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ARTICLE

Princely prisons, state exhibitions, and Muslim industrial authority in colonial India

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Abstract

This article analyses the prison industries and state industrial exhibitions of three Indian princely states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, tracing how princely elites sought to develop distinct labouring and industrial cultures. Drawing on examples from three Muslim-led princely states, namely Rampur, Bhopal, and Hyderabad, the article argues that state elites distinguished their forms of cultural and religious authority from that of the British Raj by coercing and displaying new industrial practices. They aimed to cultivate an industrial modernity that could compete with colonial projects while also promoting what they characterised as Indian Muslim characteristics and courtly traditions for artisan labourers and their work. The article asks how princely elites worked to conscript their subjects—including marginalised subjects such as convict labourers—into visions of regional industrial authority. Princely visions of Muslim and courtly industrial futures in Rampur, Bhopal, and Hyderabad were rooted in the attempts of state administrators to fashion distinctive regional identities and assert authority in a context of circumscribed, quasi-colonial rulership. Industrial cultures associated with princely prisons and exhibitions ultimately exceeded the bounds of these projects, placing pressure on other state subjects to adopt new material practices and engage with state-defined regional craft traditions.

Keywords: industry; penal labour; princely states; India; exhibitions

Introduction

Through convict labour and state-sponsored industrial exhibitions, the leaders of princely states in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India sought to teach, coerce, and display new labouring and industrial cultures. This article asks how state elites cultivated industrial practices that emphasised the cultural and religious authority of princely rulership through a comparison of three states: Rampur, Hyderabad, and Bhopal.

Princely state understandings of industrial modernity were informed by the expectations of the British colonial state, whose officers often contributed to the oversight of princely educational, judicial, and industrial projects. At the same time, state elites sought to create material and industrial cultures that emphasised their authority as Indian rulers. This often meant engaging with claims on religious pasts and specific, locally rooted courtly cultures that exceeded colonial state authority. In the case of the three Muslim-led states examined here, state elites dreamed of an industrial modernity that could compete with colonial European projects while communicating Muslim and courtly distinctiveness for artisanal and industrial work.

Scholars of Indian princely states have drawn on state histories to examine projects of local self-fashioning in contexts of circumscribed political authority.[1] Analyses of princely state-led development have emphasised state policies not only in conversation with colonial administrators, but also as products of consciously fashioned cosmopolitanism and hybridised visions of modernity.[2] But how did princely efforts to position their states as repositories of Muslim and courtly authority over industry and craft shape the way state elites sought to direct industrial labour? And how did they seek to conscript princely subjects—including marginalised subjects such as convict labourers—into elite understandings of princely authority?

To answer these questions, I trace the development of convict labour schemes in the three states, including practices of moral conditioning that aimed to cultivate modern workers and subjects.[3] I also analyse how state leaders used industrial exhibitions to display technologies and material cultures that they saw as representative of their potential autonomous industrial futures. On a practical and ideological level, jails and industrial exhibitions had much in common: both enabled the state to direct engagement with new techniques and materials, often bypassing the ability of artisans to make economic decisions about the incorporation of new practices. Through convict labour, princely administrators tied outward industriousness to the moral improvement and industrial modernity of state subjects. Using exhibitions, they demonstrated the impact of these efforts, displaying products designed to communicate the effectiveness of their integration of courtly and Muslim ideals of social propriety with colonial industrial practices.[4]

I draw on prison and exhibition records, state histories, and scholarly analyses of regional politics to emphasise the differing valences of Muslim and courtly traditions of artisanship and claims on industrial futures. In Rampur, state elites often recast regional practices of Nawabi patronage as colonially informed industrial developmentalism, positioning the state, in Razak Khan's framing, as a centre of renewed 'culture' and a site of 'progressive' rulership.[5] In Hyderabad, prison projects and exhibitions were oriented towards demonstrations of sovereignty that exceeded the limitations assumed by colonial authorities, including through the display of new forms of Muslim courtly urbanism and infrastructure.[6] In Bhopal, state administrators used jail industries and exhibitions to demonstrate the 'charitable uplift' of the state's subjects—a project that, as Siobhan Lambert-Hurley shows, drew on both gendered assumptions about female rulership and claims on reformist Muslim practices.[7] I conclude by arguing that, across all three states, princely elites also reframed long-standing courtly practices of artisanal patronage as reflective of revived princely Muslim industrial authority, in an effort to address emerging Muslim middle-class audiences beyond their borders.

[1] M. Bhagavan, 'The rebel academy: modernity and the movement for a university in princely Baroda', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61.2 (2002), pp. 919–947. H. Archambault, 'Becoming Mughal in the nineteenth century: the case of the Bhopal princely state', *South Asia: The Journal of South Asian Studies* 36.4 (2013), pp. 479–495.

[2] E. Beverley, *Hyderabad, British India, and the World: Muslim Networks and Minor Sovereignty, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 104–107; J. Nair, *Mysore Modern: Rethinking the Region under Princely Rule* (Minneapolis, 2011), pp. 165–168.

[3] A. Yang, 'Disciplining "natives": prisons and prisoners in early nineteenth century India', *South Asia* 10.2 (1987), pp. 30–32.

[4] S. Mathur, *India by Design* (Berkeley, CA, 2007), pp. 49–52.

[5] R. Khan, *Minority Pasts: Locality, Emotion, and Belonging in Princely Rampur* (Delhi, 2022), p. 67.

[6] Beverley, *Hyderabad*, pp. 223–226; and B. B. Cohen, '"The water flows under the bridge and we pass above it …" infrastructure, transport, and state power: the bridges of Hyderabad city, India *c.* sixteenth to twentieth centuries', *Journal of Transport History* 44.1 (2022), pp. 36–38.

[7] S. Lambert-Hurley, *Muslim Women, Reform, and Princely Patronage: Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum of Bhopal* (London, 2007), pp. 90–93, 144–147.

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Princely state prison labour in global and imperial context

In the wake of the anti-colonial uprising of 1857, the Indian subcontinent was organised into a patchwork of directly administered British Indian territory and 'native' or princely states, where local dynasties held at least nominal internal authority. Princely states comprised approximately a quarter of India's population and nearly 40 per cent of its territory.[8] In the wake of 1857 and the formal disestablishment of Mughal authority in Delhi, many of the leaders of the subcontinent's remaining Muslim-led princely states sought to portray themselves as the successors of Muslim political authority and courtly culture on the subcontinent. Simultaneously, they engaged with colonial models of effective princely leadership, importing advisers and administrative practices from neighbouring regions of British India.[9] Prison industrial projects in Rampur, Hyderabad, and Bhopal reveal efforts to integrate claims on traditions of Muslim courtly patronage with colonial carceral cultures. We will address these colonial carceral models first, before turning to their intersections with the specific valances of courtly patronage in each state.

For many British Indian administrators, jail manufacturing represented the possibility of morally conditioning workers while coercing inmates to address the industrial needs and desires of the colonial state. Penal labour was not unique to India, but the attempts of both British Indian and princely state jail administrators to use artisanship training and practice to reform prisoner behaviour and morality meant South Asian prison labour looked different from its global counterparts. Globally, prison labour was prized by states and contractors because it offered, in the words of Rebecca McLennan, 'a much higher degree of control over workers and the production process than was ordinarily possible in the free world'.[10] For instance, in the US American context in the post-Civil War (1861–1865) era, landholders and contractors identified in the prison population as a source of labour that was 'wholly unorganised and highly exploitable', and hence more easily disciplined.[11] In many cases, they required these carceral labourers to replace the work of formerly enslaved Black people, and forced prison labourers were often descendants of enslaved people.

Elsewhere, especially in Britain's penal colonies, convict labour was central to local economies, but critiques from the imperial centre sometimes argued that the system lacked oversight and contributed to the further moral deprivation of convicts.[12] Outside of penal colonies, British colonial experiments with prison labour focused on using the captive nature of work to improve technical processes and reforming convict labourers though discipline and physical exertion.

Prisons also became sites of industrial reform in India from the early nineteenth century.[13] In South India, European arts and industrial reformers quickly identified prisons as ideal spaces to test new forms of industrial production, though they often limited the incorporation of new machines, fearing that machinery would disrupt the 'penal' nature of hard labour. Prior to founding the Madras School of Industrial Arts, A. Hunter—a surgeon turned instructor of industrial arts—attempted to reform the jail industries of South

[8] R. Jeffrey (ed.), *People, Princes, and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in Indian Princely States* (Delhi, 1978), p. 11.

[9] K. Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu nationalism and colonial India* (Honolulu, 2013), pp. 40–44.

[10] R. McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776–1941* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 110.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 111. See also T. L. Leflouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (Chapel Hill, 2015), pp. 75–76.

[12] C. Anderson, *Convicts: A Global History* (Cambridge, 2022), pp. 158–159; A. Yang, *Empire of Convicts* (Oakland, CA, 2021), pp. 161–163.

