

GANJA MATTERS



EMPIRE AND THE
PURSUITS OF CANNABIS
IN BRITISH INDIA

UTATHYA CHATTOPADHYAYA

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Empire and the Pursuits of Cannabis in British India



Utathya Chattopadhyaya



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For Sutapan and Anindita, for doing their best

*kiya cheej banaiya khoda
bangla desh ka ganja
ek chilim me jaycha taycha
do chilim me moja
teen chilim me wajir najir*

*chaar chilim me raja
kiya cheej banaiya khoda
bangla desh ka ganja*

—GANJA WORKERS' SONG, 1970 (AFZAL, NAOGAN
MOHKUMAR ITIHASH, 43)

god, what a thing you made!
the ganja of bangla desh!
so-so after one pipe,
but jolly after two,
a third makes one minister and
nobleman
the fourth makes one a king.
god, what a thing you made!
the ganja of bangla desh!

*This magic dust can wake to ecstasy
The toil worn sense, and banish irksome care,
Yea, rive the iron chain of fixed Despair,
And waft the spirit,—buoyant—hopeful—free
O'er earth and ocean's wide immensity,
To Dreamland's distant strand, on wings of air:
Wouldst thou have visions exquisite and rare?
Taste it, and Lo! Thy wondering eyes shall see,
Rich wreaths of vivid green and silver bells
Fair laughing brows which sparkling coins
adorn,
Great groups of pendant spars and red lipped
shells
And fairy flowers, such as the frost at morn,
Paints on the gleaming panes with fingers white,
And broad colures, and bars of golden light.*

—SONNET TO EXTR. CANNABIS INDICA,
BY D. ("SONNET BY D," BENGAL MAGAZINE, 1873, 103)

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND MAPS

This book uses many ordinary colloquial words from agricultural practices and proverbial knowledge in Hindustani and Bengali. Many have roots in Persian, were adopted into Odia and Urdu, may include elements of Sanskritization, and have parallels in Punjabi, Awadhi, and other regional languages. Instead of imposing the Library of Congress standard of transliteration and romanization, which emphasize Sanskritic roots, I have retained the phonetic pronunciation of the spoken word wherever possible. Except where the genre is a specific Sanskritic word, like *pancali* instead of *panchali*, I have rendered the spoken o- and e- and ao- sounds as vowels. For proper names of deities, when quoting a source, I have used the phonetic (e.g., *lokkhi*), while in analysis, I have used the Sanskritic (Lakshmi). Similar decisions underlie the use of Trinath and Trinatha in analyses of heterodox devotion in colonial Bengal. To maintain accuracy, I have not corrected direct references to sources containing anglicized names (Kerr for Kar, Oudh for Awadh). For consistency in translating weights and measures, approximate equivalences contextual to time and region are listed in footnotes, and numbers follow hundreds and thousands instead of lakhs and crores. To make non-English-language words from the lifeworlds of ganja more familiar and adaptable to our vocabularies, I have italicized only the first usage and added spot translations in parentheses and meanings in the glossary.

Instead of using a large-scale map of British India to pictorialize the spread of ganja, a common practice in British colonial reportage, the maps in this book use a different tack. One focuses closely on the rivers and towns of the Ganja Mahal with the contemporary geopolitical boundaries of India and Bangladesh. The other transposes major towns in the Gangetic basin, where “Bengal Ganja” was held in warehouses, onto boundaries of contemporary districts and divisions but

not the Radcliffe Line of the Partition of 1947. The arrow suggests Santal migration routes, circulatory before 1860 and less so after it, of Adivasi families that settled in Naogaon.

To emphasize the widespread socially embedded import of cannabis names as categories that constituted specific experiences, I have not italicized “ganja,” “bhang,” or “charas.” The word “ganjakhori” is italicized only in reference to an individual in a story and not when used as a conceptual figure. References to caste categories in primary sources are retained for accuracy, but in highly specific cases where appropriate, I have opted to use Dalit as a capacious, even if anachronistic, descriptor for collectivities of people from multiple oppressed and untouchable caste backgrounds formed during devotional gatherings in rural swathes of undivided colonial Bengal before the 1930s. The use of italics for emphasis is indicated in footnotes only when I’ve added it. Finally, all translations, unless noted, are mine.

Introduction

The Pursuits of Cannabis

*Tobey teen bochorey ganjaye nesha nai boliya mohamannyo shomraat
porompujyo hutashoney ahuti prodaan koriya thaken.*

Declaring that after three years, ganja doesn't intoxicate anymore,
His Excellency the emperor sacrificed it to the revered fire.

