan, in 1814 on the request of Chanda Bibi, an influential woman at the court of the Nizam. See G.H. Khan, '*Ta'rikh-i Dil Afruz*', BL APAC Add. 26260.

The ideal subject for Shah Latif, the lover par excellence, was either female or Hindu.[108] *Tuhfat al-Tahirin*, a dictionary of the saints buried in Thatta written by Muhammad A'zam in 1776–77, mentions five shrines of women in the city.[109] Given his intimate familiarity with Thatta, it is unlikely that Qani' was unaware of these sites. Rather, he chose not to include them. On the other hand, in *Maklinamah*, his poem in praise of the Hills of Makli, Qani' mentions women and describes women's religious practices.[110] Looking at other historical sources also suggests a prominent role for women in the politics of Sindh. Miyan 'Abdul Nabi Khan Kalhoro's mother Bahu Begum played an important role in defending Hyderabad against the Talpurs.[111] Maryam Udheja, Miyan Sarfaraz Khan Kalhoro's wife, who was called Sindhrani or the Queen of Sindh, also captured popular imagination.[112] Despite the active engagement of women in the political and social worlds of Sindh, Qani's deliberate omission suggests that his ideal social order had to be male and Muslim. Qani' enacted these closures in his text precisely at a moment when the old guard in the city felt under threat from new groups such as Hindu administrators in the Kalhora government. Hierarchical social order, according to Qani', had to be led by Sayyid and other Muslim elite families. In turn, these families had to be led by men and men alone.

Conclusion

A close and contextual reading of *Tuhfat al-Kiram* in this article has revealed a city in flux. Qani's Sayyid-led hierarchical vision of social order was a response to the great uncertainties of eighteenth-century Thatta. The end of Mughal dispensation in the city had snapped ties of patronage and power enjoyed previously by its Persian-speaking elite. The new Kalhora political system was cobbled together from commanders and administrators from northern Sindh and Punjab, leaving out the gentry of Thatta. Nevertheless, the Kalhora were not a centralising power. This afforded the Muslim gentry of Thatta the opportunity to consolidate power through local state and Sufi institutions. Yet, people with access to political power such as Kalhora governors, administrators and revenue collectors, many of them Hindus, rose rapidly and unimpeded in eighteenth-century Sindh.

It was in this context that Qani' compiled his biographical dictionary of Thatta and Sindh, claiming the centrality of Thatta as a bastion of individual accomplishment, both cultural and religious, and of social power vested in old families. Qani's claim of pre-eminence for Thatta gentry ignored the rulers and reformulated social order as the preserve of classes such as Sayyids, judges, scholars and Sufi saints. He recognised that without political patronage the sources of power to which the gentry had access included the cultivation of individual merit within Persianate values and the consolidation of familial control of local political and Sufi institutions. However, both these bases of power were open to newcomers, threatening the old elite's already uncertain position in the city. In response to this dilemma, Qani's

[108]See S. A. Latif, *Risalo*, (ed.) C. Shackle (Cambridge, 2018); A. Schimmel, *Pain and Grace: A Study of Two Mystical Writers of Eighteenth-Century Muslim India* (Leiden, 1976).

[109]These were the shrines of Bibi Tari, Bibi Fatima, the Abdali sisters, Bibi Rani, the seven sisters. M. A'zam, *Tuhfat al-Tahirin*, pp. 48, 91, 138, 140, 175.

[110]Qani', *Maklinamah*, pp. 69, 54–56.

[111]N. A. Faridi, *Sindh ke Talpur Hukumaran* (Multan, 1984), p. 58.

[112]*Ibid.*, p. 69.

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conception of social order restricted claims of merit only to groups that had historically possessed it. This was the argument advanced through his exemplary biographies. By articulating their claim to power as deriving from belonging to these groups, Qani' sought to exclude Kalhora newcomers, at least in theory. His *tazkirah* was a normative text to be read not as a description of Sindh, but rather as a project to rearticulate social order in Sindh and centre the claims of leadership of the Muslim male gentry of Thatta.

In *Tuhfat al-Kiram*, the values of Persianate culture, which emphasise individual excellence and denominational openness, are curtailed. Yet, Qani's attempt to claim Persianate culture as the singular preserve of the Thatta gentry was not universally recognised. Hindu *amils*, Kalhora kings and Talpur rulers participated to varying degrees in Persianate cultural and literary activities. This stands as testimony of the influence and endurance of Persianate values, which continued to shape the social and cultural world of post-Mughal Sindh. In this context, *Tuhfat al-Kiram* cannot be read as a decisive turning point for the history of Persianate culture in Sindh. It is not an indication of the closure or restriction of the community of Persian in Sindh. Rather, it is a symptom of the social and political transformations taking place in eighteenth-century Sindh, whose cultural consequences were far from settled by *Tuhfat al-Kiram*.

In the years that followed, no one else reproduced this vision of a Sayyid-led social order in Sindh.[113] However, *Tuhfat al-Kiram* became an important and widely-read text on Sindh. It found diverse audiences, including the Talpur rulers, a Hyderabadi Hindu and others.[114] The text's circulation exceeded its own restricted vision of social order. The openness of the Persian-speaking community remained robust through the nineteenth century, at a time when colonial officials were busy reimagining Sindh as a society fractured along lines of tribe, race and religion. Even as *Tuhfat al-Kiram* makes an argument for Sayyid priority, it reveals, through a contextual reading, the open society and culture that shaped it. Sayyid priority in Thatta and Sindh was not a transhistorical fact, but rather a historically-specific argument in eighteenth-century Sindh, where political power in fact resided elsewhere, with the Kalhora, their commanders, and their Hindu administrators, and where the social world continued to be joined together by the values of Persianate culture.

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[113] *Tuhfat al-Kiram* was used as an important source for Shaikh Muhammad A'zam Thattavi's *Tuhfat al-Tahirin* (1780), a text on Sufi sites of pilgrimage in Thatta, and *Hi'at al-'Alam* (1793–94), a world geography. See Azam, *Tuhfat al-Tahirin*. A'zam, '*Hi'at al-'Alam*', undated, Sindhi Adabi Board MS-38.

[114] The Talpurs commissioned an illuminated manuscript of *Tuhfat al-Kiram* between 1829–32. The Sindh Archives also contains a *Tuhfat* manuscript whose scribe is a Hindu from Hyderabad by the name Monumal, son of Kandinamal. See Qani', '*Tuhfat al-Kiram*', 1829–32, British Library APAC Add. 21589; '*Tuhfat al-Kiram*', 1808, Sindh Archives MS367/348.