[13] D. Arnold, 'The colonial prison: power, knowledge and penology in nineteenth century India', in *Subaltern Studies VIII*, (eds.) D. Arnold and D. Hardiman (Delhi, 1994), p. 176.

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India. Beginning in the Chingleput district prison in Madras in around 1840, Hunter focused on 'teaching prisoners … to make some improved building materials and pottery'.[14] Ultimately, Hunter claimed, jail-based industry led to 'great improvements' in manufacturing 'building materials, plain and glazed pottery, rope, string, thread and paper'.[15]

As David Arnold has argued, in India, jails thus became sites of experimentation with forms of industrial modernity: 'If elsewhere in the industrial age the factory often resembled the prison, in India the prison largely anticipated the factory.'[16] In this understanding, the use of prisons as sites of manufacturing reflects the attempt of the colonial state to establish control over productive work. Prison labour extracted work and income from a captive population, but also was meant to teach convicts industriousness and discipline. Abigail McGowan has noted that, in the case of prison carpets in western India, jail industries allowed colonial administrators to 'intervene in industrial development in ways that the state could not (practically) or would not (politically and financially) do in free society'.[17] This included the introduction of industries in regions where they had not previously been widely practised, and the cultivation of new styles within those industries.

Rampuri prisons and the reorientation of Nawabi courtly patronage

Princely state elites borrowed the idea that industry could reshape both prisoner morality and industrial productivity from British India. Simultaneously, state elites provided new framings that often highlighted the courtly and religious nature of the states' industrial practices. In Rampur, state reports and histories about the city jail reflected the state's interest in developing industrial skill through mandated labour in the prison, while also revealing the state's distinctive efforts to reorient north Indian and Shiʿa courtly traditions of patronage.

After 1857, Rampur was the only Muslim-led state in the populous north Indian region of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh (renamed the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh in 1902). The state was the remnants of the larger Rohilkhand State, which had been incorporated into the territory of the East India Company and other regional powers following two wars in 1773–1774 and 1794.[18] The leaders of Rampur—like their counterparts in Bhopal—traced their lineages to Pashtun Sunni Muslims, but most members of the Rampuri Dynasty converted to Shiʿism in the late eighteenth century, and Rampur was one of only five Shiʿa-led states in British India after 1857.[19] Rampuri elites sometimes characterised their forms of artisanal patronage and industrial projects as taking up the mantel of those practised by the Shiʿa Nawabi court in the north Indian region of Awadh, which had been disestablished by the colonial regime in 1856.[20] In other cases, they looked to models of patronage that were understood as reflecting their

[14] 'Report on the results of artistic and industrial training in the Madras Presidency', April 1873, no. 26, National Archives of India (NAI), Home: Education, p. 2.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[16] Arnold, 'Colonial prison', pp. 178–179.

[17] A. McGowan, 'Convict carpets: jails and the revival of historic carpet design in colonial India', *Journal of Asian Studies* 72.2 (2013), p. 393.

[18] R. Khan, 'Local pasts: space, emotions, and identities in vernacular histories of princely Rampur', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58.5 (2015), pp. 704–705.

[19] L. Brennan, 'A case of attempted segmental modernization: Rampur State, 1930–1939', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23.3 (1981), p. 354.

[20] On Awadhi Shiʿa models developed in Rampur more broadly, see J. Jones, *Shiʿa Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community, and Sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 12, 250–251.

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Pathan heritage and reflecting Pashtun or Afghan pasts in India, or to Mughal antecedents.[21]

An inflection point in Rampuri jail labour projects—and state characterisations thereof—occurred on 21 October 1891. On that date, the prisoners of the Rampur city jail organised a revolt against their overseers, guards, and state officials. According to Muhammad Najm ul-Ghani Khan—an early twentieth-century historian of Rampur—the revolt included riots by large numbers of prisoners and several escapes. Najm ul-Ghani Khan explained that, although the leaders of the revolt had found weapons earlier, as other prisoners joined, they 'gathered up all the bamboo sticks and knives from the jail workshops and used them to besiege the guards'.[22] The prisoners' raids of the prison workshops are evocative of the fact that the jails in Rampur were spaces of industrial labour, where convicts were forced to toil over looms, lathes, kilns, and forges. But convicts saw little remuneration for their work. Instead, their manufactures were meant to make the jail self-sustaining and to inculcate moral behaviours into the convict labourers.

In response to the uprising, the state's Regency Council, which was ruling for the Nawab until his maturity and was led by a British official, Major H. A. Vincent, sent in state forces to re-establish order. Vincent was subsequently accused of engaging in excessive and illegal violence to quell the revolt, with Urdu newspapers in the surrounding regions describing his actions as a 'great tyranny'. Indian newspaper editors in cities such as Lucknow and Moradabad were especially horrified that Vincent 'had some convicts shot by soldiers and their bodies were not made over to their friends but were buried without any ceremony'.[23]

The scale of the revolt spurred the Regency Council to attempt significant reforms to the jail system. These did little to address accusations of Vincent's abuses of power, focusing instead on addressing the influence of 'ill-behaved' prisoners and internal corruption. Just as the industrial workshops of the jail had been a key space of conflict and revolt, they also became a major site of 'reform', central to new systems of control, moral conditioning, and ultimately visions of courtly authority over production.

A new Rampuri jailer, Muhammad Aulad 'Ali, was appointed to organise the labour of prisoners in reformed weaving, ceramics, and carpentry workshops, and to choose suitably compliant convicts for extramural work in brickmaking, road laying, and construction.[24] He served under a retired British Indian officer responsible for reforming the physical organisation of the prison and its hospital. Together, the two designed and implemented a system of jail industry that attracted accolades throughout the region. When visiting in 1898, the Lieutenant-Governor for the North-western Provinces and Oudh commented that 'this jail was as well-managed as a British one'—rare praise for a princely state institution.[25] Ultimately, the revolt was wielded by state administrators as evidence of the need for greater intervention into jail discipline. It was likewise used as an opportunity to reshape convict labour projects to reflect what Khan has characterised as a hybridised model of a 'colonial idiom of progressive rule' with regional traditions of courtly patronage.[26] This hybridised vision of convict labour was in turn designed to cultivate behaviours and materials befitting modern Muslim courtly

[21] Ibn Ḥasan Khūrshīd, *Taẕkirah-yi hunarmandān-i Rāmpūr* (Rampur, 2001), pp. 14–18.

[22] Muḥammad Najm ul-Ghanī Khān, *Akhbār al-Ṣanādīd, Jild-i Duvum* (Rampur, 1997), p. 346.

[23] *The Azad, Lucknow* (20 November 1891), quoted in *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers Published in the Punjab, North-Western Provinces, Oudh, Central Provinces, and Berar* (26 November 1891), p. 795.

[24] Muhammad Ishak Khan, 'Administration Report of the Rampur State for 1896–97', British Library, India Office Records, p. 2.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[26] Khan, *Minority Pasts*, pp. 67, 85.

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authority, which could be displayed to members of the Indian middle class at exhibitions and fairs.

Hybridised narratives about convict labour had their origins several decades before the revolt, in the policies of the administration of Nawab Kalb-e 'Ali Khan (r. 1865–1887). Kalb-e 'Ali differed from his successors in his sectarian orientation—he embraced Sunnism—but was the progenitor of many of the markers of courtly patronage and colonial models of authority embraced by subsequent Nawabs.[27] Under his rule, in 1867, a new 'modern' jail was built in Rampur city, modelled on the Banaras Jail. The Banaras Jail, in turn, had been constructed largely in accordance with the recommendations of the 1836 Indian Committee on Prison Discipline.[28] The committee recommended that most convicts should be employed within the jail itself, rather than extramurally. In the jail, they would work on simple 'machines' necessitating 'dull, monotonous, wearisome and disgustful exertion … which [would] force every individual to exert himself equally and constantly'.[29]

The emphases on observation and 'wearisome' labour shaped the design of the Banaras Jail and its Rampuri counterpart. Industry in the Rampur jail initially focused on the production of rugs and floor coverings, but later expanded to include carpentry, metalworking, and other industries.[30] An 1890–1891 state report that was issued shortly before the 1891 prison revolt noted that prisoners were most skilled at 'making carpets, tents, tables, chairs, wooden connector pieces, and travel bags and boxes'.[31]

The report went on to argue that the jail-based industry could improve the social position of convicts and the quality of industrial production in the state: 'Upon their release, the bad behaviour of the convicts will be reduced if they can find a position doing handicrafts. Many new types of workshops have been founded here recently and are in need of skilled workers.'[32] In Rampur, the jail was among the first sites to use new lathe technologies, including steam-powered lathes, meaning that released convicts had specialised technical carpentry skills.[33]

The modelling of the jail on the Banaras Jail, and its adoption of British colonial practices of prison labour, suggests a broader orientation of the judicial and policing forces within the state towards the neighbouring colonial systems of authority. At the same time, under Kalb-e 'Ali Khan and his successors, the state retained some autonomous judicial models. This included the occasional direct intervention and oversight of the Nawab in the Adalat-e Aulia, or High Court. As a colonial administration report on the state from 1869 noted, the Nawab 'hears appeals of cases of a more important nature, both Civil and Criminal', despite the fact that 'the practice of our [British Indian] courts is almost invariably followed'.[34] The Nawabs of Rampur and their advisers thus sought to communicate that, while they accepted many British Indian principles of legal justice, they retained forms of Nawabi authority that exceeded the colonial judicial system.

