The Politics of Pleasure: Wajid 'Ali Shah and his manuscript, 'Ishqnama*

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Abstract

This article deals with an 1849 semi-autobiographical manuscript, *'Ishqnama*, from Avadh (present-day Uttar Pradesh), to explore the courtly politics of the last nawab (ruler) of Avadh, Wajid 'Ali Shah. I argue that, in the *'Ishqnama*, a language of love and sex exists and portends a logic of political comportment and control between ruler and lover, ruler and servant. After surveying the importance and meaning of the manuscript during Wajid 'Ali Shah's reign, I examine the dissemination of the handwritten manuscript via lithograph copies, tracing the specific textual and visual elements that have been obfuscated and manipulated in the transition from a handwritten design to print technology. I argue that the political content of the *'Ishqnama* has been neglected because of the material differences between the lithograph copies and the manuscript format and because of the sexual nature of the *'Ishqnama* narrative.

Introduction

During the eighteenth century, the East India Company and its merchants adopted Mughal symbols and customs to legitimate their administration

while also accommodating 'Indian forms of rule'.[1] With the consolidation of British imperialism in the nineteenth century, however, a discursive shift occurred. During this time, the British increasingly justified their political intervention by establishing themselves as a moral and judicial counterpoint to South Asian power structures and court culture. In this political strategy of differentiation, the British undertook the project of 'civilizing' indigenous courts such as the nawabs of Avadh, India.

This new imperial turn is evident in the historiographical and artistic reception of the last nawab of Avadh, Wajid 'Ali Shah. Wajid 'Ali Shah was continually earmarked as an alien 'other', and his artistic practices have been scrutinized in accordance with this view. He reigned for only a short time, from 1847 to 1856. He shepherded the nawabate to its closure in 1856 after refusing to sign a demeaning treaty with the British government, which responded by officially annexing Avadh, forcing Wajid 'Ali to abdicate and driving him into exile. In part stemming from his decision not to engage in a physical confrontation with the British during his dethronement, Wajid 'Ali is remembered as little more than an 'oriental prince' who prioritized his sexual pleasures over proper governance.

Visual substantiation of this narrative is provided by an infamous oil painting of Wajid 'Ali, in which he appears grossly corpulent and baring his left nipple.[2] This image has been deployed as part of the colonial narrative that Wajid 'Ali transgressed proper bodily regulation to express his deviant subjectivity and, by extension, establish a deviant government.[3] Besides the charge of notable decadence, the painting also speaks to Wajid 'Ali Shah's sponsorship of the arts, as he patronized oil painting and the book arts during his reign. In particular, he was interested in theatrical performances, devising musical dramas and writing plays both in Lucknow, where his court was located when he was officially king, and in Calcutta, where he

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[1] Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-century India: The British in Bengal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 8–9, 16.

[2] Wajid 'Ali Shah, oil portrait, *circa* 1880, Hussainabad Picture Gallery, Lucknow. The image is reproduced in *Lucknow, Then and Now*, (ed.) Rosie Llewellyn-Jones with photographs by Ravi Kapoor (Mumbai: Marg Publications on behalf of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, 2003), pp. 16.

[3] Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 219.

relocated during his exile.[4] Wajid 'Ali wrote his own poetry under the *takhallus* (pen name) of Akhtar. Forty-three books are attributed to him.[5]

Wajid 'Ali Shah is therefore remembered in two ways: as an Oriental prince and as a devotee of the arts. These two facets come together in the *'Ishqnama* manuscript, completed in 1849, which was a versified semi-autobiography of Wajid 'Ali's life.[6] Over the course of 131 *dastans* (episodes) and 103 accompanying miniatures, the *'Ishqnama* manuscript recounts how Wajid 'Ali maintained his lovers, how he wisely disposed of them, and the lovesickness wrought by his affairs. The *'Ishqnama* also delineates important ceremonial rituals such as the enthronement of his father, Nawab Amjad 'Ali Shah, and provides information on everyday household governance such as the role of eunuchs and his lovers in the court.[7]

Historians have perpetuated the idea of the *'Ishqnama* as a perverse text by quoting it by way of a so-called translation into Urdu known as the *Parikhana*, which elides the *'Ishqnama*'s original Urdu poetic structure and its 103 images by transforming the *masnavi* (narrative poetry) format into prose.[8] These authors purport to translate the *'Ishqnama* from Persian into Urdu. In actuality, the *'Ishqnama* is written in Urdu and contains Persian chapter titles with some Persian lexicon. Because the *'Ishqnama* is almost never viewed in its original manuscript format and is instead read through the *Parikhana*'s simplified prose, Wajid 'Ali Shah

[4] Ibid., p. 220; Syed Masood Hasan Rizvi Adeeb, *Lakhnau ka Shahi Istej* (Lucknow: Kitab Nagar, 1968).

[5] The estimate is between 43 and 60; see Victoria Memorial Hall, *Musammi Ba Banni*, Manuscript C. 898, as quoted in Ranbir Sinh, *Wajid Ali Shah: The Tragic King* (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 2002), pp. 142–143; Kaukab Qadr Sajjad 'Ali Mirza, *Intikhāb-i Vājid 'Alī Shāh Akhtar* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdū Akādmī, 1984), p. 19.

[6] Royal Collection Trust, Wajid 'Ali Shah, *'Ishqnama* accession no. RCIN 1005035, fol. 445r.

[7] Muhammad Isa Waley summarized the *'Ishqnama* in 'Islamic Manuscripts in the British Royal Collection: A Concise Catalogue', *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, vol. 6, 1992, pp. 15–16. Waley also numbered the paintings, which corresponded to the folios' older page numbers written in Persian. I have found his numbering to be slightly off, so I have renumbered the textual folios. I have retained his numbering system for the paintings but not for the text so that art historians can still refer to his catalogue for reference.

[8] Historians have actually utilized two alternate texts that are translations of the *'Ishqnama*: the *Parikhana* and the *Mahal-i Shah-i Khana*. Both texts purport to translate the *'Ishqnama* from Persian to Urdu. In reality, both these later texts and the *'Ishqnama* are in Urdu; the authors of the *Parikhana* and the *Mahal-i Shah-i Khana* have only transformed the *'Ishqnama*'s poetry and images into a simplified prose.

has been read as decadent, sexually excessive, and in a state of moral decay.[9] Such a reading is dependent on colonial norms for how sexuality ought to be expressed and 'what constitutes sexuality'.[10] From a colonial vantage point, the expression of sexual desire is taken to be a private affair. Because the 'Ishqnama was widely circulated, the manuscript can be taken as a sign of Wajid 'Ali Shah 'confessing' his private matters to a public audience.[11] Such an analysis adds a layer of social stigma both to the 'Ishqnama and to Wajid 'Ali Shah. By focusing on these later translations and lithograph copies known as the *Parikhana*, we can trace the life of this manuscript and the various linguistic and visual transformations it underwent.

The manuscript is known as the 'Ishqnama because of a Persian label attached to its front cover. The label reads 'nazm 'Ishqnāma hindī bā tasvīrāt', which translates into 'verses of the story of love in Hindi with images'.[12] The root of the title 'Ishqnama is the word 'ishq, which is defined 'as comprising a number of feelings, both sacred and profane, and a complex of emotions centring on madness and violent obsession'.[13] The word has a Persian and Arabic etymology and is a frequent theme in mystical Sufi literature. As bookends, the first dastan in the 'Ishqnama opens with Wajid 'Ali's first love affair, which commences at the tender age of eight, and one of the 'Ishqnama's final half-verses also harkens back to the title, stating: 'This love, a story of women, has concluded.'[14] This arc is central to understanding the texts and images within. Contrary to present criticism that disparages the

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[9] Even Karl Marx in 1853 famously argued that these princely states in India, including Avadh, were in a state of decay. Karl Marx, 'The East India Question', *New York Daily Tribune*, 25 July 1853, in by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, 1853–1854*, vol. 12 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), pp. 148–156. For an overview of the decadence paradigm and a rejoinder to this historiography, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Introduction', in *The Mughal State, 1526–1750* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[10] Shad Naved, *The Erotic Conceit: History, Sexuality and the Urdu Ghazal* (PhD diss., UCLA, 2012), p. 19.

[11] Historian G. D. Bhatnagar even considers this book to be a 'private diary'. G. D. Bhatnagar, *Awadh under Wājid 'Alī Shāh* (Varanasi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1968), p. 6. See Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), for an interrogation of the public–private distinction in a pre-modern context of South Asia.

[12] The 'Ishqnama has also acquired the English title: *Customs of the Court of Oudh*.

[13] Aditya Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379–1545* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 71.

[14] 'Ishqnama, fol. 444r: 'kyā 'ishq niswān ka nāma tamām.'

'*Ishqnama* and its author as obscene, as a whole, the manuscript projects Wajid 'Ali's sovereignty. For instance, it discusses Wajid 'Ali's sexual affair within a palace setting, positioning the community and the spatial arrangements of the household at the centre of the narrative. Titles of rank and ancestral ties are important details included throughout the manuscript. Wajid 'Ali also reflects on his ability to control and punish his sexual partners. As a result, his lovers' bodies and the space of his sexual encounters act as symbols of his power. This becomes evident once scholars engage with the original manuscript with its visual imagery rather than the reworked versions.

The genre of the masnavi taps into an erotology that has Indo-Persianate connections with courtly literature, mysticism, and politics.[15] Since the *Ishqnama* is consistent with the masnavi framework both structurally and thematically, Wajid 'Ali Shah is able to more forcefully focus on the concept of erotics and of 'ishq, blending historical reality and fiction. Structurally masnavis typically begin with a *bismillah* (introductory formula), followed by *hamd* (praise to Allah), *na't* (eulogy of the Prophet Muhammad), and *madh* (laudation to a particular ruler or donor).[16] The *Ishqnama* follows this standard masnavi opening by retaining the bismillah, hamd, and na't.[17] The madh is not present because Wajid 'Ali Shah is both the supposed author of this text and also its patron. He does not praise himself, but praises the rights of 'ishq and of God.[18] In one of the first hemistiches, Wajid 'Ali engulfs his life and the entire world with 'ishq: '[He is] love in the earth and love in the sky.'[19] Throughout this beginning verse, the earth, sky, past literary lovers, and other elemental objects are relationally connected through 'ishq and through God's love. The line could also be translated as 'Earth is love. Sky is love', which is a standard trope in

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[15] Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic*. Aditya Behl, 'The Magic Doe: Desire and Narrative in a Hindavi Sufi Romance, circa 1503', in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750*, (ed.) Richard M. Eaton (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 205. See also Julie Scott Meisami, 'Mixed Prose and Verse in Medieval Persian Literature', in *Prosimetrum: Cross-cultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, (eds) Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), p. 298.

[16] Anna A. Suvorova, (trans.) M. Osama Faruqi, *Masnavī: A Study of Urdu Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 7.

[17] *Ishqnama*, fol. 1v– 2v.

[18] In contrast, because it is of a different genre, the *Divan* of Wajid 'Ali Shah does not have a hamd, a na't, or a madh.

[19] *Ishqnama*, fol. 2v: '[Z]amīn 'ishq hī āsmān 'ishq hī.'

mystical Islam and its 'all-embracing notion of love'.[20] Thus, the poetry in the 'Ishqnama can be said to be deeply connected to Sufi principles of God's all-encompassing love. The initial invocation of the 'Ishqnama also thematically sustains an engagement with the concept of erotics present within the masnavi genre by citing famous lovers from the masnavi canon such as Layla and Majnun, and Farhad and Shirin. By braiding these past literary characters into his present historical reality of amorous relationships, Wajid 'Ali Shah creates a hybrid text that seeks to transcend the line between fiction and non-fiction. The reader of the 'Ishqnama manuscript must contend with these multilayered meaning of erotics in which 'ishq is a Sufic, political, fictional, and materially present concept. It is worth mentioning that the later 'Ishqnama copies in lithograph and print form excised this opening poetry because it did not translate well into prose.

The 'Ishqnama has formulaic principles similar to those of another genre category: the vaqa'i (text of historical events). A vaqa'i chronicles the life and events of a historical person. As such, the word has been translated into English as *autobiography*.[21] The core principle of an autobiography is that it is a life story narrated and written by the person who experienced it. Autobiography as a genre has the sheen of 'authenticity'.[22] In that sense, autobiographies purport to be truth-telling and their veracity stems mainly from the author 'speaking directly' to their audience.[23] The form of the autobiography is also malleable, and it is not necessarily mutually exclusive to fiction. As Paul de Man has argued, the line between autobiography and fiction is 'undecisive'.[24] Paul de Man further differentiates between these two modes by setting a limit on the extent to which the material traces of fiction can interact with the truthfulness of autobiography, stating that 'autobiography seems to depend on actual and potentially verifiable

[20] C. M. Naim, *Zikr-i-Mir: The Autobiography of the Eighteenth-century Mughal Poet Mir Muhammad Taqi Mir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 193.

[21] Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[22] Chloe Martinez, 'The Autobiographical Pose: Life Narrative and Religious Transformation in the Mirabai Tradition', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2018, p. 418.

[23] David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (eds), *Telling Lives in India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 4.