—KALIMOHAN CHAKRABARTI, 1913

Kalimohan Chakrabarti wrote these words after witnessing a tall scorching blaze turn old bundles of manufactured ganja into thick billowing clouds of smoke that hung in the air for hours. He portrayed it as a ritual performed on behalf of Emperor George V in the royal manner of Indian kings. These words closed the first chapter of his serialized chronicle of ganja production in Naogaon, a subdivision of the Rajshahi district in British India. His description of *ganjaporano* (ganja-burning) captured the ultimate stage in the British Empire's adjudication of ganja's lifeways. In Naogaon, fields full of cannabis plants had grown, many hands had harvested its stalks, and several others had manufactured it into intoxicating commodities. Subsequently, these goods circulated through colonial warehouses and shops in the vast agrarian districts of British India that stretched between Dhaka and Delhi. Briefly, Naogaon's exports also sold in London and Trinidad in the British West Indies. Moving from green plant to brown vegetal matter to liquefied confection and dense smoke, ganja animated histories, bodies, and worlds of countless human subjects of the empire. The unsold remainder of such plant lifeways, once three years past its prime and with its material density and exchange value in ashes, vanished under odorous smoke.

Intensification of imperial rule in nineteenth-century British India drew the colonial state into the pursuit of the plant botanically known as *Cannabis sativa* L. In South Asia, the genus *Cannabis* produces an intoxicating resin that courses

through its stalk, leaves, and flowers. Historically, various social groups have harnessed the plant's potencies into everyday substances and market commodities, including ganja in multiple varieties from the flowering tops, bhang of different types from the leaves, and charas from the resin in the flower and stalk. The subcontinent's heterogenous cultural landscapes and language geographies made the terms "ganja" and "bhang" slippery. Both nouns, besides being just two among many, are often interchangeable and produce unstable yet contextually specific forms of meaning. Between 1790 and 1940, British India's regional governments closely pursued the journey of the plant from fields and farms to people's bodies. Following these lifeways, the state introduced legal and political structures to tax and govern its potentiality. In Chakrabarti's account, officials embodying British imperial authority had classified the stock of ganja as empty of intoxicating prowess after three years of storage in state-run warehouses. Stored inventory underwent dryage, and when new annual yields of ganja competed for storage space in warehouses, the fresher supply depreciated retail prices. To make space for the new stock, enormous state-organized public pyres destroyed depreciating older ganja.

After witnessing the pyre, Chakrabarti's narrative proceeds to immediately contrast Emperor George V with a nameless ganja cultivator facing the blaze. "Today, I gave twelve hundred [rupees'] worth ganja as a gift to Agnideb," the man says.¹ He hadn't managed to sell all his stock, stored under bond at the Excise Department warehouse, in good time. "Such is my fate in the end," he declares with resignation. However, despite this resignation to British imperial writ, which the poor *krishok* (cultivator) articulates as a condition of fate, he does not entirely concede to his subjection. Invoking a sacred episteme in which heavenly power intercedes in earthly paradigms of imperial statistics, he reframes his financial loss as a voluntary offering made as *upohaar* (gift) to Agni, the god of fire. Whether as Emperor George's rite or oblation to Agni, both Chakrabarti and the nameless cultivator refracted ganja-burning through South Asian traditions of ritualized devotion and fire worship. However, while Chakrabarti framed the burning as sacrifice, implying its eventuality as unfortunate, the cultivator insists that the offering is on volition. The cultivator writes himself into the history of empire as a participant, understanding his role on his own terms, while nonetheless being subject to British imperial decree. His hands might be tied, but what they offered was, regardless, a gift.

GANJA MATTERS

Various entwined histories scaffold Chakrabarti's exchange with the nameless cultivator in Naogaon, each of which involved the collision of different frameworks of making meaning of the same plant and the matter it produced. The dried bundles of manufactured ganja lapped up by roaring flames were a product of human labor transforming and exaggerating the potential of the cannabis

plant's body to intoxicate human ones. The commodity form of ganja, inhering in a consumable substance with a calculated shelf life, was the result of modern statistical regimes of value constituted through chemical and botanical laboratory analysis of the ratio of intoxicating principle to mass. Such calculations aspired to enumerate different facets of ganja products and made legible the circuits of empire and colonial infrastructure like warehouses and price charts within and through which they circulated. Wherever such products went, they could in turn animate diverse experiences of intoxication inside different bodies. Colonial laws, infrastructural projects, and institutions of science betrayed the state's relentless pursuit to contain and govern the place of cannabis in colonial India. Across different provinces, administrative units, and systems of rule, British colonial policies sought continuously to shape and stabilize commercial cannabis economies, manage distinctions between presidencies and Princely States, and deflect accusations of engendering addiction by profiting from drugs.