These principles also informed Rampuri efforts to reform the state's jails and their industrial projects in the wake of 1891. More specifically, Rampur's new jail administrators aimed to create a system that reflected colonial ideals of meritorious behaviour as a basis for authority, while defining that merit in Nawabi courtly and Muslim terms. In

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 75; and Khan, *Taẕkirah-yi hunarmandān*, pp. 8–12.

[28] H. Shakespear et al., *Report of the Committee on Prison Discipline* (Calcutta, 1838), pp. 51–55.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

[30] 'Administrative Report for Rampur State, June 1869', Revenue Department for the Northwestern Provinces, BL, IOR, p. C, section 72.

[31] *Ripūrt-i intiẓāmiya riyāsat-i Rāmpūr 1890–91* (Rampur, 1891), p. 44.

[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[34] 'Administrative Report for Rampur State, 1869', no. 2.12.

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the reformed jail, prisoner *lumbardārs* (headmen of the workshops and barracks) were meant to be granted extra privileges due to both their skills in industry and their ability to model behaviour associated with virtuous conduct or ethics (*akhlāq*).[35] As Khan has noted, local historians in Rampur emphasised the *'umda akhlāq* (good conduct) of regional historical actors as a potential model for future generations.[36] In much the same way, authors such as Najm ul-Ghani Khan maintained that models of *akhlāq* within the prison—reformed convicts chosen as *lumbardārs*—could serve as a reforming force for the broader jail population. For him, the source of the 1891 uprising was thus the 'corruption' of the morals and manners of those prisoners who were meant to serve as models of behaviour, which had allowed well-connected prisoners to sometimes work where and how they pleased, or to shirk work altogether.[37]

In the overwhelmingly male space of Rampur's state jail—only 22 women were imprisoned in 1883 compared with 409 men—overseers also increasingly attempted to teach prisoners forms of non-threatening but industrially modern masculinity.[38] This meant not only that prisoners were conditioned to be productive and inoffensive contributors to the state economy, but also that the state also tied their compliant productivity and industriousness to control over their masculinity.[39] In Rampur, this process was oriented towards a repudiation of what middle-class Muslims increasingly understood as earlier 'decadent' courtly cultures, and the construction of a reformed ideal of princely patronage and comportment.[40]

For instance, by emphasising prisoners' work on state construction under Nawab Hamid 'Ali Khan (r. 1889–1930), Najm ul-Ghani Khan positioned their physical strength as central to improvements to state construction practices. He highlighted, for instance, the 'strengthening' of the state's *pukkā* (solid) construction—a project that relied on the labour of convicts in the state's brickmaking workshops.[41] Convicts were also sometimes forced to make and apply plaster for state construction.[42] These varied materials were applied to visual markers of the state's hybridisation of colonial expectations of princely statehood and renewed (often Shiʿa) Muslim Nawabi patronage. Under Hamid 'Ali Khan, this included a new central *imāmbāṛā* (site of Shiʿa mourning) and multiple new palace structures that evoked both Awadhi Nawabi pasts and British Indian 'Indo-Saracenic' architectural styles.[43] Construction in Rampur was attributed to a combination of local artisanal expertise and European architectural knowledge, but the base materials were often created in state workshops manned at least in part by convict workers.

Rampuri historians and officials thus focused on the hard labour carried out by male prisoners who were deemed to be physically strong, but also compliant and unlikely to flee on extramural projects.[44] They discursively integrated convict labourers into both the construction of Rampur's evolving modern Muslim cityscape and elite visions of a

[35] On the entomology and application of the term *akhlāq*, see B. Ingram, *Revival from Below: Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Oakland, CA, 2018), p. 119.

[36] Khan, 'Local pasts', p. 702; see also Najm ul-Ghanī Khān, *Akhbār al-Ṣanādīd*, pp. 5–7.

[37] Najm ul-Ghanī Khān, *Akhbār al-Ṣanādīd*, pp. 346–347.

[38] 'Rampur Administration Report', December 1883, p. 3.

[39] For an analysis of industrial masculinities, see H. Hamad, *Industrial Sexuality: Gender, Urbanization, and Social Transformation in Egypt* (Austin, TX, 2016), p. 45.

[40] Khan, *Minority Pasts*, p. 70.

[41] Najm ul-Ghanī Khān, *Akhbār al-Ṣanādīd*, pp. 207–208; and 'Administrative Report for Rampur State 1872–73', Revenue Department for the Northwestern Provinces (1873), BL, IOR, pp. 3–4.

[42] 'Administrative Report for Rampur State 1872–73', pp. 3–4.

[43] Khūrshīd, *Taẕkirah-yi hunarmandān*; see also Khan, 'Local pasts', p. 706.

[44] Najm ul-Ghanī Khān, *Akhbār al-Ṣanādīd*, p. 207.

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compliant local working class that comprised masculine, modern, and moral labourers. Even the jail's location, immediately north of Rampur's fort, in a largely Muslim neighbourhood associated with metalsmiths, reflected the desire of Rampuri elites to inculcate localised Muslim and courtly industrial masculinities between the prison and town workshops.[45]

Ultimately, in Rampur, state prison systems were both sites of experimentation with new materials and practices of industrial production and spaces to enforce ideals of artisan industrial behaviour. Following an analysis of the differing convict labour projects taken up in Hyderabad and Bhopal, we will return to the Rampuri context to ask how convict labour systems intersected with state exhibitions and displays of a hybridised courtly and Muslim culture.

Hyderabad's jails: cultivating princely sovereignty and urbanism

In Hyderabad State, prison records often focused on the sovereign power of the Nizami administration and its ability transform unruly agriculturalists into model urban or town-based industrial workers. This narrative was tied to what Eric Beverley has described as 'urbanism centered on an aesthetic valuing clear lines of separation between races, classes, and different activities within the city'.[46] As princely prisons expanded within the cities and towns of Hyderabad State, they became part of this urbanist project. This distinctive claim to control the urban was often used, through exhibitions and other displays, to communicate the sovereignty of India's most populous princely state to elite and middle-class Muslims across India and beyond.

Hyderabad, located in the south Indian Deccan and covering large portions of the modern states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, was the largest princely state in India in terms of population and the second-largest in terms of land, after Jammu and Kashmir. Its administration boasted long-established regional legitimacy because its dynasty of ruling Nizams traced their linage to seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Mughal administrative appointments.[47] The Hyderabadi administration had an arguably higher degree of autonomy than most Indian princely states, but its wealth and size also led to significant European investment, which shaped its administrative structures and policies.[48] At the same time, as demonstrated by Benjamin Cohen, authority in Hyderabad State was negotiated with a range of smaller kingdoms, whose official status was subordinated to the Nizam.[49] Attempts to display sovereignty through convict labour—including to external observers and consumers—thus often included demonstrations of Nizami state capacity across their vast territory.

Small-scale systems of prison labour existed in Hyderabad from 1866, when Hyderabad developed an independent prison administration, but prison labour practices were not codified or formalised across the state. A formal programme to develop industrial practices within prisons and attempts to make prisons partially self-funded through industry were introduced statewide in 1876 as part of the reforms of the Dewan Salar Jung I.[50] A report two years later lamented that the revenues from the industrial work completed in prisons were 'as yet very trifling' and were often not fully reported, but instead 'simply

[45] *Rampur State Gazetteer 1905*, p. 67.

[46] Beverley, *Hyderabad*, p. 285.

[47] B. N. Ramusack, *Indian Princes and their States* (New York, 2003), p. 26.

[48] K. Leonard, 'Banking firms in nineteenth-century Hyderabad politics', *Modern Asian Studies* 15.2 (1981), pp. 181–183.

[49] B. B. Cohen, *Kingship and Colonialism in India's Deccan* (New York, 2007), pp. 3–6, 107–109.

[50] 'Annual Financial Statement (1878–79)', Finance Department: General, Hyderabad State, Telangana State Archives, p. 49.

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used up in the [prison] expenditure'. Still, the state administration expressed interest in expanding the programme, and Salar Jung noted that a 'special officer has been appointed to inspect industrial operations carried on in the prisons'.[51]

New jail construction accompanied reforms to the jail administration in Hyderabad city in 1876. The city's Central Jail was commissioned that same year, with space for over 800 prisoners.[52] Built in Chanchalguda, an eastern section of Hyderabad's Old City, the new jail was somewhat removed from the most prominent landmarks of Hyderabadi heritage but surrounded by long-standing workshops and small factories. At around the same time as the construction of the jail, the Hyderabadi administration moved its state printing press to Chanchalguda.[53] Additionally, in 1876, a group of Pathans (Pashtuns) serving in the state's military forces were removed from the city for perceived unruliness and violence. Upon the lifting of the ban the following year, many resettled in Chanchalguda, creating a Pathan colony near the jail. Reflecting the racialised perceptions of Pathans as skilled in weapon-smithing, the colony became known for its high-quality swords.[54] The jail was thus integrated into a new centre of urban industry associated with modernising technical practices such as printing and evolving regional industries such as sword-smithing.