[24] Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 94, no. 5, 1979, p. 920.

events in a less ambivalent way than fiction does'.[25] The 'Ishqnama seems to be autobiographical, as Wajid Ali Shah declares the text an act of self-representation through his use of the first-person singular. By adopting the 'I' form, Wajid 'Ali Shah declares himself the subject of this manuscript, which gives the text a rhetorical force of truthfulness.[26] It does veer into fiction, however, as, although the events portrayed in the 'Ishqnama are verifiable, at the same time, it draws metaphors, plot points, and allusions from literary characters who inhabit the fictional world of various masnavis. As mentioned, the characters of Layla and Majnun are directly and indirectly cited in the 'Ishqnama text. As such, Wajid 'Ali Shah and the events that take place in the 'Ishqnama are both historical and fictional, the boundaries of which seem more blurred than in more conventional autobiographies. Hence, I have labelled the text semi-autobiographical. Even when I renarrativize the history of the 'Ishqnama and its copies, it has been difficult to distinguish Wajid 'Ali Shah, the historical figure, from Wajid 'Ali Shah, the literary persona of a masnavi and vaqa'i manuscript. This conflation occurs even more easily in the copies since the literary components of Wajid 'Ali Shah's character are concealed by the prose format.

This article proceeds in three steps. The following section introduces the 'Ishqnama into its historical context in order to reconstruct Wajid 'Ali Shah's political intentions in sponsoring this manuscript. I provide a brief history of the production of the 'Ishqnama before turning to how Wajid 'Ali's courtly self-image was connected to his mastery over the management of his lovers and courtiers. I call this an 'erotics of sovereignty', in which desirous attachments become the cornerstone of how Wajid 'Ali Shah creates affective and political relationships within his court. As a result, in his scheme of erotics, in which his political and personal interactions are imbued with desire and sex, power operates in a strict hierarchical fashion, with him at the top, rather than in a dispersive or horizontal manner through a web of relationships. He does so by placing his corporeal body, and thereby loyalty to his body, at centre stage. This allows Wajid 'Ali Shah to flatten the complexities of his relationships, as the personal details of his female companions are provided only to service Wajid 'Ali Shah's power as a ruler and as a lover.

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (eds), *Speaking of the Self: Gender, Performance and Autobiography in South Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 144.

The last two sections are about the discursive constraints placed on the *'Ishqnama* since it has been read mostly through its print and lithograph copies, produced from 1848 to 1965, which are colloquially known as *Parikhana*. In the third section, by turning to the copies of the *'Ishqnama*, I trace the various textual and visual transformations in the *Parikhana*, including the complete omission of the *'Ishqnama*'s paintings. The fourth section reviews how the sexuality of Wajid 'Ali Shah was a site of offence under the colonial gaze. As such, scholars have been less likely to focus on the intimacy conveyed in the *'Ishqnama*'s text, not so much because the text was devoid of politics, but because it seemingly echoes the colonial narrative. In this light, I reassess how the *'Ishqnama* has been received in academic discourse and popular culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, either diverging from or enhancing this colonial framework of debauchery. The heart of this article is about the afterlife of the *'Ishqnama* manuscript: the practices of transmission that have flattened the *'Ishqnama*'s political nuances and glossed it into little more than a sexual autobiography.

Ur-manuscript of the '*Ishqnama*

In this section, I seek to address the structure of the *'Ishqnama* and its politics of intimacy and sex. First I consider the *'Ishqnama* and its relationship to other similar historical and literary texts such as Wajid 'Ali Shah's *Divan*. In rereading the *'Ishqnama*, I argue that Wajid 'Ali Shah deployed the text and visuals to showcase his sovereignty through the depiction of truthful events such as the punishment of his lovers and management of his estate. Factual historical events are only one feature of the manuscript as Wajid 'Ali Shah weaves intimate sexual moments into his narrative in a hyperbolic, emotive language to emphasize how his management of his household mirrors his handling of the Avadh state. Wajid 'Ali Shah undertakes such a balance by utilizing Urdu poetry to assert his connection to an Indo-Persianate past and to align himself with Indo-Persianate rules of proper comportment for leaders, such as justice. Thus, the manuscript does not disavow pleasure and desire, but instead constrains them within the bounds of Persian and Urdu poetry. My brief foray into the structure of the *'Ishqnama* demonstrates that the language and aesthetics of sexual practices were a foundational component of Wajid 'Ali Shah's political stagecraft.

Wajid 'Ali Shah was born in 1822 and was named heir apparent by his father, Amjad 'Ali Shah (r. 1842–47), in 1842 when the father bypassed his

eldest son in favour of the younger brother. The complete *'Ishqnama* with painting and handwritten calligraphy was completed in 1849, when Wajid 'Ali Shah was 27 years old and had been on the throne for two years. It is unclear whether Wajid 'Ali Shah began the manuscript while still a prince or immediately after he ascended to power. The event with which the *'Ishqnama* begins is, as stated previously, Wajid 'Ali Shah's embarking on his first sexual affair at age eight. Throughout this opening vignette and the rest of the historically specific episodes, the reader cannot be certain whether Wajid 'Ali Shah kept a diary of his sexual behaviour and then mined this diary for his literary source material, or whether he created a new childhood narrative for himself in 1849. Compounding this confusion is the fact that Wajid 'Ali Shah prevented any worker credit, as there is no signature of a calligrapher or artist to be found within the manuscript. As the manuscript's sole author and poet, Wajid 'Ali Shah seemingly has complete narrative control, which leaves open the question of time. When exactly did Wajid 'Ali Shah create this manuscript, and who exactly was his intended audience?

The year 1849 was an important one for Wajid 'Ali Shah. He completed two immensely elaborate manuscripts: the *'Ishqnama* and the *Divan* (a collection of poems). Both manuscripts are physically quite large: the *'Ishqnama* is approximately 46.2 by 30.2 centimetres, while the *Divan* measures 41.2 by 26 centimetres. Their sizes indicate that, when the manuscripts were displayed in a courtly setting, only a few courtiers could huddle around them, forcing an intimate viewing experience. In addition, they both have the same cream-coloured paper and *hashiya* (border) design of gold and red. The *Divan* even includes a miniature of Wajid 'Ali Shah sitting on his throne that bears an uncanny resemblance to throne scenes in the *'Ishqnama*.[27] Because of their visual resonances, the *'Ishqnama* and *Divan* should be seen together as part of Wajid 'Ali's early imperial message. That both manuscripts are written in a poetic register speaks to the fact that Wajid 'Ali considered poetry to enhance his sovereignty and the perfect means for conveying his authority. Moreover, in 1849, he minted a new coin. And, on a personal note, he witnessed the death of one of his sons from smallpox.

That same year also saw the arrival of a cantankerous British Resident, William Henry Sleeman, who, within his first five weeks as acting British

[27] Khalili collection, *Divan* accession no. MSS916, fol. 1. Throne scene in the *'Ishqnama*, fol. 357r.

Resident, had pushed for Wajid 'Ali's removal.[28] Sleeman travelled through the Avadhi countryside collecting information for his report, which ended up accusing Wajid 'Ali Shah and his administration of devastating Avadh financially and socially. In his two-volume memoir, Sleeman states that he witnessed a proliferation of crime, bribery, and extortion throughout Avadh. Wajid 'Ali was described as 'a crazy imbecile who is led like a child' by the hands of a few 'fiddlers, eunuchs, and poetasters'.[29] Sleeman suggested, in other words, that Wajid 'Ali Shah was more interested in poets, eunuchs, and dancers than in running a responsible administration. The British government would later use Sleeman's report to justify its complete absorption of Avadhi territory.

While it would be tempting to suggest that Wajid 'Ali created his manuscript to provide a direct counterpoint to Sleeman's account, manuscript production was too intensive a process to have been completed in the span of a few months. Given the high quality of the images and the elaborate hashiya, the 'Ishqnama's production must have started at least a year before Sleeman's arrival, though Wajid 'Ali Shah could have expedited the process once news circulated that Sleeman planned to submit such an antagonistic report. Indeed, a copy of the 'Ishqnama currently in a depository in Pakistan contains the date of 1848, which suggests that the 'Ishqnama was most likely planned out a year before Sleeman's arrival (see the third section of this article). In either case, Wajid 'Ali Shah commissioned two manuscripts in a poetic register that espoused intimacy and intimate bonds as foundational to his rule, which was at odds with Sleeman's account. While Sleeman saw the members of his court as a liability, Wajid 'Ali himself saw these dancers, musicians, and lovers as an asset to his power.

The 'Ishqnama, as mentioned, has been read as an autobiographical text and has been taken as a chronicle of the true events of Wajid 'Ali Shah's life. While 'Ishqnama does follow principles of the vaqa'i genre by centring on the historical life of Wajid 'Ali Shah, it also contains elements of the genre of the masnavi (literary narrative), especially in its opening lines and its thematic emphasis on the sacrality of love.[30] In tandem with the

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[28] Sleeman even declared that 'the King's [that is Wajid 'Ali Shah's] ambition seems to be limited to the reputation of being the best drum-beater, dancer, and poet of the day. He is utterly unfit to reign'. William Henry Sleeman, *Journey through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849–1850*, vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley, 1858), p. 386.

[29] Ibid.

[30] *'Ishqnama*, fol. 1v–2v.

parameters of these multiple genre categories, the *'Ishqnama* positions Wajid 'Ali Shah's personal and sexual life as an affective bond for his courtly politics. Wajid 'Ali Shah reveals details of his life at court such as the enforcement of social and courtly hierarchies, the aggrandizement of his masculinity vis-à-vis his heterosexuality, and the disciplining and punishment of members of his court, all with varying shades of veracity.

In the *'Ishqnama*, Wajid 'Ali Shah never establishes a direct connection between his manuscript and older historical memoirs, but he does provide a genealogy of his royal investments for proper comportment. In the *'Ishqnama*, during a musical celebration, Wajid 'Ali Shah makes note of historical figures who have influenced his courtly practices. He states:

If I heavily drink red wine / Then the foundation of pleasure (*'ishrat*) has been laid
   The heart of desire is prepared in this world / Through the beautiful agreeable Parīkhāna
   Bygone (*sābiq*) sovereigns (*salātīn*) are celebrated / Because of their great many customs and manners (*sha'ār*)
   Such as Muḥammad Shāh of Delhi / Barāhīm 'Adil Shāh [of Bijapur], who were renowned
   Even though they were both kings (*bādshāh*) / By holding celebratory parties (*mahfil*), they had a path of pleasure (*'ishrat*)
   … Every year they continuously gave their gifts (*'atā*) / Thousands of gifts (*bilak*) they gave. A hundred thousand.
   To the beautiful women who were cheerful and enchanting / They gave them an education in the sciences (*'ilm*) of dance and other riches (*ganā*)
   They titled these women 'envy of the moon' / They were all notable (*mushtahar*) singers.[31]

Here, Wajid 'Ali Shah is creating a historical lineage of proper manners (*sha'ār*) and behaviour by recalling Indo-Muslim rulers who favoured the arts, such as Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II (r. 1580–1627) and Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–48). These citations validate Wajid 'Ali Shah's artistic and courtly investments in pleasure and support his creation of the music school, the Parīkhāna. Outside the *'Ishqnama*, Aloys Sprenger notably catalogued the library of the nawabs between 1848 and 1850, and compiled a list of major manuscripts in Persian, Arabic, and Hindi circulating in the court.[32] Within this catalogue, neither works authored by Adil Shah nor those of Muhammad Shah are directly mentioned. Therefore, a complete literary genealogy of the *'Ishqnama* may be impossible to reconstruct.

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[31] Ibid., fol. 337r.
[32] Aloys Sprenger, *A Catalogue of the Arabic, Persian and Hindustani Manuscripts of the Libraries of the King of Oudh*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1854).

While that front may remain opaque, Wajid ‘Ali Shah makes it quite clear that he is aligning himself with the norms of Ibrahim ‘Adil Shah II and Muhmmad Shah, notable musical patrons and poets who patronized aural poetics featuring sensual tropes to enhance their power.[33] With these investments in mind, it is no wonder that *‘Ishqnama* was completed in a poetic register and positions the emotional power of desire as a cornerstone of Wajid ‘Ali Shah's sovereignty.

An important detail of the *‘Ishqnama* text is the rumination on anecdotal accounts of servants' physical appearances as a means to reinforcing Wajid ‘Ali Shah's dominance. Wajid ‘Ali Shah in the *‘Ishqnama* surveys the bodies around him, stating, for example, that one lover, Rehiman, ‘is not beautiful, nor is her face insipid’.[34] He discloses personalized descriptions to both create and evince intimate bonds with his courtiers. While furnishing intimate details of the real-life women in Wajid ‘Ali's court, the *‘Ishqnama* also visually represents them in a strict social hierarchy that reinforces the centrality of Wajid ‘Ali's power. Throughout the *‘Ishqnama*, Wajid ‘Ali Shah is the one of the few figures who is depicted with a halo. There is also a clear hierarchy among the females in his zenana. Wajid ‘Ali mentions that the stipends and allowances he gives to the women in his court are distributed according to rank. At times, women received a ‘hundred-rupee monthly allowance’.[35] In one dastan, Wajid ‘Ali Shah provides a full list of his lovers' names and the new names he conferred on them once he was on the throne. Their names vary slightly, but the appellations affixed at the end are always *bēgum*, *parī*, or *sahiba*, which indicate their place within his court.[36] For exalted women in the *‘Ishqnama*, their faces are hidden behind screens and plants. Take, for instance, the miniature of Wajid ‘Ali Shah's grandmother, Maryam Markani, whose face is shielded by a halo (Figure 1).[37] This is one of many images in which

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[33] The scholarship on Ibrahim ‘Adil Shah II is vast. For a brief overview of the conceits of music, poetry, and pleasure in regard to his rule, see Ronald Inden, ‘Paradise on Earth: The Deccan Sultanates’, in *Garden and Landscape Practices in Pre-colonial India: Histories from the Deccan*, (eds) Daud Ali and Emma J. Flatt (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2012), pp. 74–97; Nazir Ahmad, *Kitab-i Nauras* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Kendra, 1956), pp. 66–67. For Muhammad Shah, see Zahir Uddin Malik, *The Reign of Muhammad Shah, 1719–1748* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1977), pp. 342–405.