The exchange also signaled regimes of representation and relations, such as that between self and divinity, within which people understood cannabis substances culturally. Cosmologies and corresponding ritual practices between human, plant, and more-than-human deities molded the social life of cannabis plant matter in British India. These relations transformed over the long nineteenth century alongside changes in the languages in which they were expressed. Bengali, Hindustani, Oriya, and other South Asian regional languages were sites of tremendous contestations and reform under colonial rule, as political visions of purity, respectability, Brahmanism, and patriarchy among Indian reformers constrained the grammar and valences through which intoxicants and the experience of intoxication had achieved popular legibility. Despite expansive commodification of liquors and drugs from grains, flowers, and stalks across South Asia under colonial capitalism, the spectrum of nouns, meanings, and proverbial references used to make sense of intoxicants shrunk, and the institutional pathologization of excess and addiction gained greater currency.

Ganja matters to such histories of economy and symbolic systems because they cannot individually contain its polysemy. The circulation of ganja in South Asia was a world-making project. It threaded multiple temporalities, traversed different regions, and troubled standard archival recording conventions. Pathways that turn, and return, to the blazing fire begin from the fact that ganja is, and was, a tremendously popular name for cannabis in South Asian languages like Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, and Punjabi. Its popularity masks its indeterminacy in social life. The capacious noun "ganja" could refer to a highly variate plant species that produces different types of intoxicants, sometimes one but often all of those intoxicants, or entirely different drugs one may be prejudiced against but doesn't have words to describe. In lesser degree, the same is true for the noun "bhang." "Bhang" is extremely popular in the subcontinent and, along with cognates like *bangi* and *bangue*, it has been used among Persian, Swahili, Hindi, Portuguese, Bengali, and Punjabi language speakers in Asia and Africa. "Ganja" and "bhang" are both

nouns for solid matter, including flower, leaf, seed, and twig, produced from cannabis plants in South Asia. Formally, two differences matter: Ganja is made of cannabis flowers or buds and commonly ingested through smoking, while “bhang” refers to the plant’s leaves and liquid confections made for drinking. However, neither is a dry noun dependent solely on the technicality of anatomy and confectionery method. In South Asian cultural practices, both words are colorful and shift in meaning depending on the context. The transformation in connotations, implications, and usages of “ganja” and “bhang” demand an appreciation of the worlds from which they acquired meaning and those they helped shape.

“Ganja” and “bhang” are nouns for matter derived from cannabis plants that were also called ganja. To insist on the specificity of Indian cannabis, this book refers to both the physical substances ganja and bhang as ganja products. “Charas,” the noun for intoxicants made solely with the resinous exudation along flowers and stalks, is a more particular form of cannabis matter obtainable at high-altitude environments and not the focus of this book. Whether as a noun in a sentence or an actual substance, ganja and bhang aren’t like other forms of cannabis like marijuana, hashish, dagga, or kif. The cultivated plant’s products go by multiple names in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, leading people to commonly correlate them in conversation. However, specialists and entrepreneurs realize how specific and mercurial the species *Cannabis sativa* is. The plant’s ability to produce potent intoxicants of quality depends heavily on soil, moisture, heat, and method of cultivation and culture. Changes in these factors produce different types of intensity, potency, and quantity of intoxicating resin in the plant’s body. In its coevolutionary history with the human species, physical characteristics like breadth of leaves and seed formation depended on the purpose for which the plant was cultivated and the surrounding ecology of the cultivation zone. Genetic culturing also produced different gene pools, which in turn have shaped debates between monotypic and polytypic classification of the species and genus.² Coevolution with humans has also produced incredibly wide variation in the effects on human bodily functions that different substances of the plant can have. Scientists and humanists studying *Cannabis sativa* agree that these biochemical processes are so fundamentally disparate that singular definitions and prescriptions never suffice. Globally powerful twentieth-century antinarcotics regimes have also adversely impacted cannabis research, effectively hindering people from fully appreciating the plant’s material sensitivities and variations. The noun “ganja” maintains the South Asian specificity of the plant’s name even as it enfolds various histories spanning regions, tongues, and statuses in the subcontinent and elsewhere.

The noun also carries a twinned history of modern contempt and objectification rooted in nineteenth-century colonial discourses. Scientists and governments in British India tightly defined and fixed *Cannabis sativa* in its juridical place, using solely biochemical and physical criteria. Outside biochemical definitions, in everyday contexts, depending on who one asks, ganja is a slipper name, a specific

drug, a youthful fancy, a hinge for friendly sociality, a compulsive habit, a mystified object, an everyday presence, and a familiar enemy. In the most globally used South Asian languages, such as Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, and Gujarati, words like *ganjeri*, *genjel*, *bhangkhor*, and *ganjakhor* can be pejorative references to real or imagined addicts. The tug-of-war between variability of substance and meaning on one hand and standardization of official taxonomy on the other remain shot through with modern discourses of health, temperance, and respectability. Yet the *ganjakhor*, the figure who used ganja, also matters. The *ganjakhor*'s historical entanglements with the colonial systems that shaped the circulation of ganja lie just under the surface, inviting further scrutiny of the worlds of relations that enfolded ganja.