Within the prison walls, Hyderabadi jailers aimed to teach modern artisan industrial practices to convicts with limited previous exposure to artisan trades. As of 1881, 'mechanics and artisans' formed 16 per cent of prisoners in Hyderabad State, with 'agriculturalists' forming the largest single profession at 35 per cent.[55] Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the proportion of artisans continued to decrease, although this seems to have been partly a result of different systems of categorising professions. Nonetheless, by 1922, artisans and those employed in manufacturing were the single smallest class of prisoners, at only 3.06 per cent—even smaller than the 3.35 per cent of prisoners who had previously worked as 'government servants'.[56] The vast majority—over 85 per cent—were categorised as agriculturalists. In part, this reflected the rural nature of the state's population, and the growth in agriculturalist convicts was likely due to the widening reach of Hyderabad's prison and judicial system into rural districts.

Moreover, although the Hyderabadi judicial and policing systems, like its prison system, drew on British Indian models, they were an important piece of Hyderabadi claims on sovereignty. This included an autonomous police force that, while sometimes willing to collaborate with colonial police forces in bordering regions, also sought to distinguish itself as more knowledgeable of regional social and criminal realities than its colonial counterparts.[57] Additionally, as Karen Leonard notes, Hyderabad formally separated its judicial system from its executive in 1921, placing it ahead of British India.[58] This move was aimed, in part, to place the state on a par with Muslim-led states such as Afghanistan and Iran that had clearer claims on sovereignty, at least in the eyes of the

[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[53] M. Rao and T. Rao, *Bustān-i Āṣafiyah, jild-i charum* (Hyderabad, 1931), p. 78.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 76. On the Pathan community and its regulation in Hyderabad and Chanchalguda, see also Foreign Department: Internal A, 'Measures to be taken for the prevention of Afghans, Rohillas, etc. from entering Hyderabad', (1869), no 1-12, NAI, pp. 8–9.

[55] Chiragh Ali, *The Administration of Hyderabad (Deccan) Under Sir Salar Jung* (Bombay, 1886), vol. 4, p. 354.

[56] *Report on the Administration of HEH the Nizam's Dominions 1331 Fasli* (Hyderabad, 1922), p. 126.

[57] E. L. Beverley, 'Frontier as resource: law, crime, and sovereignty on the margins of empire', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55.2 (2013), p. 247.

[58] K. Leonard, 'Reassessing indirect rule in Hyderabad: rule, ruler, or sons-in-law of the state?', *Modern Asian Studies* 37.2 (2003), p. 375.

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Indian Muslim middle class, for whom employment in Hyderabad's administrative system often remained socially prestigious.

Convict labour was similarly used to highlight Hyderabad's territorial and judicial sovereignty, as well as its ability to extend these visions of authority beyond the state's urban core. Even as 'extramural' labour outside of the prison walls declined in British Indian jails in the late nineteenth century, in Hyderabad, convicts remained an important part of the public works programmes. One of the most common uses of prison labour in public works projects in Hyderabad was for metalling—gravelling and surfacing—roads.[59] The poor quality of princely state roads, particularly outside of their capitals, was a common complaint of British administrators—one that they registered with their princely state counterparts regularly. In response to this complaint about their relative modernity vis-à-vis British Indian territory, from the 1870s, Hyderabad began devoting greater funds to road metalling and emphasised the process in state reports.[60]

Directing prison labour towards projects of road metalling thus allowed Hyderabad to keep tight control over projects that were not only meant to indicate the state's increased technical parity with British India, but also used to demonstrate its authority in and beyond the urban. Simultaneously, prison administrators developed internal craft trades that sought to transform the state's convicts into repositories of revived, often highly localised material traditions. Differentiation of products by region ultimately meant that towns of Hyderabad State were able to claim new forms of industrial prowess and to integrate these practices into local craft histories, which state elites used as further evidence of the cohesion of state sovereignty across a vast territory.

For instance, Gulbarga prison, located in the west of the state, became well known for its woven and cotton manufactures, while Raichur, in the south-west, was lauded for its prison's leatherwork, included silver- and gold-lilted leather.[61] While most district prisons in the state had these sorts of specialties, Gulbarga attracted by far the most attention for its excellence in industrial organisation. A state history from 1883 claimed that 'very good checked cloths, purdahs, shikar cloth, tent cloth, etc. are made at Gulbarga jail'.[62] The success of Gulbarga's jail manufacturing attracted notice beyond state borders: an 1881 article in the *Times of India* claimed that the jail was the very first in India, in either British or princely state territory, to yield a revenue to its government. This 'unprecedented' revenue, according to the article, reflected the success of the prison administrators in directing and disciplining convict labourers in 'weaving, papermaking, ropemaking, tentmaking, and dying'.[63] By developing forms of local, town jail-based expertise in urban centres outside of Hyderabad city, the administration of Hyderabad State sought to demonstrate its sovereignty, control, and influence across its territory.

Bhopali prisons, charitable uplift, and industrial heritage

In comparison with Rampur and Hyderabad, Bhopal was a relatively late adopter of large-scale prison industries. Nonetheless, from the late nineteenth century, the state embarked on a notable prison programme designed to demonstrate the court's distinctive ability to cultivate both moral subjects and crafts popularly associated with Mughal and Muslim pasts. Bhopal, with a recorded population of 665,961 at the turn of the twentieth

[59] *Ripūrt-i naẓm o nasq mumālik-i maḥrūsiyah sarkār-i Niẓāmul Mulk Āṣafjāh Bahādur, 1298–1303 faṣlī* (Hyderabad, 1894), p. 268.

[60] *Ripūrt-i naẓm o nasq, 1303 f.*, pp. 285, 315–316.

[61] Syed Hussain Bilgrami and C. Willmott, *Historical and Descriptive Sketch of His Highness the Nizam's Dominions* (Bombay, 1883), pp. 420, 433.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 420.

[63] Syed Mahdi Ali (ed.), *Hyderabad Affairs* (Bombay, 1883), vol. 4, p. 129.

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century, was the second-largest Muslim-led state in India in terms of both population and area, after Hyderabad.[64] Unique among Indian princely states, it was ruled from 1819 to 1926 by a dynasty of women, popularly known as the Begums of Bhopal.[65] Like the leaders of Rampur, they were an ethnic Afghan Pathan dynasty. During the reign of Nawab Shah Jahan Begum between 1868 and 1901, the state was also often associated with the *ahl-i hadith* Muslim reformist movement—a movement that emphasised engagement with transregional Arabic-language Islamic learning.[66]

Shah Jahan Begum and her daughter Sultan Jahan Begum (r. 1901–1926) positioned their state as a site of what Lambert-Hurley described as 'benevolent autocracy' and 'courtly cosmopolitanism' that sought to 'modernise' Muslim traditions of rulership.[67] Despite differences in their individual ideologies, Bhopali histories written throughout the period consistently characterised the jail as a site of the Begums' Muslim and feminine charitable practice, capable of morally reforming and uplifting ill-behaved subjects. Industrial crafts chosen for development in the jail were also meant, in Barbara Metcalf's terms, to 'evoke the aura of the Mughals' and other prominent Indian and transregional Muslim dynasties.[68]

The later development of Bhopali prison industries was in part because, until the turn of the century, its primary city jail was located not within a purpose-built complex, but in the disused fort of a regional pre-Islamic dynasty. As a result, for most of the nineteenth century, small-scale jail crafts were limited to woven *daris*, *newars*, and other styles of carpets.[69] The new 1899 jail sought to rectify this limitation, bringing Bhopal city jail into alignment with prison design throughout British India and other prominent princely states. An important component of this design was internal workshops, including weaving, carpentry, and papermaking spaces within the new jail.[70]

An especially important new prison industry was tile-making, with the state investing in clay, kilns, and paints to emphasise an artisanal tradition that was popularly understood to be rooted in a (transregional) Muslim past. By the turn of the twentieth century, Bhopal's judicial system—and several other administrative branches—were increasingly dominated by recruits from Muslim reformist educational institutions based in British Indian territory.[71] Perhaps as a result of the presence of these administrators, state efforts to cultivate new industrial practices seem to have been particularly oriented towards symbols of Muslim economic and material renewal that would have been widely understood beyond its borders.