[34] *‘Ishqnama*, fol. 3v: ‘jamāl ūskā har cand āīsa nathā/ magar bi namak uskā cherā nathā.’

[35] Ibid., fol. 410v.

[36] Ibid., fol. 350r–351r.

[37] Ibid., fol. 12r.

Figure 1. *'Ishqnama*, folio 12r. The prince falls in love with a visitor, Hajji Khanum, who has an infant child, while in the company of Maryam Markani. 1250/1834–35. RCIN 1005035. *Source*: Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020.

women of high stature are given licence to shield their faces from the painter's brush.

When Wajid 'Ali introduces a new woman or lover in his manuscript, he includes information about her rank and social status. If she is a servant, he lists the family that she is employed under. Social and filial relations are stressed. Regarding one of his servants, Bandi Umda Wali, Wajid 'Ali mentions that he met her before he was crowned king (*takht*

shāhī pe), when she worked in the house of Jahan (Numa).[38] He later decides to give Bandi Umda Wali the proper name (*riẓā*) of Matlub al-Sultan Hazrat Begum and to pay her a monthly salary of Rs 2,500.[39] For another servant, Wajid 'Ali states he caught a glimpse of Amer Baksh while she was living in Hazoor Bagh. Through the intercession of Chote Khan, one of the drummers in Wajid 'Ali's theatre, Amer Baksh is able to communicate with Wajid 'Ali and to be given signs of his faith (*'aqīdat*).[40] After that, Wajid 'Ali finally is able to meet Amer Baksh in person. Wajid 'Ali Shah emphasizes these social and filial relations to show that these women are vetted and that they have some kind of pre-existing relationship with members of his court before he allows them into his home.

In an effort to preserve a genealogy with his father's and grandfather's courts, Wajid 'Ali retains members of their staff.[41] Because of this, Wajid 'Ali decides to marry some of his late father's servants while freeing others. One such servant, Paro, who was previously employed in an exalted (*khalad*) house in Faizabad, enters Wajid 'Ali's protection and is addressed thereafter as Arghawan Pari. In the later *Parikhana* copies, scribes suggest that Paro was the servant of none other than the Mirza Nasir al-din Haidar's late mother, Nawab Badshah Begum.[42] In the *'Ishqnama*, the name of Nawab Badshah Begum is never evoked, but only inferred. Through this act of employment, Wajid 'Ali positions himself closer to the nawabi bloodline and its past courtly structure. In another instance, a courtier, Mir Muhammad Mehdi, recommends Umrao Begum as the new superintendent officer (*'ahd-daroga*) for Wajid 'Ali Shah's palace. Wajid 'Ali accepts Mir Muhammad Mehdi's request because Umrao Begum is the sister of Nasir al-din Haidar's wife, Qudsia Begum, and her brother is Wafa Beg.[43] Despite her impressive lineage, Wajid 'Ali is dismissive of her as his servant because of her corpulent (*farbih*) physique and the large number of moles on her face. Against his own sexual desires, Wajid 'Ali Shah keeps Umrao Begum in his employ because she preserves the relationship between his father's cousin and his elite courtier. Wajid 'Ali Shah even mentions that he

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[38] Ibid., fol. 374v.
[39] Ibid., fol. 377r–379v.
[40] Ibid., fol. 348v, 350v.
[41] Ibid., fol. 408r–411v.
[42] Ibid., fol. 410v.
[43] Ibid., fol. 317v–318v.

permitted some of the female servants who were in his late grandfather's zenana to go to Karbala.[44]

Notably, he discusses when the people in his household are connected to the Prophet or to Quranic and noble ancestors. In describing his first nikah marriage, to Naik Akhtar, who would later be titled Nawab Khas Mahal, Wajid 'Ali notes that she was from the noble (*ashraf*) and exalted (*buland*) household of al-Daula 'Ali, also known as Ahmad 'Ali Khan. Jani Khanam, the grandmother of Wajid 'Ali Shah, was the first to introduce Naik Akhtar as a possible match for Wajid 'Ali because of her lineage (*nisbat*).[45] In another dastan, Wajid 'Ali mentions that his uncle-in-law, 'Ali Naqi Khan, was a sayyid—a title that suggests he was descended from the Prophet Muhammad.[46] Wajid 'Ali extends these noble connections to his servants. He states that Insha Allah Khan, who was a great poet (*shā'ir*) of the imagination and an eloquent poet (*sukhun-dān*) with intelligence (*sukhun-fahm*) and a sweet voice (*shīrīn-maqāl*), had three happy daughters. The eldest was Hederi Begum Muba Husain, the middle child was Muhammadi Begum, and the youngest (*khurd-tar*) was Nanhi Begum. They were escorted into the service of Wajid 'Ali Shah's mother, where they recited marsiya during Muharram and the Urdu play of the Hindu god Indra.[47] Thus, these three sisters and their connection to Wajid 'Ali Shah's court are first connected to Insha Allah Khan, a famous polyglot poet in Lucknow with ties to the Mughal court.

Through his marriages and by employing household servants, Wajid 'Ali Shah links himself to Islamicate symbols of power such as descendants of the Prophet. As Gail Minault argues, Muslim men were subject to new pressures both political and socio-economic in nature throughout the nineteenth century as a result of colonial encounters. Consequently, the term *sharif*, which translates into 'noble' and which had a prior connotation of 'birthright to position or wealth', was subsequently transformed into a description of good character.[48] Therefore, in the nineteenth century, *ashraf*, the plural form of *sharif*,

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[44] Ibid., fol. 409r.

[45] Ibid., fol. 18v.

[46] Ibid., fol. 108r.

[47] Ibid., fol. 36v–37r. The *'Ishqnama* states that they were Mir Insha's daughters (*dukhtar*). In the *Parikhana*, the author says they were his granddaughters (*nawāsīān*). Tehsen Sarwari, *Parīkhāna* (Rampur: Delhi Printing Press, 1965), p. 29.

[48] Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 4–5.

denoted respectability in terms of birth, religion, material resources, and caste. In the *'Ishqnama*, a lineage that goes back to the Prophet Muhammad could be a claim about Wajid 'Ali Shah's piety or his noble character; in another sense, furthermore, it allows Wajid 'Ali Shah to elevate the caste standing of the women in his court into ashraf.[49] Colonial officers consistently remarked on how many low-caste subjects made up Wajid 'Ali Shah's retinue.[50] By providing citational claims of the ties between the women of his court and the Prophet, Wajid 'Ali Shah rebuts these charges by making them members of an elevated status group. At the same time, Wajid 'Ali Shah rewrites the record by blurring the gradations of power among the women of his court by indicating that were all of a high social status when in fact they came from various socio-economic positions.[51] In reality, given their unequal social roles, these women must have experienced a range of different forms of physical and psychic violence.

Throughout the *'Ishqnama*, Wajid 'Ali Shah casts only females as objects of desire. The heterosexualization of the pictorial motifs in the *'Ishqnama* was a response to the colonial discourse that sought to undermine Wajid 'Ali Shah and previous nawabs through the accusation of homosexuality (see the fourth section of this article). In a different context, Afsaneh Najmabadi has argued that, during Iranian nationalism, there was a disappearance of the young boy as the site of romantic and mystical desire as a direct result of contact with Europeans.[52] The case of the *'Ishqnama* and Wajid 'Ali Shah reinforces Najmabadi's argument. Because of the colonial discourse surrounding previous nawabs, Wajid 'Ali Shah selected only females as his lovers, not only out of his personal predilection, but also to combat the colonial discourse of effeminization and homoeroticism. The only males who figure predominately in the *'Ishqnama* are eunuchs. Unlike the females in his zenana, the eunuchs continue to swear their loyalty to

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[49] Ghaus Ansari, *Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of Culture Contact* (Lucknow, Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society, 1960), pp. 30–36. Juan Ricardo Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shī'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 72–84.

[50] Sleeman, *Journey through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849–1850*, p. 386. Bhatnagar, *Awadh Under Wājid 'Alī Shāh*, pp. 104, 199.

[51] Michael H. Fisher, 'Women and the Feminine in the Court and Culture of Awadh', in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, (ed.) Gavin R. G. Hambly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 491–492.

[52] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Wajid 'Ali Shah. For Wajid 'Ali Shah, they are never desired, and they are highly trusted.

Wajid 'Ali Shah incorporates different female bedfellows from a range of classes and races into his court and zenana. By doing so, he stages his marriages and sexual affairs to showcase his virility and imperial power.[53] Each lover adds to Wajid 'Ali Shah's power, since 'symbolically the world, like his lovers', is considered 'under his protection'.[54] To adopt an adage, the personal was political. This is especially true for rulers like Wajid 'Ali Shah, whose sexuality needed to be mastered, since it translated into an 'idealised masculinity of kingship'.[55] In the *'Ishqnama*, Wajid 'Ali Shah makes sure to differentiate between mut'a, short-term marriages, and nikah marriages, which are permanent. He is emphatic that his lovers are under his protection, which ultimately displays and reinforces his kingship. However, Wajid 'Ali Shah is very specific about who exactly is granted the benefits of his royal guardianship.

Throughout the *'Ishqnama*, Wajid 'Ali Shah performs his political sovereignty by emphasizing and idealizing his heterosexuality. This is evident in the dastan featuring Sahiba Khanum, an older servant in the employ of the nawabi court.[56] At this point, Wajid 'Ali Shah is 19 years old and is married to his first wife, Naik Akhtar. A love blossoms between Wajid 'Ali Shah and Sahiba Khanum as she sings ghazals and dances for him, and they revel in their shared affection for ganjifa cards.[57] During the course of his love affair with Sahiba Khanum, his wife suffers a miscarriage of their daughter, Murtaza Begum. The section, which directly follows the news of Murtaza Begum's death, is a matla' ghazal that is devoted neither to his wife nor to his deceased daughter, but to Sahiba Khanum. Wajid 'Ali Shah actively silences his wife's sorrow within the *'Ishqnama*'s narrative structure in order to centre the narrative on himself and his sexual prowess. According to Wajid 'Ali Shah's account, after his daughter's death, his wife, Naik Akhtar,

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[53] This idea is borrowed from Lal, *Domesticity and Power*, p. 173.

[54] Ibid. Ruby Lal advocated for such a language to discuss the *Akbarnama*, which was completed in 1596 and is a history of Akbar's life. It reveals personal details regarding Akbar's sexual history and yet does so to reveal how, for Akbar, pleasure is tempered in his sexual politics. Although the *Akbarnama* and *'Ishqnama* have different ways of expressing pleasure and desire within their texts, Lal's analysis was very useful as guidepost for this article.

[55] Dr Mana Kia, conversation, October 2016.

[56] The text also mentions that Sahiba Khanum has two daughters.

[57] *'Ishqnama*, fol. 30v.

acquiesces to his affair with Sahiba Khanum and decides Wajid 'Ali Shah's desires (_khwāhish_) should become hers as well.[58]

The miniature of folio 32v shows Sahiba Khanum displaying her thigh. Sahiba Khanum heated a part of a _sitar_ (guitar) and struck her left thigh multiple times, causing fresh wounds (_zakhm_). In the dastan, she dresses the wound herself and then proceeds to limp toward Wajid 'Ali Shah so that he can tend to her maimed (_lang_) leg (Figure 2). This narrative of self-branding is repeated a few times in the _'Ishqnama_. As a motif, it allows Wajid 'Ali Shah to gain complete control over his lovers' submissive bodies and showcase the intensity of his own emotions. The physical act of disfigurement is reinforced by the _'Ishqnama_'s poetic vocabulary. In the case of Sahiba Khanum, her state is described as heated (_garm_) from her eyes to her physical well-being, which becomes fatigued (_ta'ab_) under her inflamed passion. Instead of reading the Sahiba Khanum dastan as merely describing Wajid 'Ali Shah's cruel behaviour toward his wife and daughter, the narrative structure is in place so that the emotional ties between him and his lovers become synonymous with the dependency of a court on their king and a king on his court.

As in the Sahiba Khanum dastan, throughout the _'Ishqnama_, Wajid 'Ali Shah is accompanied by females. He is usually the only man in each pictorial scene. In this folio and in many others scattered throughout the _'Ishqnama_, Wajid 'Ali constructs his sovereign subjectivity as an individual who pines after love. As in the Sahiba Khanum account, he is rarely pictorialized as actively engaging in bureaucratic matters. Expressing desire is not inimical to or an escape from rational governance. By reconsidering the politics of the _'Ishqnama_, we see that Wajid 'Ali's governance occurs through his control of women such as Sahiba Khanum. His household, which includes his lovers, serves as a reflection of his state and his right to rule.