Nuances of ganja's relations with its consumers and their social histories, cultural meanings, and political economy have not, however, been at the forefront of South Asian history. British colonial discourse looms large in James Mills's foundational work, which traces a historical arc through official debates about cannabis and the records of "native-only" lunatic asylums.³ Mills reveals the gradual emergence of the categories "Indian hemp" and "hemp drugs" in official and medical parlance, differences in doctors' experiences of using cannabinoid medicines, debates over smuggling and trade of cannabis products in British circles, and the arbitrariness of asylum officials assigning ganja as a cause for criminal lunacy in British India. Prioritizing English-language records, European medical practitioners, and colonial officials, Mills reveals the internal inconsistency and prejudicial reasoning of administrative actors. Using views of British actors in colonial institutions in India as guideline or counterfoil is par for the course in many histories of alcohol and drugs. Fischer-Tine and Tschurennev's summary of major research trends rightly reveals the limited focus on ganja while relying on temperance activism and antvice politics outside India to frame the literature and explaining "global contexts" as seemingly tidy connections between sites inside and outside the subcontinent.⁴ Lacking both a theory of colonialism and a keen eye for the materiality of cannabis products grown and manufactured in India, scholarship on drugs like ganja flattens relationalities, ignores knowledges in indigenous languages, and in claiming the scale of the "global," historicizes Western perceptions of intoxicants as opposed to the intoxicants themselves.⁵

Among social histories, ganja and bhang appear briefly and paint a different picture of sacral binds and political economy. Joseph Alter studied how, in male wrestling communities and Hindu ascetic culture in northern India, bhang is drunk as an anxiolytic to soothe the nerves and calm one's sense of desire.⁶ In the Decan, ganja smoking and bhang drinking were common in what Nile Green called "barracks Islam" in his analysis of the everyday religious life of Muslim sepoy in military contingents of the Hyderabad Princely State that were under British control after the Indian Rebellion.⁷ In peasant politics in western India, a remarkable figure like Daduram liberally used ganja to shape his persona in the 1900s,

while newspapers in Bengal, like *Samay*, simultaneously described Bihari Muslim workers in Calcutta's mill areas as ganja addicts.⁸ In early modern India, as Richard Eaton established, bhang was a vehicle for a charismatic poet in the Bijapur sultanate to articulate criticisms of Islamic orthodoxy and Sufi dispositions.⁹ At Lahore's Shahidganj structure, long a site of Sikh and Muslim worship, Sana Haroon has explored the settlement of land as a religious endowment by the British government in Punjab based on the claims that a Sikh *mahant* (hereditary caretaker of the gurdwara) had *first* served liquid bhang at the site in the early nineteenth century.¹⁰ Such examples suggest how human-plant relations between South Asian communities and ganja products were built through local and regional histories of circulation and socially distributed sacral meanings across the formal, yet fragile and shifting boundaries of Hindu, Islamic, Sikh, and Adivasi cosmologies.

Current scholarship does not acknowledge the fact that in modern South Asia, ganja has existed simultaneously as a plant, a noun, a material substance, a sacral object, a commodity, a colonial tax article, and a cohabiting life form. It has shaped, and has in turn been shaped, by the creative, therapeutic, leisurely, and prejudicial pursuits of people for centuries. With British conquest and expansion, the official pursuit of the plant collided with existing ones, folding the matter produced from the plant in colonial India into imperial systems of rule. Plant matter, however, proved difficult to objectify so neatly. Colonial officials in British India struggled with all the nouns for ganja products in different languages and eventually systematized the triplex of "ganja," "bhang," and "charas" as juridical categories. Many of those names continue in everyday use today. More important, however, the accompanying reduction during the nineteenth century of the conceptual breadth required to understand intoxicants contributed to the drug panics of the twentieth century, which makes a prolonged and consistent historical engagement with ganja in colonial South Asia long overdue.