Shah Jahan Begum commissioned the construction of a new city jail as part of her wide-reaching attempt to build modernising institutions and buildings in Bhopal city. Built by the Public Works Department (PWD) at a cost of 1.5 lakh rupees, the new jail expanded the industrial range of prison industries, with a particular focus on producing ceramic tile-ware. Prisoners were moved into the new jail in May 1901 and were immediately set to work in the purpose-built ceramic workshop, as well as in other manufacturing roles.[72]

[64] C. E. Luard and Munshi Kudrat Ali, *Bhopal State Gazetteer* (Calcutta, 1908), vol. 3, p. 35.

[65] Lambert-Hurley, *Muslim Women*, pp. 3–4, 15.

[66] B. Metcalf, 'Islam and power in colonial India: the making and unmaking of a Muslim princess', *The American Historical Review* 116.1 (2011), p. 12.

[67] Lambert-Hurley, *Muslim Women*, p. 71.

[68] Metcalf, 'Islam and power', p. 14.

[69] Luard and Ali, *Bhopal State Gazetteer*, pp. 53, 72.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 72; see also Sultan Jahan Begum, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani: Life of Her Highness the Late Nawab Shahjehan Begum of Bhopal*, (trans.) B. Ghosal (Bombay, 1926), p. 72.

[71] Lambert-Hurley, *Muslim Women*, pp. 56–58.

[72] M. J. Meade, *Report of the Political Administration of the Territories within the Central Indian Agency, 1900–1901* (Calcutta, 1902), p. 9.

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Unlike many of Shah Jahan's other construction projects, the new jail was not built in her namesake neighbourhood of Shahjahanabad, but instead on top of a hill on the outskirts of an older suburb: Jahangirabad. This decision reflects a desire to separate criminal classes from her centrepiece of Bhopali modern urban identity, even as she argued that, through technical training, the convicts could become upstanding members of society.[73] Still, while Jahangirabad was less prominent than her construction of Shahjahanabad as a space of urban trade, Shah Jahan and her daughter and successor Sultan Jahan did work to reinvigorate industry in Jahangirabad.

In addition to the new jail, the Nawab dedicated funds to the construction of a new parade ground in Jahangirabad, and built a PWD furniture and tent workshop there.[74] A community of tanners, who had previously worked near the city centre, was forcibly moved to Jahangirabad, both because their work was seen as too unclean for the centre and because Jahangirabad was home to aligned workshops.[75] Because the neighbourhood abutted the railway line, it also became home to a variety of small factories and workshops focused on metalsmithing, carpentry, and other industries needed for railway construction and repair.[76]

The jail thus became integrated into a neighbourhood that was recognised for its industrial production, with jail-produced ceramic tiles sold at both the fairs held at the parade grounds and the neighbourhood market. In a biography of her mother, Shah Jahan Begum's daughter and successor Sultan Jahan Begum depicted her interest in jail industry as primarily an effort to 'enable [convicts] to lead an honest life after their release'.[77] As elsewhere, labour in Bhopali jails was presented as a moral corrective, but here it was also tied to the Begums' distinctive position as the only women to rule an Indian princely state. The Begums of Bhopal professed—and sought to publicly cultivate—'charitable traditions' that reflected a Muslim and feminine engagement with the uplift of the poor.[78] Thus, even as the city's jail sough to punish convicts, it was positioned in Bhopali writing, particularly by the Begums themselves, as a site of potential moral and economic uplift.

Simultaneously, the jail was part of a broader effort to promote the city of Bhopal and its artisans as a centre of modern, Islamically informed industrial production. The production of ceramic tiles at the jail, which was the most prominently highlighted industry in state reports after the construction of the new jail in 1899, points to the integration of jail industries into Bhopali demonstrations of heritage and modernity. The ceramic tiles were sold to defray jail expenses and also used in state construction, especially in the spurt of palace and state residential construction around the turn of the century.[79] Ceramic tilework gained popularity in Europe and especially Britain in the mid-nineteenth century as part of a larger 'Orientalist vouge'.[80] Most famously, the British artist Sir Frederick Leighton commissioned scholars to bring ceramic tiles from Syria and required members of the arts-and-crafts movement to imitate the tiles to decorate his home and studio in London—now the Leighton House Museum.[81]

[73] Sultan Jahan Begum, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*, p. 72.
[74] Luard, *Bhopal State Gazetteer*, p. 71.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[76] Sultan Jahan Begum, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*, p. 85.
[77] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[78] Lambert-Hurley, *Muslim Women*, p. 178.
[79] Luard and Ali, *Bhopal State Gazetteer*, p. 73.
[80] V. Porter, 'William De Morgan and the Islamic tiles of Leighton House', *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society* 16 (1992), p. 76.
[81] *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77.

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By the end of the nineteenth century, Indian elites had embraced this European interest in 'Islamic tile-work'. A July 1894 article in the *Āyīnah-yi Angrīzī Sadāgarī* (*The Mirror of British Trade*)—an Urdu journal that promoted British technical innovations and products to Indian merchants—reflects the spread of this interest in decorative ceramic tiles. In promoting British-made encaustic tiles to Indian buyers, the article claimed that

> several centuries ago India and Iran were the birthplaces of painted tiles. But due to the passage of time and revolutions of our era, today this art is no longer practiced in those regions and the tiles can only be seen at ruins… but England has now brought a new perfection to this art.[82]

By choosing tile-work as a central component of their new jail industry programme just a few years later, Bhopali administrators claimed an industry associated with both transregional Muslim pasts and contemporary European practice. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bhopali affinity for glazed ceramic tile-work was likely in part an attempt to imitate older Delhi designs and perhaps external Arab designs, but their extensive use to decorate the interior of residences was also clearly a response to this European craze.[83] In other words, Bhopali elites chose ceramic tile-work as the centrepiece of their jail industry in part because it reflected an imported European idea of Muslim artisan heritage.

Exhibitions, fairs, and the promotion of princely industry

Jail manufactures such as Bhopali tile-work circulated and gained prominence in South Asia in part because of their popularity at industrial exhibitions held in both British India and princely states. Princely administrators often preferred to exhibit works completed in jails because they could ensure forms of uniformity and direct production in ways that they could not with materials secured from artisans in the market. Moreover, even when products were secured from non-convict artisans, displays of artisan labour were characterised by their emphasis on outwardly disciplined, clean, and industrious spaces and practices of work.

At industrial exhibitions, both convict labourers and non-convict artisans were depicted as simultaneously the inheritors of local traditions and the subjects of modernisation. By drawing on examples from Rampur's annual exhibition, the *Taqrīb-e Benaẓīr*, I analyse that state's efforts to integrate historical regional *melas*, fairs, and courtly practices with British Indian industrial modernity. In the context of Hyderabad, I analyse the state's forms of self-representation of sovereign authority through the coercion of industrial practices at all-India and international exhibitions. Finally, I return to Bhopal, where the capital city's industrial fair became part of a broader project of urban renewal coded as princely charity.

Indian industrial exhibitions, whether large-scale events that were meant to highlight the developmental prowess of the colonial state or small regional fairs designed to find merchants for local goods, enabled elites to make claims on artisan work. While often rooted in long-standing local fairs, by the late nineteenth century, princely exhibitions also often took on characteristics of colonial industrial exhibitions. The earliest modern industrial exhibitions were held in Europe in the final decades of the eighteenth century,

[82] *Āyīnah-yi Angrīzī Sadāgarī* (London, 1894), p. 21.

[83] Sulṭān Jahān Begum briefly noted and admired ceramic tile-work during her visit to Medina in 1904, pointing to another potential source for the elite embrace of ceramic tile-work in Bhopali residential architecture. See Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum, *The Story of a Pilgrimage to the Hijaz* (Calcutta, 1909).

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and often sought to amuse the working classes, while also integrating them into bourgeois systems of consumption.[84] Nineteenth-century imperial exhibitions maintained this focus on marketing commodities to the working classes, while also helping to familiarise empires' subjects with geographies of production and consumption. Saloni Mathur has argued that Indian 'natives' and their work were situated as displays to illustrate both their subjugation within and their need for the British imperial system.[85]

But princely elites also used exhibitions to demonstrate emerging technologies in the states and their potential for integration into crafts was seen as reflective of a state's heritage. Moreover, princely state elites often integrated industrial exhibitions with religious or cultural events. Janaki Nair has argued that Mysore State's Dasara exhibition, first held in 1888, combined state visions of a modern economic and industrial future with the 'ritually stated' celebration of both Dasara and the state's princely authority.[86] In Rampur, Hyderabad, and Bhopal, new models of princely industrial authority were likewise integrated with reimagined traditions embedded in fairs, practices of trade, and courtly identities.