In another reading, however, the _'Ishqnama_ offers varying levels of truthfulness about self-harm in the interest of aggrandizing the principal hero figure, Wajid 'Ali Shah. The emotions of Wajid 'Ali Shah's lovers are the most exaggerated. There are multiple instances in which his lovers become so jealous that they go beyond cases of self-harm such as the Sahiba Khanum dastan and move into the realm of attempted suicide. For instance, at his Chatterwala palace, one of his lovers, Nanhi Begum, goes to the top of a tower (_burj_) to end her life because she is jealous (_rushk_) of Wajid 'Ali Shah's other lovers. Before she can commit
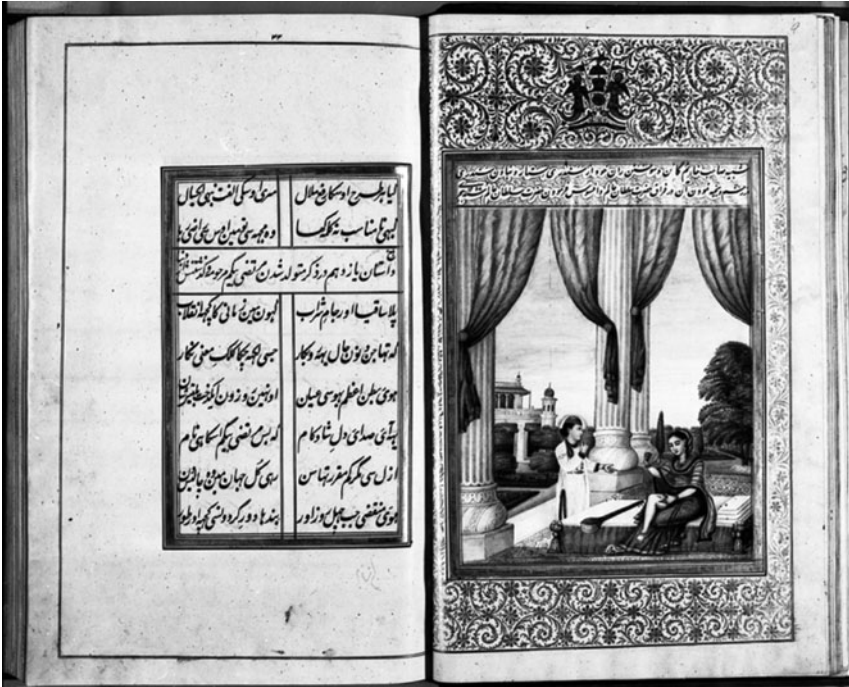
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[58] Ibid., fol. 31v–32r.

Figure 2. *'Ishqnama*, folio 32v. Sahiba Khanum, a singer, shows the prince the burn on her thigh and receives sympathy. 1257 (1841–42). RCIN 1005035. *Source*: Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020.

suicide, Wajid 'Ali Shah arrives and lectures her on her 'irrational' decision (*'āqil dūr*).[59] He claims that suicide is born out of ignorance (*jahālat*) and brings 'disgrace' (*ruswā*).[60] She decides not to jump. Previously, Wajid 'Ali did attempt suicide. He never labels his own actions as being against God, instead reserving such a judgement only for his lovers. In another dastan, the servant Hedari Begum attempts suicide (*jān apnī dēnī pe ḥāzir*) by eating crushed (*kūtā*) glass because her desire (*ārzū*) for Wajid 'Ali Shah is unrequited.[61] In the *'Ishqnama*, Wajid 'Ali Shah possesses such charisma that his lovers are bound to him and willing to sacrifice their lives. In the *'Ishqnama*, Wajid 'Ali Shah's lovers are so enchanted by and in thrall to Wajid 'Ali Shah that they no

[59] Ibid., fol. 44r.

[60] Her suicide attempt was also connected to her grief over the passing of her daughter (fol. 44v).

[61] Ibid., fol. 140r–v.

longer operate according to an austere 'strategy of conduct'.[62] His magnetism is what binds his lovers, courtiers, and court to his rule.

In the *'Ishqnama* poetic narrative, one could argue that Wajid 'Ali Shah's wives and lovers have some degree of power. When one of Wajid 'Ali's servants and lovers, Umda Begum, attempts to leave the court, Naik Akhtar, Wajid 'Ali's wife, argues that Umda cannot quit of her own volition because she was given by God and, as such, must abide by different rules.[63] Although Naik Akhtar appears to have some agency in confronting Umda, her actions ultimately benefit Wajid 'Ali Shah, as Umda Begum is his lover. To this end, various lovers physically display their devotion to Wajid 'Ali Shah through their suicide attempts, displaying their frenzied love for him. These macabre displays of affection evince how some of these women operated with a bit of agency. They are rewarded with more money and freedom after each unsuccessful attempt.

In the *'Ishqnama*, even when his wives disobey him, the bedroom still remains an extension of Wajid 'Ali's rule and power. Throughout the *'Ishqnama*, it appears that Wajid 'Ali Shah is overwrought with emotions. He is jealous. His lovers deceive him and run off with other men. In dastan 75, this exact scenario plays out with one of his lovers, Sar-faraz Pari, who betrays him by seeking the company of other men. As a result of his heartbreak (*dard-e jigar*), he becomes melancholic (*shiddat ġam*).[64] His emotional pain manifests itself in his body. He is afflicted with (*satānā*) buboes (*khiyārak*), which are huge blisters on the lymph nodes. He is unable to stand properly and is extremely helpless (*ma'zūr*). Through the course of his lovesickness for Sar-faraz Pari, he is driven to such a state of grief that he loses (*farāmosh*) his physical and emotional senses.[65] Shortly thereafter, he strikes his left thigh with a heated hookah pipe (*qaliyān*), which in effect duplicates the behaviour of his lovers who underwent similar trials and burned themselves out of love. When Wajid 'Ali Shah reveals his scars (*dāġ*) to Sar-faraz Pari, she frivolously (*'abs*) laughs at his pain.[66] As this dastan illustrates, Wajid 'Ali Shah's management of his household is not devoid of emotions. He

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[62] Daud Ali, 'Anxieties of Attachment: The Dynamics of Courtship in Medieval India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2002, p. 138.

[63] *'Ishqnama*, fol. 40v: 'Jis ko khudā'ī ne diya.'

[64] Ibid., fol. 253v.

[65] Ibid., fol. 254v–255r.

[66] Ibid., fol. 264v–266r.

expresses deep anguish at having to part with his lovers. They, in turn, do not always comply with his desires.

According to Wajid 'Ali Shah, his effusive emotions are not a sign of weakness. Through the affective language of 'ishq, Wajid 'Ali Shah positions himself as the most esteemed *ashiq*, lover, for his court and his household. Further along in the *'Ishqnama*, Sar-faraz Pari becomes jealous, attempts suicide, and undergoes a self-imposed exile from the palace.[67] She returns to Wajid 'Ali Shah after a short period of time and apologizes (*'uzr*). As a result, their ardent love (*ātish shauq*) resumes once again.[68] Wajid 'Ali Shah uses this incident in which he seemingly loses control of his emotions and burns himself to showcase his emotional investment in his lovers and other courtly relationships. In addition, unlike some of his lovers, Wajid 'Ali Shah always recovers from his passion. In a later dastan, Sar-faraz attempts suicide by consuming a diamond (*almās*) from a ring (*nigīn*).[69] In the narrative, Sar-faraz suffers more than Wajid 'Ali. She even miscarries. The exact line is: 'She fell out of pregnancy. And I [Wajid 'Ali Shah] suffered.'[70] In the end, Wajid 'Ali regains control over Sar-faraz by showcasing her misfortunes (*muṣībat*) and shifting the story back to his own emotions. Through narrative plot points such as his attempts at suicide and deep depression, Wajid 'Ali shows that he grieves while at the same time these moments show his resilience. Through it all, he remains the central figure on which the entire narrative and the household pivot. Ultimately, Wajid 'Ali Shah's suffering is part of his moral advancement that allows him to become a more just ruler, while the women are mere narrative devices so that he can attain emotional mastery over the emotions of others.

There are two dastans in the *'Ishqnama* that have been excised in later lithographs: dastan 66 and dastan 89. Focusing on one of them reveals the political subtleties at play in the original manuscript that have been lost in the later *Parikhana* copies. Dastan 66, which was excised from later *Parikhana* lithograph copies, is centred on a measured act of discipline, which ultimately highlights Wajid 'Ali Shah's equanimity. In this dastan, Wajid 'Ali doles out punishment to one of his female soldiers. His jurisprudence and measured response are symbolic of how

[67] Ibid., fol. 272r–278v.
[68] Ibid., fol. 279v.
[69] Ibid., fol. 387v–388v.
[70] Ibid., fol. 390r: 'Girāḥaml un kā huā. Mujh ko ranj.'

he governs his court and his people.[71] Earlier on in the *Ishqnama*, Wajid ‘Ali narrates that he created an army of women to protect himself, which consisted of mostly Turkish females. Previously, Wajid ‘Ali had attempted to reform his regular army, constituted of male soldiers, by introducing new disciplinary techniques. The East India Company put an end to his reforms and forced him to reduce the army.[72] By employing women, Wajid ‘Ali circumvents the colonial decrees meant to undermine his rule. For a short time, these Turkish women were his personal guards in his palace. Because of colonial regulations, Wajid ‘Ali Shah could not exert his authority over a touring army, but he had the means to discipline his intimate familiars.

In dastan 66, a member of his special troop is accused of deceitfulness (*dagā*). When he inquires after her (*taḥqīq kiyā*), members of his court reveal her relationship with a bath attendant (*ḥammāmī*). Wajid ‘Ali Shah's anger quickens at 'her spreading lies' (*jhūt bātil*) and he decides to use her as an example (*ibrat*) for his zenana. He consults shari‘a law (*sharī‘at*) and resolves to punish her by shaving her head (Figure 3).[73] In the miniature, the scene of punishment appears tranquil. Wajid ‘Ali Shah oversees her punishment with cool detachment. By punishing the Turk solider, Wajid ‘Ali demonstrates his ability to discipline those in his zenana. These scenes symbolically demonstrate how he treated his other courtly relationships. He was just and ethical by following the rules of shari‘a law, as in the case of the solider.

Here, it must be noted that many of his lovers were of Turkish or African descent, pointing explicitly to the question of slavery in Wajid ‘Ali Shah's court. The mechanism by which Wajid ‘Ali Shah recruited and enslaved these women who in effect served as reproductive pools needs further study. While many of these figures are marginal within the story, the *Ishqnama* shines light on many of these lower-class women who were culled from local Indo-African households and recruited from Africa. Particularly, their specific geographic locale is pinpointed by their names, which are affixed with terms such as *sūdī* and *zangī*. In conjunction, generic markers such as colour further indicate that some of these women were of African descent. Indigenous terms associated with slavery, such as *ghulām*, *bandī*, and *kanīz*, are employed in the *Ishqnama* not only to discuss these African women, but also to describe

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[71] Another story excised from the *Ishqnama* in the copies is dastan 89, fol. 317r. In this account, under the guidance of Wajid ‘Ali Shah, one of his lovers, Mah-i ‘Alam, strikes a watchman with a golden whip as penalty for making a false accusation. 1262/1846–47.

[72] Bhatnagar, *Awadh under Wājid ‘Alī Shāh*, pp. 193–199.
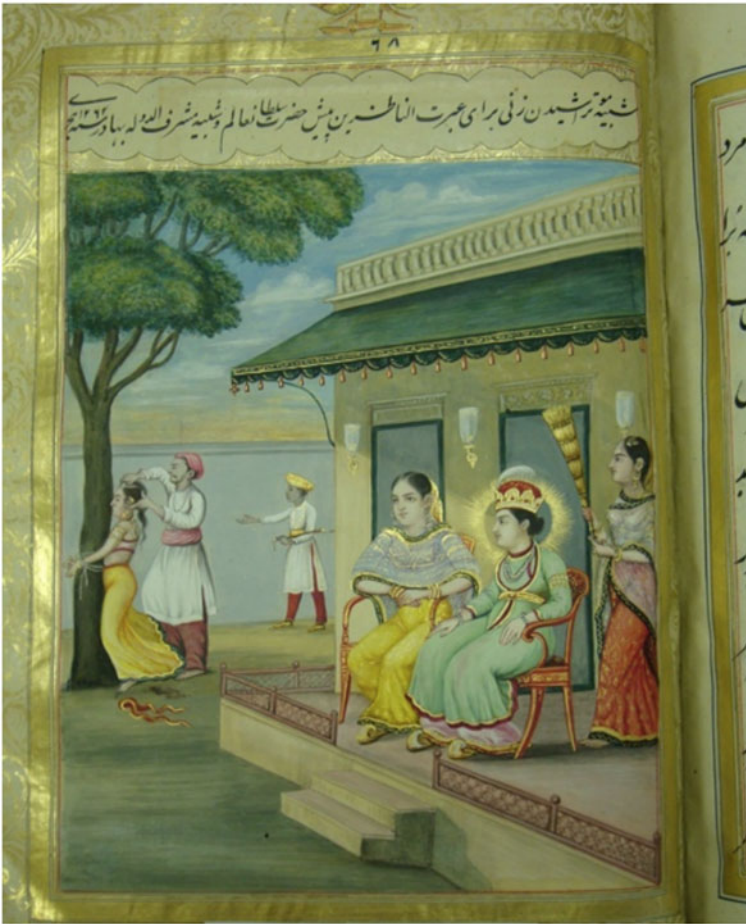
[73] *Ishqnama*, fol. 232r–233v.