In fact, the twentieth-century history of cannabis had a tremendously powerful impact on its past. After it was added to the first schedule of dangerous drugs in the Geneva Convention of the League of Nations in 1925, the resulting burden of illicitness and the international criminalization and prohibition on trade were overwhelming. The Geneva Convention became pivotal in helping streamline the more disparate policing strategies in the US, British, and French empires enacted before World War I and giving them legal coherence in the interwar years.¹¹ The influential work of Thembiisa Waetjen and Liat Kozma has traced the roots of intolerance, discrimination, policing, and criminalization surrounding cannabis directly to race, colonialism, and border regimes in the modern history of nation-states.¹² Racial formations built around negative associations between cannabis and the colonized other, which was often a racialized subject or an impoverished immiserated worker or peasant, or both, prominently defined European imperialism and medical history in Mexico, the United States, French North Africa, and British colonies in Africa and Asia.¹³ Even though few scholars of drug histories

conceptually engage empire and difference when they evaluate medicalization, criminalization, and legalization, it is clear that histories of race, class, poverty, settler colonialism, and science around the colonial world boomeranged into policies against cannabis in imperial states during the interwar period.¹⁴ With the international state system after 1945, prohibition of cannabis and the use of criminal law in domestic statutes became standard across member states of the United Nations, complemented further by sporadic moral panics, heavy racial policing and profiling, and eventually, the War on Drugs.¹⁵ Plant matter from cannabis, at once hazardous and subversive, continues to battle this history today in debates about agrobusiness, medicalization, and decriminalization, whether in the US and Britain or in postcolonial nation-states.¹⁶

Ganja Matters is an effort to materialize the historical worlds of ganja in South Asia by first sidelining the steamrolling pressures of criminalization and medicalization and beginning with the licit, vibrant, and polysemic lives of the plant and its material forms. The ecumene in which South Asian peoples situated the plant and its plural meanings was repressed under colonial rule in British India, but its imprints remain powerful. Here, feminist approaches to materialism are crucial to understanding how ganja mattered to the history of colonialism and modern empire. The antecedents of the noun “matter,” such as the Latin *mater*, the earlier cognates in Germanic and Sanskrit (*matr*), and the more recent usage of the word *materia* help us consider plant matter critically and generatively.¹⁷ The historical usage of “matter” as wood, *materia* as the tree trunk that births offshoots, and the philosophical operation of matter as substance with perceptible and physical attributes, all draw on an active notion of mothering as a productive act of generating a thing anew. The transformation of the word into meanings ranging from substance to events and affairs with regard to which one may be speaking offer other pathways. Simultaneously, and relatedly, the verb “to matter” conveys importance and influence as well as relative notions of significance vis-à-vis a subject.¹⁸ Taken together, these expressions each open up ways to think of and through matter as a productive analytic.

Taking up the materialist feminist invitation to think about ganja as plant matter that, interrelatedly with other human and more-than-human beings, generates, organizes, and propels history, I pluralize my approach to the ways ganja mattered. *Ganja Matters* refers first to the matter that the plant is composed of—its shape, structure, smell, density, and the words and referents used to capture such facets. It also denotes the different kinds of intoxicating substances with diverse naming conventions and histories of meaning that were produced from the plant. Leaving aside charas as resin, which deserves to be treated separately, I discard the technical separations instituted between ganja and bhang and embrace the slipperiness of the nouns as unstable forms of matter. While I focus on only intoxicants, the analytic of matter still captures other products like oil from the seed and fiber from the stalk that were produced in British India.