The *Taqrīb-e Benaẕīr*: hybridity and industry at Rampur's annual exhibition

Although Jaipur State hosted a large all-Indian Exhibition in 1883, most princely states held smaller local fairs and exhibitions that were designed to promote their own products to merchants from surrounding regions. These events combined older regional fairs with practices adapted from British Indian industrial exhibitions. Rampur specifically characterised its annual exhibition, known as the *Taqrīb-e Benaẕīr* (Unparalleled Function), *Jashn-e Benaẕīr* (Unparalleled Festival), or simply the Rampur *numā'ish* (exhibition), as a coupling of British Indian and pre-colonial exhibition practices.[87] The exhibition was an updated form of a local fair that had been especially well known for its sporting demonstrations and literary patronage.[88] When introducing the 1894 fair, a state report explained that 'the state of Rampur, a territory whose industry and commerce, handicrafts and trade, and agriculture have found the path of development, has re-established the tradition of holding an annual fair, at which all useful products and goods are to be displayed'.[89]

The exhibition explicitly integrated the promotion of Rampuri goods and manufactures with a celebration of its ruling dynasty and its local history. Lasting approximately 10 days in December and held in the gardens of the city's *Benaẕīr* palace, the fair featured the daily carrying of the Nawab through the public. Established in 1865, the fair adapted both Mughal and other pre-colonial traditions of public gathering and British Indian styles of public industrial exhibitions. In the 1860s and 1870s, the Rampur exhibition became well known throughout north Indian literary society for providing economic opportunities for poets and literati who had relied on Mughal or Awadhi patronage prior to the disestablishment of the Delhi and Lucknow courts.[90] Razak Khan, in a study of a poetic account of the exhibition in around 1867–1868 by Mir Yar 'Ali 'Jan Ṣahib', highlights

[84] W. Benjamin, 'Paris, capital of the nineteenth century', *Perspecta* 12 (1969), pp. 167–168.

[85] Mathur, *India by Design*, p. 61.

[86] J. Nair, 'Mysore's Wembley? The Dasara Exhibition's imagined economies', *Modern Asian Studies* 47.5 (2013), pp. 1550–1551.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. 3; see also Mir Yar Ali 'Jan Sahib', *The Incomparable Festival*, (trans.) Shad Naved, (ed.) Razak Khan (2021).

[88] Najm ul-Ghanī Khān, *Akhbār al-Ṣanādīd*, p. 139.

[89] Muḥammad Fayrūz Shāh, *Rāmpūr kī namāyish: Taqrīb bīnaẕīr* (Agra, 1894), p. 9.

[90] On literary patronage at the Rampur exhibition, see Khan, 'Local pasts', p. 705, as well as Khan's introduction to Mir Yar Ali, *Incomparable Festival*, pp. 24–26.

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the poet's emphasis on 'the qualities of a princely ruler' that are 'manifested' in structures of courtly patronage.[91] The exhibition featured *mushā'irah* (poetry performances), *dastāngūī* (the dramatic narrations of Urdu stories), as well as *kushtī* (wresting competitions). By the 1890s, while the *mushā'irahs*, *dastāngūī*, and *kushtī* matches continued, the fair also adapted British Indian cultural practices, including a sponsored cricket match between the city's best school-aged cricketers and those from schools in Moradabad and Bareilly.[92]

The *Taqrīb-e Benaẕīr* was, however, emphatically not only a cultural showcase, but also an industrial exhibition, designed to display and attract sales for the city's manufactures. Reflecting the integration of the two aims, an 1891 report on the previous year's exhibition began by noting that 'samples of the excellence of our handicrafts, arts and industries, and agricultural and irrigation projects are brought together … and every type of merchant from near and far eagerly attends'.[93] These merchants required entertainment and education in Rampuri taste and culture. For this purpose, the report goes on, 'wrestling matches, military demonstrations, races, elephant fights, etc.' were held on the exhibition grounds.[94] Visiting merchants were also expected to tour physical displays of the prowess of state manufacturers. Independent clockmakers, shawl and carpet weavers, chessboard makers, 'and every other type of artisan and shopkeeper' were provided with stalls in a central bazaar at the exhibition.[95]

To promote the fair beyond Rampur's borders in British India, florid annual reports were written by state bureaucrats and printed at the Mufīd-e 'Ām Press in Agra. The Mufīd-e 'Ām was a publisher frequently used by several princely courts to advance understandings of their states as sites of Islamic heritage in the broader Indian Muslim community.[96] By using a press that more frequently published poetry, genealogies, and religious tracts authored by state elites to promote the state's cultural and industrial fair, the court placed Rampur's industrial production as a central component of its identity and heritage. The choice of press reflected the broader goal of the *Taqrīb-e Benaẕīr* to situate Rampur as a site for hybridisation of an Islamic past and technical modernity. As an industrial exhibition, the *Taqrīb-e Benaẕīr* also borrowed from European and British Indian practices that demonstrated industrial change to broad audiences.

For instance, the report of the 1894 exhibition highlighted both the advancing techniques of Rampuri carpenters and masons, and the involvement of these groups in the state's PWD. The tours offered to important visitors also included stops at the city's most notable recent renovations.[97] The report notes that they were encouraged to marvel at the 'excellence of the stone pillars' at a memorial erected to the late General Azim ud-Din Khan, a member of Rampur's Regency Council.[98] Assassinated by political rivals in 1881, in the following years, Azim ud-Din was honoured with memorials. The visitors to the exhibition were taken to see high-quality calligraphy on his memorial, as well as an adjoining wooden arch that was elaborately carved and painted using a paste made from lapis lazuli. Working on wood with ultramarine blue made from lapis lazuli was, the report informed readers, a 'special handicraft' local to Rampur.[99]

[91] Khan, 'Introduction', in Mir Yar Ali, *Incomparable Festival*, p. 9.
[92] Shāh, *Rāmpūr kī namāyish*, p. 12.
[93] *Ripūrt-i intiẓāmiya riyāsat-i Rāmpūr*, p. 91.
[94] *Ibid.*, p. 91
[95] Shāh, *Rāmpūr kī namāyish*, p. 9.
[96] *Ibid.*, cover page.
[97] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[98] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[99] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

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By describing these sites as 'showpieces of Rampuri work', the report integrated them into discussions of Rampuri artisanship and handicrafts. Like the exhibition more broadly, they were meant to illustrate Rampur's ability to integrate the old and new, colonial and pre-colonial, technologies of modernity and styles associated with courtly Muslim north Indian pasts. In an explicit nod to the state's work to integrate religious heritage and industrial modernity, the 1879 fair featured the official opening of a shrine honouring a footprint of the Prophet Muhammad. The footprint, reportedly brought from 'Arabia' to the state a few years earlier, was installed under a decoratively carved shrine outside of the Benazir palace. The opening of the shrine, according to Najm ul-Ghani Khan, led to a 'great fervour' among the public, boosting attendance at the fair.[100] Through tours of religious architecture and 'special handicrafts' central to Rampuri style, the sponsors of Rampur's *Taqrīb-e Benaẓīr* adapted British exhibition practices to local concepts of Islamic industrial modernity.

In a further bid to position their state and its annual exhibition as a site for hybridity and innovation, members of the Rampuri court released Urdu-language manuals and guides to artisan work in conjunction with *Taqrīb-e Benaẓīr*. For instance, in 1892, a Rampuri landholder and factory owner named Ahmad 'Ali Khan was commissioned by Rampur's Regency Council to deliver a lecture on the use of indigo. The lecture was subsequently printed in neighbouring Moradabad and released to help educate the residents of British Indian towns on the practices of the state.[101] Reflecting the focus of the exhibition on agriculture, commerce, and industry, it traced the growth of indigo plants, before turning the sale of their leaves, and the processes of making and using dyes. Ahmad 'Ali Khan portrayed Rampur state as a site worthy of industrial emulation, arguing that 'our workshops of Rampur must be congratulated for improving the methods and tools of indigo work'.[102] By commissioning lectures associated with its exhibition, the state sought not only to increase the popularity of its exhibition with British Indian merchants, but also to promote its vision of a local industrial modernity.

Moreover, Rampur's publications on its *Taqrīb-e Benaẓīr* reveal the degree to which the exhibition displayed Rampur's evolving industrial norms and the behaviours that the state hoped to inculcate into its urban labouring classes. The report explained that visitors were offered tours of a model of a state workshop, where woodworkers made luggage boxes, tables, and inlays in the furniture using gold and silver. It described the workshop as 'brightly lit and clean' and noted that the woodworkers showed 'all deference and respect to the honoured visitors'.[103] By portraying their workspaces as clean, visible, and accessible, the report argued that Rampuri artisans were knowable and definable to an elite audience, not confined to small shops in the bazaar, but instead open and controlled.

The artisans of Rampur's *Taqrīb-e Benaẓīr* were explicitly integrated into elite state narratives. Visually removed from the bazaar or independent workshops and situated in a model state workshop, woodworker participants in the exhibition posed no threat to elite control and were representative of the ability of state elites to direct aesthetics and behaviour. In Rampur, the state thus used both jails and exhibitions to display concepts of modern, moral artisan behaviour and to connect artisan practices to elite aesthetic preferences. Its leaders communicated both to their own subjects and to visitors their ideal vision of an industrial future rooted in the development of moral and

[100] Najm ul-Ghanī Khān, *Akhbār al-Ṣanādīd*, p. 139.
[101] Aḥmad 'Alī Khān, *Nīl kī kāsht par lakchar* (Moradabad, 1893), cover page.
[102] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[103] Shāh, *Rāmpūr kī namāyish*, p. 19.