Figure 3. *'Ishqnama*, dastan 66, folio 233r. RCIN 1005035. *Source*: Royal Collection Trust/©
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020.

other women and men at Wajid 'Ali Shah's court. In this case, slavery is
not industrialized (i.e. chattel status). Instead, slavery in Avadh can be
defined using the Richard Eaton's rubric of 'the condition of uprooted
outsiders, impoverished insiders—or the descendants of either—serving
persons or institutions on which they are wholly dependent'.[74] In this
case, the slave or courtier has total dependency on the court and on

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[74] Richard M. Eaton, 'Introduction', in *Slavery and South Asian History*, (eds) Indrani
Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 2.

their master, Wajid 'Ali Shah. Thus, the relationship is a 'reciprocal, contractual' one in which 'the slave owe[s] obedience and loyalty as well as service and labor to the master, while the latter owe[s] protection and support to the slave'.[75] In thinking through these bonded sexual relationships in the *'Ishqnama* through the lens of slavery, the status differentials between Wajid Ali Shah and these women are emphasized. Thus, the concept of an erotics of sovereignty that I argue undergirds the *'Ishqnama* seeks to obfuscate the issue of consent and forced bondedness by focusing on love and desire as the driving forces behind Wajid 'Ali Shah's relationships rather than coerced servitude. One productive aspect of the *'Ishqnama* manuscript is that it provides portraits of these enslaved women, which grants them a semblance of personhood. This differs from the copies, which further dehumanizes enslaved men and women by removing their images and visible presence.

Manuscripts were a costly enterprise. In this regard, Wajid 'Ali Shah spared no expense, and the *'Ishqnama* was the most extravagant manuscript completed during his reign. Wajid 'Ali Shah was not ashamed of his sexual history; he unabashedly circulated copies of the *'Ishqnama* during his exile in Calcutta. Copies were completed in both lithograph and handwritten forms, and news of the *'Ishqnama*'s production likely travelled to other neighbouring courts through word-of-mouth transmission.[76]

The *Parikhana* and the other copies

Up to this point, for simplicity, I have referred to the lithograph copies as the *Parikhana*. Although this was the title of one of the lithographs, the history of their transmission entails a knottier story. There were various copies published with various titles, undertaken by various translators. Scribes first copied the *'Ishqnama* in 1848, prior to the manuscript's completion in 1849. This copy will hitherto be referred to as the *Lahore Manuscript*. It was the first copy to transform the *'Ishqnama*'s poetry into prose. After that, there are scattered references to now missing copies that were printed in poetic verse during Wajid 'Ali Shah's exile in

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[75] Ibid., p. 3.
[76] Francis Robinson, 'Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, special issue: *How Social, Political and Cultural Information Is Collected, Defined, Used and Analyzed*, 1993, pp. 229–251.

Calcutta from 1856 to 1887. Two other lithograph copies, entitled *Mahal Khana Shahi* (*The Royal King's House*) and *Parikhana* (*Fairy House*), followed. These later copies made a number of narrative and linguistic changes over the course of their publication from 1914 to 1965. By following this chain of transmission, the elisions of some of the *'Ishqnama* manuscript's dastans along with the removal of the poetic format and the images can be interrogated more thoroughly. This section moves in a schematic and chronological order to trace the evolution of these copies and their differences from the *'Ishqnama* manuscript.

The *Lahore Manuscript* was crafted as a handwritten facsimile in 1848 and is currently located in the Punjab University Library in Lahore. It is the earliest datable copy of the *'Ishqnama* manuscript, the only one to be completed purely in Persian, the first to transform the *'Ishqnama*'s verse form into prose, and the first to remove all visual material. The *Lahore Manuscript* is identifiable as the first reproduction because of its textual contents. First, it contains the following poetry on its last folios: 'To history, the hemistiches of Akhtar are spoken. From my opportunity [to observe] the conditions of women' (*Be tārīkh in guftah miṣra'-i akhtar. Az aḥvāl naswān kardim furṣat*).[77] These four lines do not appear in the *'Ishqnama*. They are found only in the *Lahore Manuscript*. The lines were later reprinted in the *Mahal Khana Shahi* (1914) and the *Parikhana* (1965) with minor edits.[78] Since the *Mahal Khana Shahi* and *Parikhana* retain these lines, it is clear that the respective authors of the *Parikhana* copies had access to either the *Lahore Manuscript* or some version of it such as the *Mahal Khana Shahi*.[79] Moreover, the *Lahore Manuscript* is the only version besides the *'Ishqnama* to mention the illustrations. Although the *Lahore Manuscript* does not contain any paintings, it does indicate when a picture appears, stating 'a picture has been prepared' (*shabah taiyār shud*). Such phrasing indicates that the writer(s) of the *Lahore Manuscript* either had direct access to the completed *'Ishqnama* or composed the *Lahore Manuscript* simultaneously with the creation of the paintings and manuscript of the *'Ishqnama*.

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[77] Lahore copy, Punjab University Library, fol. 433.

[78] For instance, the verb *guft* is changed to *guftam*. These lines further authenticate Wajid 'Ali Shah's authorship by incorporating his takhallus, Akhtar.

[79] Wajid 'Ali Shah and Mirzā Fidā 'Alī Khanjar Lakhnavī, *Mahal Khānah-yi Shāhī* (Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu, 1914), p. 125, <https://rekhta.org/ebooks/mahal-khana-shahi-wajid-ali-shah-akhtar-ebooks>; Wajid 'Ali Shah and Mirzā Fidā 'Alī Khanjar Lakhnavī, *Mahal Khānah-yi Shāhī* (Lucknow: Nami Press, 1926), p. 160; Sarwari, *Parīkhāna*, p. 190.

The *Lahore Manuscript* also contains the two dastans, namely dastans 66 and 89, found in the *'Ishqnama* that were later excised from lithograph copies of the *Mahal Khana Shahi* and *Parikhana*. One of the dastans, as mentioned in the previous section, describes Wajid 'Ali Shah's ordering that one of his soldiers be whipped and her hair shaved. Given this inclusion, the scribes of the *Lahore Manuscript* must have read the original *'Ishqnama*, in which this dastan is illustrated and narrated (Figure 3). In the *Lahore Manuscript*, dastans 66 and 89 do not appear in sequential order with the rest of the dastans. A line is marked below the colophon, the last lines of the text, and the two dastans are written underneath as if the copyist realized his mistake and added them in haste. A subsequent copyist—for instance, the author of *Mahal Khana Shahi* of the 1914 edition—must have committed an error by not copying dastans 66 and 89, since they did not occur sequentially in the *Lahore Manuscript*. Another possibility is that the *Mahal Khana Shahi* author deliberately chose to excise this story.

Besides structural clues to the dating of the *Lahore Manuscript*, there is also an exact date in the colophon, which reads 1265/1848. The year 1849 is what is inscribed in the colophon of the *'Ishqnama*. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the *'Ishqnama* was initiated, at the latest, in 1848 and completed in 1849, during the first two years of Wajid 'Ali Shah's rule. This means that either the scribe of the *Lahore Manuscript* obtained a version of the *'Ishqnama* before the calligrapher had finished the manuscript in 1849 or he copied the date in error. This date of 1265/1848 also appears in later copies, including the *Mahal Khana Shahi* and *Parikhana*. In the *Mahal Khana Shahi*, the lithograph bears the date of 1914, when it was completed, and the Hijra date of 1265, which aligns with the *Lahore Manuscript* and not the *'Ishqnama*.

The inclusion of elements of the *Lahore Manuscript* in later reproductions such as *Mahal Khana Shahi* and *Parikhana*—for instance, the same poetic language—bears witness to Wajid 'Ali Shah's history of rebellion and exile. After the illustrated *'Ishqnama* was completed in 1849, Wajid 'Ali Shah kept it in his possession until 1858, when British-allied soldiers raided his Lucknow palace. The soldiers subsequently gave the manuscript to their commanding superior, Sir John Lawrence, who presented it to Queen Victoria in 1859.[80] In a letter addressing the *'Ishqnama* manuscript, Sir John Lawrence states:

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[80] Waley, 'Islamic Manuscripts in the British Royal Collection', p. 16.

This book is curious and interesting from two circumstances. It was prepared in the Palace of Lucknow under the direction of the King of Oude, and is of course a faithful illustration of the life and dress of the highest Mahomedan families in India. Secondly, it was taken by some Seikhs [Sikhs] of one of the Punjabee Regiments at the time the Palace of Lucknow was stormed—they gave it to their commanding officer, who was good enough to present it to me, as the Corps was raised under my orders.[81]

In 1859, Sir John Lawrence was already deeming the *'Ishqnama* a 'faithful illustration of [Wajid 'Ali Shah's] life'. He underscored the idea that the *'Ishqnama* had historical veracity. To this day, the manuscript resides in the Queen's library in Windsor Castle. Unlike some of the other Indian manuscripts housed there, this manuscript was never intended to be given to the English.[82] Since the *'Ishqnama* was taken from India in 1858, the only means for its story to continue circulating after 1858 was through an already extant copy such as the *Lahore Manuscript*. One might thus speculate that scribes utilized the *Lahore Manuscript* rather than the *'Ishqnama* because it was the only source of reference available in northern India.

The *Lahore Manuscript* is the only reproduction to be handwritten and not in a lithograph format, and its composition resembles an *akhbarat* (a proto-newspaper) containing a number of Persian scripts by different scribal hands with varying degrees of legibility. The visual aspect of this copy was an afterthought. It is completed in the shikasta and naskh scripts, which expedite writing, rather than the neat, clean nastaliq script used throughout the *'Ishqnama*. Furthermore, throughout the *Lahore Manuscript*, sentences and phrases are repeatedly crossed out. Given its perfunctory appearance, the *Lahore Manuscript* was most likely produced simultaneously with the *'Ishqnama*, serving as a kind of rough draft for Wajid 'Ali Shah's artisans in his kitabkhana, hence its early date of 1265/1848. In the *Lahore Manuscript*'s colophon, a title, 'A Piece of History [qita' tārīkh]', is included—a phrase that concludes both the *Mahal Khana Shahi* and the *Parikhana* copies, much like the specific phrasing of 'To history, the hemistiches of Akhtar are spoken'. As mentioned, unlike these later copies, the *Lahore Manuscript* does not end there. The appearance of the two appended dastans suggests that the

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[81] Ibid., p. 16; Mildred and William Archer, *Indian Painting for the British* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 62.

[82] In contrast, Lord Teignmouth in 1799 donated a few manuscripts to the Queen, which had been gifted by Nawab Asaf al-Daula to the English. Windsor Castle 1005091.a and 1005091.b.

scribe copied the colophon too quickly before completing the correct order of the dastans. This likelihood reinforces the notion that the *Lahore Manuscript* served as a draft form of the *'Ishqnama*. Much of the commentary in the margins of the *Lahore Manuscript* contains potential chapter titles for the dastans and indicates when paintings appear. They also contain brief asides. The margins of the *Lahore Manuscript* thus point to another possible point of circulation. The presence of the marginalia may mean that various readers had access to the *Lahore Manuscript* and spent enough time studying it to offer commentary. In many cases, akhbarat were not only distributed textually in bound book form, but also orally disseminated. As with akhbarat, the appearance of the *Lahore Manuscript* was secondary because the orator would have read it out loud to a group of listeners who could not visually perceive the text. Wajid 'Ali Shah may have elected to have two types of texts produced: one a handwritten copy that would have gained a wider audience through oral transmission and the other a luxurious manuscript copy for his own private courtly use.

There were also political and technological reasons for Wajid 'Ali Shah's decision to disseminate both the *'Ishqnama* and the *Lahore Manuscript* in a handwritten form and not through a lithograph press. By 1820, Nawab Ghazi al-din Haidar (r. 1814–27) had established a lithograph printing press in Lucknow.[83] Aloys Sprenger, who catalogued the Lucknow Palace Library, noted that, by 1830, there was an active printing press, which increased the availability 'of periodical and light literature'.[84] By 1849, 700 books had been lithographed in Lucknow and the nearby city of Cawnpore.[85] After a series of events, Wajid 'Ali Shah abolished both the lithograph and printing presses from 1849 until 1857. He also closed down the Lucknow Observatory in 1849.[86] In his official statement on the matter, Wajid 'Ali Shah argued that his court could no longer bear the expense

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[83] Katherine S. Diehl, 'Lucknow Printers, 1820–1850', in *Comparative Librarianship: Essays in Honour of Professor D. N. Marshall*, (ed.) N. N. Gidwani (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1973), p. 115; Graham Shaw, 'Calcutta: Birthplace of the Indian Lithographed Book', *Journal of the Printing Historical Society*, vol. 27, 1998, p. 106.