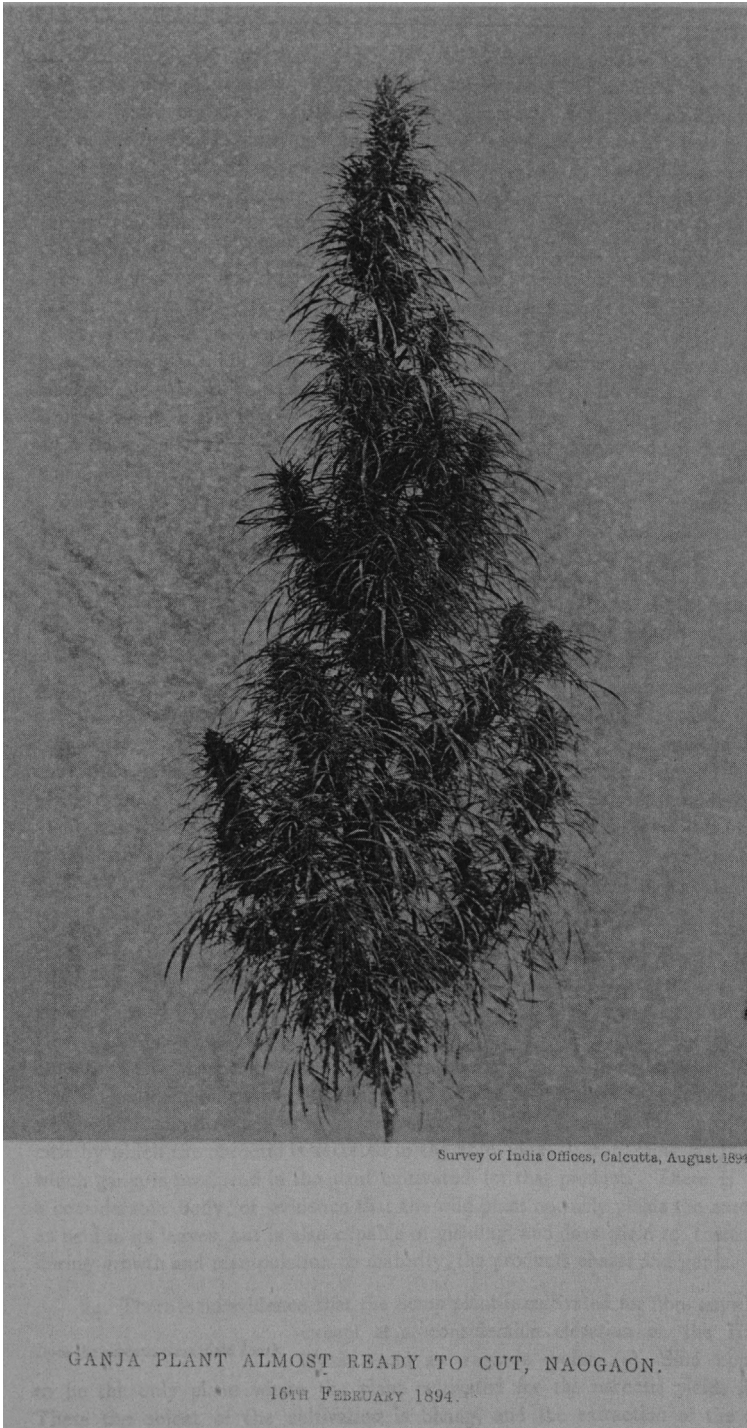
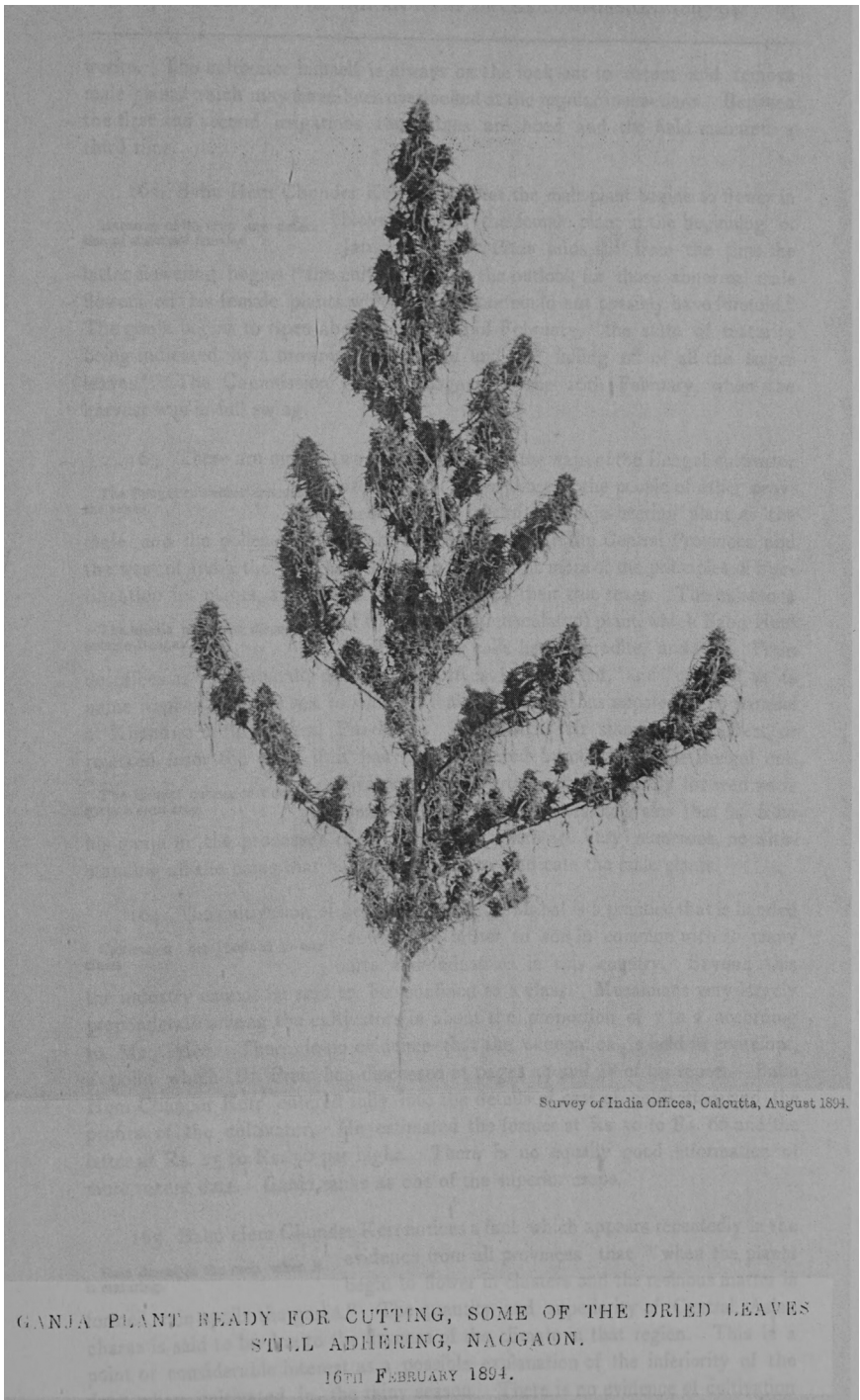