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deferential labourers who practised modern iterations of trades that evoked the renewal of courtly and Muslim north Indian authority.

Hyderabad State sovereignty at all-India and international exhibitions

Like Rampur, Hyderabad State hosted a range of exhibitions, and often sought to combine elements of local and regional *melas* with British Indian practices of industrial display. Simultaneously, however, Hyderabad is particularly notable for its efforts to demonstrate its political and industrial sovereignty through the state's engagement with all-India and international exhibitions.

The state's emphasis on the skill of its artisan labourers in weapon-smithing at all-India and international exhibitions is demonstrative of its efforts to assert and communicate its sovereignty to communities beyond its borders. In Hyderabad, the state commissioned weapon-smiths to produce both guns and expensive decorative swords that were beyond the economic reach of most of its population for exhibition on the all-India circuit.[104] By displaying guns and swords, the state communicated not only the technical abilities found within its craft industries, but also the fact that it was not bound by British Indian limitations on production.

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India, arms production could communicate princely sovereignty because of British Indian legal restrictions on the manufacture of guns and swords within its directly administered territory. In 1878, British India had adopted an 'Arms Act' that placed significant restrictions on ownership of arms, as well as the production of guns, swords, and other weapons in its territory.[105] Towards the end of the century, it pressured many princely states to follow suite, and even states such as Rampur, historically known for their weapons manufacturing industries, restricted production.

Hyderabad, however, did not adopt restrictions on weapons production. Still, the importation of British guns, especially from Birmingham, sparked a severe decline in Hyderabadi gunsmithing, although sword-smithing continued largely unabated. Gun manufacturing became largely a decorative art practice in Hyderabad, while sword-smiths designed arms for both decoration and use. A long-standing arms bazaar in old Hyderabad, located in a lane to the south of the city's famed central Chārminār, remained a bustling site throughout the 1920s, though few guns produced by the state's smiths were sold there.[106] The weapons market in Chanchalguda sold locally produced swords and knives, but almost all the guns were imports or antiques.[107]

Thus, despite a limited local market for Hyderabadi-made guns, arms—including guns—were among the most prominent materials sent from Hyderabad to exhibitions across the subcontinent. At the 1903 Exhibition of Indian Art in Delhi, Hyderabad State attracted special attention as one of the few regions of India to still produce quality Damascene armour, swords, and knives.[108] The state likewise sent a wide range of arms to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition held in London in 1886, which was attended by the Nizam himself, along with several other state leaders. Hyderabad was given a 'court' and a space of exhibition to share with Mysore and

[104] G. Watt, *Indian Art Exhibition, 1903, Delhi* (Calcutta, 1903), p. 57.

[105] Judicial and Public, 'Working and Amendment of the Indian Arms Act, 1878' (May 1882), File 1022 (British Library, India Office Records), pp. 2–4.

[106] Syed Ali Bilgrami, 'Iron industry in the territory of His Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad Deccan', *Journal of the Iron and Steel Institute* 56 (1899), p. 78

[107] A. C. Campbell, *Glimpses of the Nizam's Dominions: Being an Exhaustive Photographic History of the Hyderabad State, Deccan India* (Bombay, 1989), pp. 172–173.

[108] Watt, *Indian Art Exhibition*, p. 57.

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Coorg, and the official catalogue of the exhibition emphasised the state's weapons, noting 'modem blades made from the steel in the Hyderabad territory rival the finest Damascus'.[109]

As suggested by the catalogue, Hyderabadi efforts to demonstrate sovereignty through weapons production and display extended to enforced experimentation with new materials of production. Between the 1870s and 1890s, engineers employed by the state and the Hyderabad Deccan Company attempted to develop new iron mines.[110] The slow but steady growth of the state's iron and steel industry reduced the cost of wrought iron and steel used in the production of luxury and decorative weapons within the state. Hyderabad's head of Public Works, Sayyid 'Ali Bilgrami, composed an 1899 article for the British *Journal of the Iron and Steel Institute* highlighting the experimentation of Hyderabadi engineers with newly mined ores and new practices of smelting, including their expertise with smelting furnaces. He thus suggested that the state possessed a level of engineering prowess that demonstrated its material and technological sovereignty.[111] This sovereignty was embodied by Hyderabad's middle-class technical intermediaries, whom Bilgrami positioned as leaders and directors of projects that pulled occasionally reluctant artisans into a new industrial future.

Similarly, Hyderabadi administrators sought to demonstrate the comparative superiority of their command of technical knowledge and direction of artisanal labour by exhibiting a broad range of Hyderabadi products in neighbouring regions of British India. They frequently sent products and participants to exhibitions that were held in the Central Provinces—a region that was popularly perceived to lag behind other regions in terms of artisan adaptation and technology. By exhibiting in cities of the Central Provinces such as Nagpur, located just across Hyderabad State's northern border, Hyderabad offered itself, its technical intermediaries, and its artisans as models of 'indigenous' development and excellence. According to British Indian reports compiled in the immediate wake of the Nagpur exhibition of 1865, Hyderabadi works 'carried away first prize easily' in several categories, particularly metalworking competitions.[112] The *bidri*—inlaid brass—vessels sent by the state attracted particularly notice; Harry Rivett-Carnac, the British Indian official responsible for arranging the Nagpur exhibition, lamented that the metalsmiths of the Central Provinces lacked knowledge of similar decorative and material practices.[113]

Hyderabadi leaders thus sought to illustrate the state's distinctive claims on sovereignty to consumers and observers beyond Hyderabad's borders. This intended audience included middle-class Indian Muslim communities who Hyderabadi administrators hoped would view the state as a repository of lost Muslim authority and prestige on the subcontinent. As Kavita Datla noted, the ability of the Nizams to patronise 'educational and literary projects that did not much interest the colonial government' highlighted both their autonomy and their efforts to cultivate courtly Muslim cultures that attracted Indians beyond their borders.[114] In the context of exhibitions, their display of goods that exceeded colonial technical expectation—particularly in trades such as weapon-smithing that were limited in British Indian territory—similarly communicated their cultivation of a conceivably 'sovereign' Muslim-led space to middle-class Indian consumers.

[109] *Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886: Official Catalogue* (London, 1886), p. 70.
[110] Bilgrami, 'Iron industry', pp. 74–75.
[111] *Ibid.*, p. 75.
[112] *Report of the Nagpore Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Produce*, December 1865 (Nagpore, 1866), p. 88.
[113] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[114] Datla, *Language of Secular Islam*, p. 12.

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Bhopali exhibitions: urban renewal and charitable uplift

In Bhopal, exhibitions, like prison manufactures, often focused on remaking the state's artisan industries to represent the Begums' visions of the charitable uplift of the masses. This included positioning artisans and exhibits within a new model of Bhopal city's urban infrastructure in Bhopal city. But Bhopali records suggest that artisans did not necessarily passively receive and acquiesce to princely charitable uplift, changing technical practices, or state-directed ideals of behaviour. Bhopali records about efforts at urban renewal through exhibitions not only reveal state ideologies, but in some cases provide a circumscribed opportunity to ask how artisans who laboured beyond state systems may have responded to these princely industrial ideals.

Bhopal's annual industrial fairs were designed to bring commerce to the city's urban neighbourhoods—a project the Begum Nawabs and their council struggled with due to competition from the annual fair held at the British station at Sehore, 38 kilometres to the east of Bhopal city.[115] In 1872, under Shah Jahan Begum, the state combined a series of smaller commercial trade fairs into an annual industrial fair, to be held in her new industrial neighbourhood of Shahjahanabad. To spur regional interest in the fair, particularly among merchants based in British India, Shah Jahan Begum decreed that all merchandise for sale at the fair would be exempt from state transit duties.[116]

Despite its integration with contemporaneous projects of urban and industrial development, and despite these financial incentives, the annual fair seems to have struggled to gain popularity in the region, particularly vis-à-vis the industrial fair held in Sehore. Sehore was the site of British Indian oversight for Bhopal and the home of a large British Indian military cantonment. Products sold at the Sehore fair were exempt from both British Indian and Bhopali transit duties, and the fair attracted a large trading community that already passed through Sehore due to the presence of the cantonment.[117] As a result of the popularity of the Sehore fair, which was held annually in April, and the relative lack of interest in the Shahjahanabad fair, the latter was formally discontinued in 1889.[118]

Although the Sehore fair attracted trade to Bhopal State and promoted the state's products beyond its borders, it did not highlight the urban industrial practices and spaces of production that Shah Jahan Begum sought to promote through the Shahjahanabad fair. Reflecting the desire to bring trade to Bhopal city and to integrate an annual fair into the city's concept of industrial development, in 1909, under Sultan Jahan Begum, the state proposed a new fair for Bhopal city, to be held in Jahangirabad, at the parade grounds near the jail.[119] Held for the first time the following year, this was a small event for local artisans and merchants to promote trade. Nonetheless, it brought new consumers to an area of the city that was meant to reflect the state's integration of industrial modernity and Muslim craft traditions.[120]

Even with the relative lack of popularity of the Shahjahanabad and Jahangirabad fairs, the state's direction of artisan labour through jails and exhibitions clearly shaped the

[115] See 'Discontinuance of the Bhopal Fair and holding of the Sehore Fair', NAI, Bhopal Agency: Vernacular Record, No. 863, pp. 1-2.