[84] Sprenger, *A Catalogue*, pp. vi–vii.

[85] Diehl, 'Lucknow Printers', p. 119; C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 240.

[86] National Archives in Delhi F(P)C No. 130–36, 6 October 1849, cited in S. M. Razaullah Ansari, 'Early Modern Observatories in India 1792–1900', in *Science and Modern India: An Institutional History, 1784–1947*, (ed.) Uma Das Gupta (Delhi: Longman Pearson Education, 2011), p. 361; Diehl, 'Lucknow Printers', p. 118.

and upkeep of both presses and the observatory. Yet British Resident Sleeman accused Wajid 'Ali Shah of shutting down the press because it had printed and distributed an unflattering text: *Qaisar ut-Tawārīkh*. The author of *Qaisar ut-Tawārīkh*, Sayyid Kamal ud din Haidar, happened to be a 'superintendent of the Avad observatory office'.[87] According to Sleeman, Wajid 'Ali Shah closed down the press and observatory to take a stand against those who had undermined his authority. In either case, with the press no longer operational, Wajid 'Ali Shah elected to transcribe and circulate the *'Ishqnama* as the handwritten *Lahore Manuscript* instead of reversing his earlier decree.

The question becomes this: why did Wajid 'Ali Shah transform the *'Ishqnama*'s Urdu poetry into Persian prose in the *Lahore Manuscript*? To take it from a different angle: as a poet himself, why did Wajid 'Ali Shah elect to summarize the *'Ishqnama* in Persian prose? I propose that the dissemination of the *Lahore Manuscript* was somewhat accidental and not the only means for his story to circulate. Wajid 'Ali Shah intended the *Lahore Manuscript* to be a rough draft of his *'Ishqnama* manuscript and only after the *'Ishqnama* manuscript was carried off in 1858 did he rely on the *Lahore Manuscript* as his only means of recalling the story. This would explain the *Lahore Manuscript*'s sloppy appearance and its haphazard assembly. It is unclear whether Wajid 'Ali Shah circulated the *Lahore Manuscript* in an akhbarat style of transmission before or after the *'Ishqnama* was forcibly removed from India in 1858. Another possibility is that, with the *Lahore Manuscript* as his guide, soon afterward, Wajid 'Ali Shah lithographed the *'Ishqnama* in verse.

After the rebellion and while in exile in Calcutta, Wajid 'Ali Shah was given a sizable pension of about a 'hundred thousand rupees'. He spent some of his funds constructing a housing complex in Garden Reach (Matiya Burj), Calcutta, and re-establishing a printing press, Matba-e Sultani, in the area. Matba-e Sultani literally translates into 'royal printing press'. Many of the books published by Matba-e Sultani were distributed free of charge from 1860 to 1885.[88] Wajid 'Ali Shah thereby enabled a wider audience to gain access to his library collection and his

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[87] Bhatnagar, *Awadh under Wājid 'Alī Shāh*, p. 73n21; John Pemble, *The Raj, the Indian Mutiny, and the Kingdom of Oudh, 1801–1859* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1977), p. 9.

[88] Kaukab Qadir Sajjad 'Ali Mirza, *Wajid Ali Shah ki Adabi aur Saqafati Khidmat* (New Delhi: Taraqqi-yi Urdu Bureau, 1995), p. 72; Chatterjee, *Black Hole*, p. 220.

writings.[89] Reversing his earlier order on the printing press, Wajid 'Ali Shah published many of his poetry collections and novels through lithography during his exile in Calcutta.[90]

I have so far been unable to locate the lithographed form of the *'Ishqnama* in poetic verse. Scant references to its existence appear in both Urdu and English.[91] The most intriguing citation is in the *History of Avadh* written by Najm ul-Ghani in 1919. In his fifth and final volume, Najm ul-Ghani utilizes the *'Ishqnama* extensively to reconstruct Wajid 'Ali Shah's life and rule.[92] Najm ul-Ghani reproduces exact poetic verses that appear in the *'Ishqnama* manuscript and, I assume, in the missing lithographed copy. Before launching into a long quotation and summary of the *'Ishqnama*'s Urdu poetry, Najm ul-Ghani states: 'Wajid 'Ali Shah (*bādshāh*) versified (*mauzūn*) in a mansavi the conditions (*kaifīyat*) of his youthfulness (*shabāb*).' Further down, he demarcates the various versions of the *'Ishqnama*, stating: '[A]nd here and there (*kahīn-kahīn*) Wajid 'Ali Shah's poetry (*sher*) on his palatial abode (*maḥal*) will also be copied (*naql*) word for word (*bi-'ainihi*).'[93] Even though this versified copy (*naql*) that Najm ul-Ghani Rampuri refers to has not been located, it is clear that historians and a larger public as early as 1919 had access to it in a lithographed form. As such, the *Lahore Manuscript*, with its Persian prose, was not the primary mode by which readers consumed and comprehended the *'Ishqnama*. Instead, I contend that this missing lithograph copy of the *'Ishqnama* in poetic verse (*mauzūn*) served as the main material format for the Urdu-speaking public sphere from the 1860s to the 1910s. In preserving the poetry in this missing lithograph copy, Wajid 'Ali Shah must have perceived that a reading public could understand the subtleties of his Urdu poetry. Significantly,

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[89] A. Sprenger notes, 'One of the most remarkable results of the progress of printing is the rapid increase of periodical and light literature' in *A Catalogue*, p. vii.

[90] Sinh, *Wajid Ali Shah*, p. 141.

[91] Hamid Afaq Qureshi, *Sources on Awadh: From 1722 A.D. to 1856 A.D.* (Lucknow: New Royal Book Co., 2004), p. 19; Syed Masood Hasan Rizvi, *Lakhnau ka Shahi Istej*, pp. 33, 74, 76; Kaukab Qadar Sajjad 'Ali Mirza, *Intikhāb*, pp. 10–11, 39–46; Kaukab Qadir Sajjad 'Ali Mirza, *Wajid Ali Shah ki Adabi aur Saqafati Khidmat*, p. 111. Qureshi expressly mentions the existence of a lithograph copy in poetic verse. Both Rizvi and Mirza provide direct poetic quotations from the *'Ishqnama*, which means that they could have had access to a photographed copy of the *'Ishqnama* manuscript or the lithographed poetic-verse format.

[92] Muhammad Najm ul-Ghani Khan Rampuri, *Tarikh-i Awadh*, 5 vols (Lucknow: Newal Kishore Press, 1919).

[93] Ibid., vol. 5, p. 47.

at this point, Najm ul-Ghani Rampuri does not mention the retention of any signs of painting or hashiya decorations in the print copies. In only 50 years, the aesthetics of the print book had already greatly changed the original 'Ishqnama manuscript.

Beyond the 'Ishqnama copies, in Calcutta, lithography was an important technology for Wajid 'Ali Shah, as the format allowed him to dispute many of the colonial myths that circulated about him. In one of his printed poems, entitled 'From Lucknow to Kolkata', Wajid 'Ali Shah comments directly on the unfair treatment he has received from the British. He cites the toxicity of the Bengal landscape and the inescapable ecology of exile as his evidence. In one line, he ruminates: 'Bengal is hot, it is charmingly barren (lūn) and it intensely (tapish) eats up everything.'[94] He further elaborates that 'to whoever was alive (jānwar), he/it opened his/its mouth to him'.[95] In this poem, bodies both animal and human in the barren landscape of Bengal function as testimonials, bearing witness to the trauma, injustice, violence, and pain of exile. He dramatizes the inherent otherness of Bengal, suggesting that his own body is being transformed by the new landscape. He is 'eaten up' by Bengal. Noticeably, in the poem, Wajid 'Ali Shah has no qualms about using his press to comment on politically charged topics in the poetic register.[96]

'Abdul Halim Sharar (1860–1926), who lived in the same area of Calcutta as Wajid 'Ali Shah, attests to the fact that 'Ishqnama copies circulated in the city in poetic verse.[97] As part of the 'Muslim education and reform movement', Sharar had a very low opinion of Wajid 'Ali Shah and his 'Ishqnama text, since it was of little educational value.[98] In

[94] Kaukab Qadar Sajjad 'Ali Mirza, *Intikhāb*, p. 62: 'Voh garmi voh lun aur voh xaur ki tapish.'

[95] Ibid.: 'Jo tha jānwar munh ko kho le tha voh.'

[96] The larger social arrangements that were put in crisis during Wajid 'Ali Shah's exile were metaphorically represented by the reorganization of the Bengal landscape into risk/ safe limits.

[97] 'Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow, the Last Phase of an Oriental Culture* (London: Elek, 1975), p. 66; 'Abdul Halim Sharar and Muhammad Ikrām Cughāī, *Guzashtah Lakhnaū: Hindustān men Mashriqī Tamaddun kā ākhirī Namūnah* (Lahore: Sang-i Mīl Publications, 2006), pp. 96–97.

[98] Christopher Ryan Perkins, *Partitioning History: The Creation of an Islāmī Pablik in Late Colonial India, c. 1880–1920* (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2011), p. 4.

a series of articles written in around 1913, Sharar penned his response to reading the *'Ishqnama*, stating:

The trouble was that the language of his [Mirza Shauq's] masnavīs was so beautiful, frank, pure, and clean in spite of its erotic allure (*āshiqāna jazbāt*), that even honorable and decent people could not abstain from reading and enjoying it. Wajid 'Ali Shah also read these masnavīs, and because he was a poet himself, he adopted this style and versified (*mauzūn*) his love affairs and hundreds of the amorous escapades (*rindāna ě'tidālin*) of his early youth. He made them public throughout the country and became to a conventional, moral, world a self-confessed criminal (*mujrim*). Few ministers and nobles in their early youth have not given full rein to their sexual desires (*shahwat-parast*).[99]

Sharar states that he read a text of Wajid 'Ali Shah's 'love-affairs and hundreds of the amorous escapades (*rindāna e'tidālin*) of his early youth' that was completed in the '[masnavī] style and versified (*mauzūn*)' form. Shahar's description of the *'Ishqnama* as a poetic copy is similar to Najm ul-Ghani Rampuri's specific terminology referring to a 'versified masnavi'. Besides the charge of obscenity, Sharar's response also makes it evident that the lithograph press afforded Wajid 'Ali Shah the opportunity to recover his poetic voice and distribute his poems and books to a large reading audience during his exile. With Shahar's and Najm ul-Ghani Rampur's strong testimonials, the existence of an *'Ishqnama* copy in poetic verse also validates Orsini's profound argument that earlier commercial publishers in northern India selected 'texts of pleasure'—those that had resonance with an oral performative past.[100] Clearly, at the start of the twentieth century, the poetics of the *'Ishqnama* were still viable and were inherently a pleasurable part of the reading and listening experience for consuming the story. Wajid 'Ali Shah's poetics, as Sharar's response strongly indicates, was judged for its aesthetic message and measured against those of other poets.

After the *Lahore Manuscript* and the missing poetic copy, the next extant *'Ishqnama* copies are from 1914 and 1926. Both are entitled *Mahal Khana Shahi* and are printed in Urdu, not Persian. They were circulated during the rise of vernacular print in India and under the auspices of the new obscenity laws that passed in the Indian Penal Code, section 292, which banned the distribution and sale of obscene books. Administrators began to enforce the code in 1862, but the law had wide-reaching effects only

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[99] Sharar, *Lucknow*, p. 63; Sharar and Cughāī, *Guzashtah Lakhnaū*, p. 96.

[100] Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), p. 9.

after the 1940s. This was also the period of British Repression in India that spanned 1907–47. These laws had very little effect on the distribution of the 'Ishqnama copies, since British administrators did not disapprove of it. Only a handful of readers such as 'Abdul Halim Sharar, not government officials, considered the text obscene (ashlil).

During the period when the *Mahal Khana Shahi* was published, obscene materials in Hindi were part of the 'publishing boom' in the area around Uttar Pradesh.[101] According to Charu Gupta: 'The number of presses in Uttar Pradesh had risen from 177 in 1878–79 to 568 in 1901–02 and 743 in 1925–26.'[102] She states: 'By the early twentieth century, wide-ranging pulp and popular literature—semi-pornographic sex manuals and romances in colloquial Hindi, thin tracts and small formats of songs and poems in Braj, flooded the market in Uttar Pradesh.'[103] The *Mahal Khana Shahi* operated for a slightly different public audience than these Hindi tracts because it was completed in Urdu. Nevertheless, Gupta's observations stand. Obscenity laws did little to curb the publication of erotic texts, since the term 'obscene' encompassed such a vast amount of literature. Only a few books were publicly vilified at the time. In 1927, Pandey Becan Sharma 'Ugra's *Chaklet* was published—a story that 'dealt with issues of sodomy, sexual acts between adult males and adolescent boys, and other aspects of male homosexuality'.[104] It garnered the most public and governmental ire. While readers such as Sharar might have disapproved of *Mahal Khana Shahi*, the text was never under state surveillance.