FIGURE 1. Ganja plant almost ready for cutting. 16 February 1894. Image courtesy of Survey of India Office, Calcutta, and Wellcome Library.



Survey of India Offices, Calcutta, August 1894.

GANJA PLANT READY FOR CUTTING, SOME OF THE DRIED LEAVES
STILL ADHERING, NAOGAON.

16TH FEBRUARY 1894.

FIGURE 2. Ganja plant ready for cutting. 16 February 1894. Image courtesy of Survey of India Office, Calcutta, and Wellcome Library.

Ganja did not just matter differently to the colonial officer, the nameless cultivator, the devotee, the worker, and the writer and poet. It also occupied different, yet coeval, temporalities that cascaded and overlapped. Their material effects came to matter to people and institutions embedded in vastly unequal relations of power across the uneven terrain of imperial rule. The etymology of the word “matter” indicates multiple simultaneous possibilities of historical analysis for capturing such effects. In this book, how the plant’s body transformed in human hands, animated other species, fueled global imperial anxieties, interceded in agrarian reorganization, and illuminated subaltern desires are all of material relevance, even if differently.

Letting the abundant polysemy of ganja generate a historical framework acknowledges its status as, to use Pamela Smith’s term, a “material complex” endowed with meanings derived from knowledge in motion, without disregarding the power of colonial objectification and medicalization to fix and ossify it as the legal category “hemp drug.”¹⁹ The difference lies in where the spotlight moves. While European physicians, surgeons, and botanists in colonial India’s hospitals and asylums generated a powerful English-language archive of plant knowledge, biochemistry, lunacy, and psychiatry, ordinary people in the subcontinent produced thousands of other worlds shot through with power and meaning. Whether the latter unmakes the former is a question suited to critical histories of botany that I do not pursue here.²⁰ Indeed, ganja was strictly defined, using Linnean categories of botanical sexual classification, as a product of the “female flowering plant,” in contradistinction to its other parts, namely, the leaf, seed, and the resin. Tables, glossaries, and analyses of chemical composition, botanical particularities, and commentaries on psychoactive effects on Indian bodily physiology routinely accompanied British discourses on taxation and addiction. As a disciplinary and disciplining apparatus, the colonial scientific laboratory and its practices of experimentation gave ballast to regulatory efforts of British officials to establish a single way to define the plant’s intoxicating ability. Prefiguring a classic liberal conceit, this single framework correlated an anatomically separated part of the plant with the type of intoxicating effect it could have. Exemplifying a mode of “liberal biology” that individuates organic bodies using seemingly rational separations imposed on the actual relational, fungible, and systemic networks that constitute them, the designation of ganja as the flowering top of the female cannabis plant, bhang as the leaf, and charas as the resinous matter reduced a complex bodily system to three superficially tidy and abstract categories that reflected the plant’s commodified forms.²¹ Yet such knowledge did not immediately alter how speakers of Bengali, Hindi, Oriya, Assamese and other regional languages referred to ganja and bhang, even though it shaped how both substances circulated in the areas that made up such language geographies in the subcontinent.

It is crucial to spotlight ganja without dematerializing and depoliticizing its polysemy, recalcitrance, and coevolution with various forms of power in South Asia, as much existing scholarship tends to do in simply describing, and often narrating

verbatim, the accounts of imperial administrators, doctors, and the police within a telos from premodern legality to eventual illegality.²² Historians also implicitly and explicitly establish “drug” as a self-contained category within a narrative of British vacillation and modulation in policy and leave intact the rationalities and motivations that line the shelves of British imperial archives. Despite Rohan Deb Roy and Guy Attewell’s call to analyze in processual terms the “historical ontologies of medicine,” few have taken the lead from Ian Hacking to follow how substances become and unbecome drugs.²³ As Maziyar Ghiabi explains regarding opiates, political frameworks through which substances are sustained *as* drugs are equally critical.²⁴ However, a framework where substances transition in and out of the status of medicine also risks reifying medicalization and remedicalization, forces the historian to stay bound within the poison-medicine spectrum, and circumscribes, even if partially, the category “medicine.”²⁵ Alternatively, a focus on matter draws on historical ontologies and eschews spectrums in order to keep the interplay between materiality and politics of plant life under empire in focus.