[116] 'Administration Report of HH Shah Jehan Begum of Bhopal for 1872', NAI, Foreign Department: Political A, No. 70, May 1873, p. 3.

[117] 'Correspondence relating to the Sehore Fair', NAI, Bhopal Agency: Vernacular Record, No. 875, (1900), p. 3.

[118] 'Discontinuance of the Bhopal Fair', pp. 1–2.

[119] 'Application from Bhopal Vakil for holding of an annual Fair in Jahangirabad Bhopal', NAI: Bhopal Agency: Vernacular Record, No. 44 (1909), p. 2.

[120] The annual Jahangirabad fair seems to have grown out of a smaller weekly fair held at the Jahangirabad parade grounds; see Luard and Ali, *Bhopal State Gazetteer*, p. 101.

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work done by independent artisans who laboured in local workshops. A significant majority of Bhopalis—about 57 per cent—remained agriculturalists through the first decade of the twentieth century.[121] Nonetheless, the personal interests of Shah Jahan Begum and Sultan Jahan Begum and their councils were oriented towards the city and the development of urban artisan industries.[122]

To attract members of artisan and industrial classes to Shahjahanabad, Shah Jahan Begum provided free gifts of land for homes and shops, and developed 'houses … laid out on a uniform plan to meet the requirements of all classes of people, from the members of the ruling family down to people in ordinary walks of life'.[123] Likewise, a 'row of shops of the local bazaar' was designed to link the neighbourhood to the barracks for members of the state's armed forces and the Nawab Begum's guards.[124] By designing the neighbourhood in this way, the Begum Nawab and her council sought to attract not only industrial artisans, but also their potential customers, to live and work in Shahjahanabad.

In comparison with those in Shahjahanabad, industrial artisans in Jahangirabad were insulated from state-directed changes in artisan industrial production until the construction of the new jail at the turn of the century. They were, of course, exposed to competition from other areas of the city. However, the location of the neighbourhood, on the south-east side of Bhopal's Lower Lake, far from the centre of old Bhopal city, meant that carpenters, blacksmiths, and others who produced primarily for a local clientele were able to avoid state redirection.[125]

At the turn of the century, Jahangirabad was shaped by not only the establishment of the jail, but also the forced move of a tanning community into the area, the foundation of a PWD furniture workshop, and the establishment of an industrial fair in the area's parade grounds. These changes brought new merchants and customers into the Jahangirabad bazaar, spurring trade, but also necessitating adaptations among the area's artisan classes. Carpenters seem to have faced particularly strong technical pressures as a result of the roughly contemporaneous arrival of the jail carpentry workshop, the PWD furniture workshop, and the new annual fair.

New styles and practices of varnishing were among the most important changes that carpenters encountered because of these state interventions in Jahangirabad. Artisans in the Jahangirabad bazaar necessarily adjusted to new practices of varnishing and finishing wood in part due to the jail-produced carpentry products that flooded the event. Additionally, many were likely employed in the new state furniture workshop in the area or the railway workshops that sprouted along the neighbourhood's portion of the railway line, where they were probably introduced to new styles and practices of varnishing.

While carpenters in Jahangirabad's workshops and bazaars necessarily adapted to new practices of varnishing introduced by jail, PWD, and exhibition work, in other cases, artisans chose not to engage with state projects that they found economically or culturally irrelevant. Artisans in the Jahangirabad bazaar encountered the new state-supported industry of ceramic tile-making, with ceramic tiles from the jail making their way into not only state residences, but also public sale. However, few if any free artisans appear to have taken up the trade, likely because the jail had cornered the market for the

[121] Lambert-Hurley, *Muslim Women*, p. 46.
[122] C. E. Luard and K. Ali, *Bhopal State Gazetteer* (Calcutta, 1908), vol. 1, p. 50.
[123] Sultan Jahan Begum, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*, p. 83.
[124] *Ibid.*, p. 83.
[125] See Luard and Ali, *Bhopal State Gazetteer*, pp. 71, 96.

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tiles, and artisans in the area's bazaars and workshops recognised that there was limited space for growth.[126]

As noted above, at the turn of the century, ceramic tile-work was in vogue among the highest classes in Bhopal, probably in response to a European trend that had emerged earlier in the nineteenth century.[127] The practice of decorating residences with these painted ceramic tiles does not appear to have spread among a larger Bhopali public and jail products seem to have satisfied demand among elites across central India.[128] Beyond recognising an economic reality, artisans seem to have rejected elite claims to model modern Islamic heritage and direct local taste. While the state and its elites were able to coerce artisan production within the jails to address a niche taste, in this instance, there was not a strong enough cultural or economic impetuous for artisans to change their practices.

Artisans who worked in Bhopali neighbourhoods such as Shahjahanabad and Jahangirabad necessarily built working lives that adjusted to and adapted state technical ideologies. Their neighbourhoods were built or reshaped around state institutions such as the jail, industrial schools, exhibition grounds, or PWD workshops. This not only meant that state-preferred technologies and materials were introduced to their markets, but also that their markets became spaces for new forms of trade and exchange, where they encountered shifting regional tastes. Non-convict artisans in these bazaars were able to reject elite and state projects such as the development of the ceramic tile industry as economically unviable or untenable for them. Still, they necessarily developed skills and technological practices that complimented or competed with the work introduced through state projects such as jails and exhibitions.

Conclusions

Princely visions of industrial futures in Rampur, Hyderabad, and Bhopal were rooted in the attempts of state elites to fashion distinctive regional identities and assert authority in a context of circumscribed, quasi-colonial rulership. They impacted the lives, livelihoods, and labouring practices of state subjects. In many cases, these changes were coerced and directed, with jails and exhibitions as spaces where princely elites exerted control over artisan production. Princely visions of courtly and Muslim industrial futures also exceeded these boundaries, as independent artisan labourers sometimes faced economic or political pressure to take up new industrial practices.

Princely cultivation of industrial futures through convict labour and exhibitions also exceeded the boundaries of elite state spaces in that many explicitly addressed the middle-class Indian audiences beyond princely state borders. At the level of rhetoric and regional self-representation, princely state histories, many of which were printed in British Indian cities, often spoke, in part, to emerging Indian Muslim middle classes.[129] They sought to convince these readers to look to the states as sites of renewed Muslim political, economic, or moral authority.

For this reason, even though each state examined here drew on different courtly, regional, and religious histories, representations of jail labour in popular state histories and material culture tended to converge around two arguments. The first was that a

[126] The *Bhopal Gazetteer* of 1909 characterised the tiles as a 'specialty' unique to the jail; see Luard and Ali, *Bhopal State Gazetteer*, p. 73.

[127] See Porter, 'William De Morgan', pp. 76–77; and *Āyīnah-yi Angrīzī Sadāgarī*.

[128] Luard and Ali, *Bhopal State Gazetteer*, p. 73.

[129] Examples include Sultan Jahan Begum, *Hayat-i-Shahjehani*; Najm ul-Ghanī Khān, *Akhbār al-Ṣanādīd*; Shāh, *Rāmpūr kī namāyish*; Chiragh Ali, *Administration of Hyderabad.*

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given princely state's jails were uniquely capable of the moral reform of convicts, and the second was that state engagement with new technologies and practices in the jail was part of a broader renewal of Muslim authority over industry. Likewise, princely state forms of self-representation through exhibitions were addressed in part to external—often but not always Muslim—middle-class Indian audiences. The materials displayed were used to emphasise the idea that state industries could not only compete with their British Indian counterparts, but also revive and redirect practices of Muslim and courtly patronage and technical authority on the subcontinent.

The specific contours and valances of these arguments differed significantly based on the regional, sectarian, and historical differences between the states. In Rampur, prison production and exhibitions both contributed to the state's efforts to project a reformed or hybridised courtly culture that drew on both colonial expectations of rulership and north Indian histories of Nawabi patronage. In Hyderabad, state elites both cultivated jail industries and participated in all-India and international exhibitions as part of a broader effort to communicate princely sovereignty and a vision of control and authority, particularly over the urban spaces of their extensive territory. And in Bhopal, jail industries and state exhibitions often sought to reinforce the Begum Nawabs' models of the charitable uplift of subjects, as well as their claims on engagement with transregional Muslim traditions and arts. Despite these differences, princely prisons and exhibition participation consistently served to distinguish state forms of cultural and religious authority over industry from those of the British Raj.

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