The *debacca* (introductions) of the *Mahal Khana Shahi* editions contain further information on the book's public reception. Abdahkar Mirza Fiza 'Ali Khanjar, who created the first *Mahal Khana Shahi* copy in 1914, states in the foreword:

First off, 'Ali Janāb Sheikh Muḥammad Yusuf Hussain Khān Sāhab Bahādar, who is a barrister of law in the noble city of Lucknow, should be thanked since he presented me with the gift of the 'History of the Parikhana', which was in his library. And through this celebrated (*mamdūḥ*) man's kindness, I was able to preserve and affirm my vision and desire for this book. From this a special type of excitement was born in my heart. And I picked up my pen on behalf

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[101] Charu Gupta, '(Im)possible Love and Sexual Pleasure in Late-Colonial North India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2002, p. 197.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., p. 198.

[104] Ibid.

of my translation. … I translated this disorganised (*bē-tarattub*) book and words completed in the shikasta script with little delicacy or excellence (*fakhr*).[105]

Like other future copyists, Khanjar names the space in which he initially discovered the *'Ishqnama* text. He found a lithograph copy in the library of the lawyer Muhammad Yusuf Hussain Khan Sahab Bahadar, which speaks to the fact that the book had currency in middle- and upper-class Urdu-speaking circles. Khanjar further states:

This history (*tārīkh*) of a society (*ṣuḥbat*) is not a society of a respectful lineage (*nisbat*). I must give a valuable request. Enough has occurred to know that his house (*bait*) is not the house (*bait*) of the world (*jag*). This man's misfortune (*wāqiʿat*) was that he was pleasure loving (*'aish pasand*). In this manner of misfortune, my pen closed upon these events since the official (*manṣab*) duty (*farẓ*) of a historian (*muwarrakh*) is to be faithful (*rāst-bāz*).[106]

Khanjar positions himself as a historian whose duty (*farẓ*) is to honestly translate Wajid 'Ali Shah's text. Khanjar's analysis of the *'Ishqnama* as a truthful history deviates slightly from Sharar's earlier stance positing the *'Ishqnama* as a history but also as a poetic descendant of Urdu poets such as Shauq. Sharar, unlike Khanjar, may have seen the *'Ishqnama* as part of Lucknow's Urdu repertoire because he read the text in the poetic format. By 1914, Khanjar may have had access only to a copy in prose. The only indication of which format Khanjar read is his comment that he read the book *History of the Parikhana*—a title that so far has not surfaced on a lithographed copy. In either case, whether Khanjar had access to the prose or the poetic copy, he considered the book a truthful representation of Wajid 'Ali Shah's royal family and judged them to be obsessed with sex and pleasure (*'aish*).

In response to *Mahal Khana Shahi*'s popularity, Nami Press in Lucknow published a second edition in 1926 under the same title, and Abdahkar Mirza Fida Ali Khanjar is still credited as the author. The *Mahal Khana Shahi* copies of 1914 and 1926 mark the moment at which the *'Ishqnama* copies came to be distributed exclusively in a legible Urdu prose format. While the majority of the sentences are in prose, *Mahal Khana Shahi* does gesture to the *'Ishqnama*'s poetic past by including a few ghazals. They appear at the end of certain dastans. However, these ghazals are not from the original *'Ishqnama* manuscript and appear to

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[105] *Mahal Khana Shahi*, (trans.) Mirzā Fidā 'Alī Khanjar Lakhnavī (Lucknow: Nami Press, 1926), p. 3.
[106] Ibid., p. 4.

be Abdahkar Mirza Fida Ali Khanjar's invention. Many historians writing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries utilized these two editions of 1914 and 1926 as references when researching and completing their books on the nawabate of Avadh.[107] But it is with these editions that the *'Ishqnama* and the reading public forsook the poetic register, as these copies were exclusively printed primarily in prose.

In 1965, the writer Tehsen Sarwari undertook the next *'Ishqnama* edition, entitled *Parikhana*. In the text, he made a number of linguistic edits.[108] First, as in the introduction of the *Mahal Khana Shahi*, there is a narrative of discovery to justify his translations. Tehsen Sarwari states:

One day, I went [to the house] of the Urdu author (Mulana Mufti Intizam Allah Sahib). There I saw a large (*ḥajm*) manuscript (*qalamī kitāb*) that needed new (*jadīd*) writing (*khaṭṭ*). However, the writing was written clearly and was in good shape. I took the book to privately study (*mutāla'a*) it. After which, I knew that this was a rare (*nā-yāb*) manuscript copy (*nuskha*) of the Persian language and that its name was the *Parīkhāna* written by the king (*tāj-dār*) of Avadh Wajid 'Ali Shah Akhtar. As I continued to the read the book, my interest in it increased. An idea came to mind: this book should be in the Urdu language to respect its subject matter. Wajid 'Ali Shah was attached to the Urdu language and manners (*adab*). In this regard, he composed a memorial of the Urdu language [in his writings]. Considering this, one has to ask why did Wajid 'Ali Shah write and present [this manuscript] in Persian? No special reason comes to mind. Perhaps by doing so, Wajid 'Ali Shah could transmit a state of royalty.[109]

Like Khanjar before him, Tehsen Sarwari felt compelled to translate this text from Persian into Urdu. Later in his introduction, Tehsen Sarwari reveals that he was not translating from a pure Persian text, but was in fact reading a subsequent Urdu copy:

In Wajid 'Ali Shah's book, he dispersed and mixed in short Persian poetic couplets that were not from Iran. Rather, in this manner, he wanted to reserve the Persian only for personal pronouns and verbs. The rest of the sections (*ḥissa*) are in Urdu. For this reason, I did not feel like I spent a lot of time translating the manuscript.[110]

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[107] See, for instance, Afroz Taj, *The Court of Indar and the Rebirth of North Indian Drama* (New Delhi: Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu [Hind], 2007), p. 31n16. He states that his translation of Wajid 'Ali Shah's Persian Ishq Namah' is 'taken from an Urdu translation with references'.

[108] The *Parikhana* was later printed in devangari in the 1980s. See Iqbal Bahadur Devsare, *Parīkhānā* (Ilāhābāda: Sāhitya Bhavana, 1982); and Wajid 'Ali Shah, *Parīkhānah*, (trans.) Śakīla Siddīqī (Mumbai: Paridrśya Prakāśana, 1998).

[109] Sarwari, *Parikhana*, p. 5.

[110] Ibid., p. 6.

This description makes it clear that Tehsen Sarwari worked from some version of the *Mahal Khana Shahi*. He did not translate between languages, but modified the Urdu linguistic register from a florid Persianized Urdu into a simplified Urdu with a few Persian verbs. The simplification in Tehsen Sarwari's translation implies that there must have been a shift in audience and audience expectations for Urdu novels by the 1960s. The *Mahal Khana Shahi*'s literary Urdu, which includes Persian terminology and metaphoric speech, gives way to the *Parikhana*'s accessible Urdu register, which is very plain and direct. In the *Parikhana*, Tehsen Sarwari retains only half of the ghazals found in the *Mahal Khana Shahi*, further reducing the role of poetry in Wajid 'Ali Shah's original manuscript and in his political thought.

Much like his prose, Tehsen Sarwari's analysis of the *Ishqnama* is quite dry. He states:

From studying this book, I definitely knew that this was a story (*dāstān*) about an individual who became sick from engaging in and thinking about sex (*jinsi marīz*) for two years. Despite being king (*bādshāh*), he was a slave (*gulām*) to his desires (*khwāhishāt*), and he was a weak (*majbūr*) and powerless (*be-bas*) person.[111]

By the 1960s, as Tehsen Sarwari's introduction testifies, Wajid 'Ali Shah and his text were disparaged for concentrating on the subject of sexual pleasure.[112]

By focusing on the form of the *Ishqnama* copies, we can better understand why Wajid 'Ali and his book were considered deviant. For instance, the switch from poetry to prose in the copies masks the connections of the *Ishqnama* to Indo-Persianate rules of comportment and justice. To this end, many of the translators of the *Ishqnama* copies elide this connection and, in their introductory remarks, describe the *Ishqnama* as historical non-fiction. Such a claim bolsters the idea that, during his tenure as nawab, Wajid 'Ali Shah was so consumed by love and sex that he neglected statecraft.

Discomfort with the '*Ishqnama* manuscript

The *Ishqnama* manuscript has received very little scholarly attention. And the few cultural figures who have remarked on the manuscript, including

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[111] Ibid., p. 10.
[112] Tehsen Sarwari's *Parikhana* text was reprinted as Wajid 'Ali Shah Akhtar, *Parikhana* (Karachi: Collection Books, 2000).

'Abdul Halim Sharar (1860–1926), Mildred Archer (1911–2005), and the director Satyajit Ray (1921–92), all equate the *'Ishqnama* with perversity and decadency. Beyond these few cases, there has been a general amnesia about the art historical, historical, and literary significance of the *'Ishqnama* manuscript. Just as importantly, when it does enter academic discourse, historians have drawn from the Urdu copies and not from the original manuscript.

Before turning to these figures, a word must be said about the archiving principle of non-normativity within the nawabi bloodline, which affected the reception of Wajid 'Ali Shah's poems and his sexual practices. A discourse of native sexual non-normativity emerged under the British and was part and parcel of the British imperial and colonial project to undermine the political sovereignty of the nawabs and other native princes. The roots of this discourse began in the eighteenth century and stretched to the sunset of the nawabs' reign in 1856. Colonial and imperial officers disparaged the role of women in the nawabi court, the nawabs' clothing, their femininity, and their non-normative sexuality for the following nawabs: Shuja' al-Daula (r. 1754–75), Asaf al-Daula (r. 1775–97), Ghazi al-din Haidar (r. 1814–27), Nasir al-din Haidar (r. 1827–37), Muhammad 'Ali Shah (r. 1837–42), and Amjad 'Ali Shah (r. 1842–47). The last nawab, Wajid 'Ali Shah (r. 1847–56), accrued all of his forefathers' deviant signifiers. The role of empire and colonialism in characterizing the nawabs and their sexuality as excessive must not be forgotten when examining the reception of Wajid 'Ali Shah's *'Ishqnama*.

A snapshot of this is found in the words of Captain Shakespeare, a British officer stationed in Avadh who wrote a dismissive report about Wajid 'Ali Shah (r. 1847–56) to the governor general of India on 29 September 1845, stating:

The prospect that the present reign offers is truly a melancholy one and in case of anything happening to the King [Amjad 'Ali Shah], I should much dread that the future will become still more clouded. The heir-apparent's [Wajid 'Ali Shah] character holds out no promise of good. By all accounts his temper is capricious, and fickle, his days and nights are past in the female apartments and he appears wholly to have resigned himself to debauchery, dissipation and low pursuits, and for some time past has been on distant terms with his father [Amjad 'Ali Shah].[113]

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[113] National Archives of India, Foreign Department Political Consultations, 29 November 1845, no. 186, quoted in Bhatnagar, *Awadh under Wājid 'Alī Shāh*, p. 7.

For Shakespeare, Wajid 'Ali Shah strayed far beyond the line of propriety in terms of his decorum and sexual practices. Shakespeare's authoritative text served as a technique of the modern British empire to impose its sovereignty and forcefully seize desired territory. His statement was later utilized in the 1855 Outram report, which justified the annexation of Avadh by depicting Wajid 'Ali Shah as an unfit ruler. The report was named after James Outram, who served as the final British Resident of Avadh from 1854 to 1856. Much of Outram's rhetoric was an extension of Shakespeare's and Dalhousie's writings. Dalhousie, who had a low opinion of Wajid 'Ali Shah, was appointed governor general of India from 1848 to 1856.[114] Together, these officers' writings formed a citational chain that attempted to justify the deposal of Avadhi courtly culture.

After British annexation, Wajid 'Ali Shah settled permanently in Calcutta, where he sought to recreate the former glory of his Lucknow court. One of the many inhabitants of Garden Reach (Matiya Burj), as the new courtly space came to be known, was 'Abdul Halim Sharar, a historian, novelist, and reformer. Sharar's opinions about morality and state governance are quite visible in his literary output. The premise of one of his novels, *Firdaus-i Birin* (Paradise on Earth), for instance, centres on the dangers of superstitions to show the virtues of reason—a quality that Sharar believed Wajid 'Ali Shah lacked.

Sharar was the first author to link Wajid 'Ali Shah's debauchery with the *'Ishqnama* manuscript. In *Hindustān men Mashriqī Tamaddun kā ākhirī Namūnah*, originally printed as a series of articles around 1913, Sharar reserves his most scathing remarks for the last nawab, stating he was a 'criminal (*mujrim*)' for engaging in sexual affairs and publishing details on them.[115] He further explains his revulsion for the *'Ishqnama*, stating:

Wajid 'Ali Shah has made public his sensuous transgressions (*be-sharmi ki jarā'im*). Wajid 'Ali Shah could not outdo Nawab Mirza [Shauq] in the realm of poetry, so he decided to surpass him by proclaiming to the world his unchaste predilections (*jazbāt*), thoughts, and deeds. He even had no hesitation in showing shamefully (*bāzāri mizāq*) low taste (*mubtazal*) and in using obscene language (*fāḥish alfāz*). He would fall in love with female palanquin-bearers, courtesans (*raṇḍī*), domestic servants (*khawās*) and women who came in and out of the palace, in short with hundreds of women, and because he was heir to the throne, he had great success with his love-affairs, the shameful accounts (*sharm-nāk dāstānin*) of

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[114] Chatterjee, *Black Hole*, p. 204.
[115] Sharar, *Lucknow*, p. 63; Sharar and Cughāī, *Guzashtah Lakhnaū*, p. 96.

which can be read in his poems, writings and books. His character, therefore, appears to be one of the most dubious (*nā-pāk*) in all the records of history.[116]

Because the *'Ishqnama* manuscript was already in England by the time he penned his scathing review, Sharar must have read a lithograph copy of the *'Ishqnama* that was completed in a poetic format and with no accompanying images. Having read one of these *'Ishqnama* copies, Sharar states that Wajid 'Ali Shah's book transgressed both taste and morality. Wajid 'Ali Shah is deemed a criminal (*mujrim*) and unchaste (*na–pak*). Sharar takes the *'Ishqnama* copy as an accurate reflection of reality and accepts the claim that Wajid 'Ali Shah fell in love with hundreds of women. As a fellow writer, Sharar could not forgive Wajid 'Ali Shah for debasing poetry with his 'obscene' (*fāḥish*) language.

The charge of obscenity against the *'Ishqnama* continued during the formation of the discipline of South Asian art history, and has animated discussions on Wajid 'Ali Shah's literary and artistic patronage. Mildred Archer, former curator of the India Office Library in London, catalogued and curated exhibitions on Indian paintings. She was the first to review the *'Ishqnama* based on its art historical merit. In 1955, she stated that, within the *'Ishqnama*:

[t]he paintings reveal the tawdry Europeanized palace to which the journals and memoirs constantly refer. We see the garish stucco building with its shoddy woodwork and frescoes, its carpets, furniture and wall lamps in the worst British taste. The rooms are decorated with Indian portraits and British sporting prints, and the ruler of Oudh, now a king with a golden halo, is portrayed throughout his regal routine avidly seeking with monotonous regularity the tedious company of unhappy women. … The style of the painting is even more revealing. … The original Lucknow manner which had still persisted under Asaf ud-Daula is now dead. … In this volume the pleasure of the zenana, its feats, music, dancing and embracings, formerly portrayed with voluptuous line and fevered colour, are now so feebly rendered that dignity is lost and nothing remains but a sense of all-pervading squalor.[117]

Archer's emotive vocabulary such as 'pleasure', 'voluptuousness', 'fever', and 'squalor' devalues the literary conceits and aesthetics of the *'Ishqnama*. To turn Archer's interpretation on its head, the *'Ishqnama* painting style could be considered refined rather than voluptuous. The 'fevered colour' could be described as subdued. A sense of royalty rather than squalor could be all-pervading. I reverse Archer's language here so that one can more easily

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[116] Sharar, *Lucknow*, p. 66; Sharar and Cughāī, *Guzashtah Lakhnaū*, pp. 96–97.
[117] Archer, *Indian Painting for the British*, pp. 62–63.

notice that Archer's discussions of the *'Ishqnama* are not objective and are conditioned by colonial paradigms of decadence and excessive sexuality. For Archer, this manuscript reifies the logic of colonialism according to which, by surrounding himself with women, Wajid 'Ali Shah was feminized and emasculated as an Oriental despot.

Such an attitude has persisted in contemporary reception of the *'Ishqnama*. For example, the 1977 film *Shatranj ke Khilari* (*The Chess Players*) centres on Wajid 'Ali Shah's court, and has been studied as a postcolonial film that 'critiques both colonialist and nationalist constructions'.[118] To achieve this aim, the filmmaker Satyajit Ray notably refused to read the *'Ishqnama*, and instead pulled from a number of resources including British documents and the expertise of Urdu historians to create a semi-historical film.[119] Since Satyajit drew from local sources, the film not only reflects Satyajit's personal feelings toward the nawab, but also highlights the myths of Wajid 'Ali Shah circulating in the Indian public sphere. While undertaking research for his film, Satyajit states that he encountered a manuscript detailing Wajid 'Ali's sexual exploits beginning at a very young age. The manuscript in question was most likely a copy of the *'Ishqnama*. Refusing to read this text, Satyajit remarked to one of his researchers, Manikda: '[D] on't tell me all this [about the *'Ishqnama*] because then I'll dislike him [Wajid 'Ali Shah] even more.' Satyajit wanted to complete the film as an impartial party, and he thought that Wajid 'Ali's overt sexuality only reinforced colonial historiography, claiming that a decadent king needed to be overthrown. As Satyajit notes: 'He [Wajid 'Ali Shah] even had no hesitation in showing shamefully low taste and in using obscene language.' Eventually, after further research, Satyajit gained greater sympathy for Wajid 'Ali Shah, but this research did not include reading the *'Ishqnama*.[120] After *Shatranj ke Khilari* was released, a debate erupted over Satyajit Ray's construction of Wajid 'Ali's gender.[121]

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[118] Reena Dube, *Satyajit Ray's Chess Players: The Discourse of British Colonial Enterprise and Its Representation of the Other through the Expanded Cultural Critique* (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2001), p. i.

[119] Andrew Robinson, *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye* (London: A. Deutsch, 1989), pp. 242–243. Satyajit's *Shatranj ke Khilari* was completed in 1977 and was based on writer Premchand's 1924 novel.

[120] Ibid., pp. 240–251.

[121] For more on this debate, see Ashis Nandy, 'Beyond Oriental Despotism: Politics and Femininity in Satyajit Ray', *Sunday*, Annual No., 1981. Reprinted in Ashis Nandy, *The Savage Freud and Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 209–216.

These recent assumptions by art historians and filmmakers throughout the twentieth century show the resilience of the association between Wajid 'Ali Shah and the *'Ishqnama* and opprobrium and disrepute. But these representations derived from different versions of the *'Ishqnama*. While in England, Archer mostly likely saw the original *'Ishqnama* manuscript, as she remarks on the paintings, which are available only in the manuscript format. Her disgust for the *'Ishqnama* may have stemmed from the fact that she did not read Urdu or Persian and therefore could not understand the text and its crucial relationship to the images. Archer could only make a superficial analysis based on the paintings. For his part, Satyajit Ray's research assistants most likely read the *'Ishqnama* as an Urdu lithograph copy. In that format, the *'Ishqnama* reads more like a factual biography, which would have been useful for Satyajit's quest for objective documents and historicity. Paradoxically, however, he refused to engage with a text that was too truthful. The lithograph copies, for their part, seemingly bolstered the idea that Wajid 'Ali Shah undertook passionate affairs at the expense of his politics.

Such cases of turning to the copies are the norm, including in more recent engagements. Historian G. D. Bhatnagar's careful study of Wajid 'Ali Shah's court, completed in 1968, uses a version of the lithograph copies. Rosie Llewellyn-Jones's recent monograph on Wajid 'Ali Shah, published in 2014, utilized primarily the *Parikhana* copy.[122] Recently, art historian Tushara Bindu Gude in 2011 and Emily Hannam in 2018 commented on the *'Ishqnama* manuscript in short catalogue entries.[123]

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[122] Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *The Last King in India: Wajid 'Ali Shah, 1822–1887* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014). She states that she is using the *'Ishqnama* but, in her footnotes, she cites the *Parikhana*. She describes the *'Ishqnama/Parikhana* as a 'straightforward case of a child who was sexualized at an early age and spent the rest of his life seeking fulfilment by marrying vast numbers of women, but not finding much real satisfaction' (p. 130).

[123] Tushara Bindu Gude, 'Hybrid Visions: The Cultural Landscape of Awadh', in *India's Fabled City: The Art of Courtly Lucknow*, (eds) Stephen Markel, Tushara Bindu Gude, and Muzaffar Alam (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2010), pp. 98–99; Emily Hannam, *Eastern Encounters: Four Centuries of Paintings and Manuscripts from the Indian Subcontinent* (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2018), catalogue entries 78–81; Jeremiah P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London: British Library, 1982), pp. 146, 151. Like Gude and Hannam, Losty provides a short catalogue entry. He argues that the text and images of the *'Ishqnama* represent 'lovely ladies' who care for Wajid 'Ali Shah 'far from affairs of state', which positions proper state governance as antithetical to Wajid 'Ali Shah's relationship with his household.

Though abbreviated, these entries are a much-needed rejoinder to previous scholarship.

The *'Ishqnama* has long carried with it the stigma of its historical period. In alignment with Allison Busch's argument on Riti poetry and its relationship with Indian courts, there are three main reasons why Wajid 'Ali Shah's literature and his courtly culture are earmarked as decadent.[124] First, there is an assumption that the culture of the court of the nawabs, especially Wajid 'Ali Shah, facilitated British colonization. This notion is apparent in the colonial discourse on the nawabs' sexuality, which was used to discredit the native right to rule to justify replacing the nawabs with a supposedly more rational colonial system. Second, the literature by these 'emasculated' courtly rulers looked backward to Islamicate motifs instead of forward to so-called modern European tropes. As such, Wajid 'Ali's gender and sexuality served as a symbol of non-normativity and backwardness for Indian nationalists and colonialists alike, as encapsulated in Sharar's reaction. Third, during Indian nationalism, these texts were measured against new moral criteria. In this context, Wajid 'Ali's sexuality was considered a blight on the nation of India and was a site of moral disavowal.[125] Sharar was the first to push this sentiment regarding the *'Ishqnama*, and his position was inadvertently reinforced by Satyajit Ray. This history cannot be disentangled from the current reception of the *'Ishqnama* and helps t explain the text's absence from literary studies. Moreover, the active silencing of the *'Ishqnama* in current media productions such as *Shatranj ke Khilari* as well as the art historical amnesia surrounding the work's miniatures and the text's literary merit also stem from its colonial reception.

Conclusion

By reading pleasure as productive in the *'Ishqnama*, I see Wajid 'Ali Shah's efforts as creating an "ishq" philosophy—one that places affective relations within a literary and political history. 'Ishq was an aesthetic and social concept that allowed Wajid 'Ali to reimagine, relive, and reconstitute

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[124] Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[125] For an overview study on the heterosexualization of the Indian nation in the wake of India's independence, see Ruth Vanita (ed.), *Queering India* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

his sovereignty through intimate bonds. At the end of the 'Ishqnama, near the colophon, Wajid 'Ali Shah stresses the importance of loyalty and fidelity (wafā) in his interpersonal relations. He provides a list of his lovers who have been loyal and those who have not. For Wajid 'Ali Shah, the intense attachments that were forged erotically and sexually were symbolically mapped onto the attachments that courtiers should have expressed for their ruler. In his erotics of sovereignty, loyalty becomes a foundational emotion, not only for his individual sexual relationships, but also for his dominion as a ruler.

The overarching theme of the 'Ishqnama is 'ishqbazi, the play of love, which in a sense can be used to substantiate the colonial argument of Oriental despotism.[126] By studying aspects of the original manuscript, this article has overturned this conflation by providing detailed analysis of some of the dastans in which 'ishq was aligned directly with politics. Although it was not possible to analyse every single one of the 'Ishqnama's 131 dastans, my viewpoint sheds new light on the 'Ishqnama and provides an opening for future scholarship. Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam have been at the forefront of taking seriously other genres of histories and, similarly, the provocations raised in this article shed new light on the 'Ishqnama and urge a new analysis from future scholarship.[127]

In returning to the poetics and aesthetics of the manuscript, it is evident that the 'Ishqnama did not forgo history; rather, by aligning itself with the politics of pleasure, the 'Ishqnama presents the new avenues through which Wajid 'Ali Shah engaged with the social and political changes occurring in his court. From the arrival of Sleeman to the whittling-down of the geography of his political power to the confines of his household, Wajid 'Ali Shah accommodated these changes in new forms of rule that were founded on a language of sex and love. My analysis requires reading the manuscript as an expression of the self, a common conceit for the genre of autobiography, in tandem with viewing Wajid 'Ali Shah's poetic self and his household as an extension of his sovereignty.[128]

Shifting from a manuscript with poetry and painting to one with only poetry, thence to one with prose and poetry, and finally to a simplified register of Urdu prose, the 'Ishqnama and its copies have been

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[126] 'Ishqbazi can also be translated as 'amorous speech'.

[127] Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Dean Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India, 1600–1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

[128] For a case in point, see Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley (eds), *Speaking of the Self*.

manipulated in the market space of print publication to better suit their reading communities. The manuscript's circulation in a wider public space resulted in the removal of its aesthetic features such as any traces of hashiya, perhaps because of the economic and technological demands of the printing press. Because of these limitations, and coupled with the reading public's expectations for what a particular historical autobiographical form should look like, publishers and translators have over time removed the poetic structure and figural representations contained in the first copies of the *'Ishqnama* manuscript. These changes, in turn, have shaped the reception of the text and in effect have shaped how historians have read and understood the historical figure of Wajid 'Ali Shah. In short, a double bind occurs: readers have certain expectations of the autobiography genre that ultimately shape a book's production and, as a consequence, readers shape what counts as a historical, political document. By returning to the various iterations of the *'Ishqnama*, we can see how each edition was correlated with the different expectations of its reading public and the audiences' different conceptualizations of how political history ought to be expressed. With each subsequent copy, the versions lost their poetics of vision and were edited into a more simplified register of speech. Inadvertently, as scholars, we have been reinforcing our own ideas of historicity by turning time and time again to the copies.