Ganja is best understood when conceived as *matter* that co-constituted colonial and imperial processes, the analysis of which *matters* to a rigorous engagement with plant and human multispecies relations. Matter is not simply a metaphor. Instead, it is a category, more fundamental and capacious than “drug,” that unites disparate archives and rightfully illustrates the inseparability of plant and human history. It also enables a pathway out of conceptual boundaries in commodity history within which studies of commoditization, packaging, advertising, and consumption foreclose the simultaneous material existence of objects as substances, sacral bodies, and simulacra that embody other meanings. Even when scholars of imperial commodities center flows and use commodities as a lens for global and local scales of analysis, the material density of the commodity form either remains unexamined or is slotted into the unwieldy binary formulation of the anticommodity, which is either assigned non-economic value or commodified in non-European ways.²⁶ Unlike other “commodities of empire” in British history such as opium and tea, ganja did not stitch together the local and global at comparable scales or depend on industrial production standards amenable to vertically deep value extraction in a global economy. In ganja’s case, the variabilities in the plant’s power to intoxicate relied further on domestication, moisture, elevation, soil composition, mode of manufacture, and patterns of exposure to light and heat such that similar seeds, grown a few miles apart, could and did produce different quantities of intoxicating principle. Ganja’s ecological history repels the commodity as a narrative lens or a state to transition in and out of.

Ganja products existed as forms of matter simultaneously in multiple, even contradictory states of being. As I show in this book, a purchased cake of ganja was an article of revenue and a sacral substance offered to a deity in the same moment that its meanings were made through devotees from different castes articulating through prayers entirely secret desires while touching the same smoking

pipe. Instead of separating economic from religious, medicine from commodity, material from metaphor, I lead with the inseparability and simultaneity of ganja as plant matter. Embracing concurrent and cascading temporalities, the organization of chapters reflects how the circulation of ganja built and upheld worlds with connected historical processes that didn't begin and end in tidy ways, even in the period covered by a specific chapter. Stretching the rubric of the long nineteenth century to span 1770 and 1940, I take the material biographies of ganja as object, noun, substance, metaphor, and commodity so as to illuminate how the inseparability of multispecies relations between humans, more-than-human beings, and plant matter constituted empire from below in British India's eastern, northern, and central regions.

MULTISPECIES EMPIRE HISTORY

Ganja was a subject that exerted an organizing force on the bodies and structures it evolved with. Its polysemy and materiality, and the inability of British colonial frameworks to disentangle noun, object, and context despite meticulous efforts to do so, bring forth new questions of scale and species in British imperial history. Since the British Empire did not ask for permission before subjecting the smallest ganja-producing villages in colonial India to military conquest and extractive taxation, the history of ganja cultivation in Naogaon is not simply local or regional in scale. As Kalimohan Chakrabarti's reference to Emperor George V in the opening anecdote suggests, ganja cultivators saw themselves as imperial subjects with a hierarchical relationship to Calcutta and London. The world came to them even if they did not move as much in the world. The plant moved too, both as a material substance and a potent symbol in racial discourses in Orientalist and ethnographic writing and in utopian discourses in subaltern devotion. Officials of the British Empire produced the juridical category "hemp drug" to govern such complexities of ganja products and, in doing so, produced a tremendous bureaucratic, contradictory, and polyvocal archive defined by a preoccupation with madness, addiction, and crime. The multiple contexts that shaped archives of ganja were effects of the collision between the plant's life and the many facets of empire that played out across several scales simultaneously.

Without a doubt, violence and political economy were the focal points of imperial discourse on ganja in South Asia's long nineteenth century. In 1873, the governor-general of British India concluded the first major series of correspondences on the relation between "hemp drugs," crime, madness, and taxation with officials and governors of Bombay, Madras, Oudh, Bengal, and Burma.²⁷ Although British officials agreed that the drug was specifically an Indian habit, was physically harmful, and caused crimes, none of them could establish its extent or reasonably justify prohibition, eventually leading the state to strengthen its policy of taxing ganja products as excisable articles. This cold racial arithmetic of British

governance was a product both of the deep-rooted uses of excise as a principle of political economy and of the Indian Rebellion of 1857–59, when bhang and ganja were cast as causative agents of anti-imperial violence in global imperial culture. The Rebellion revealed the spatial configuration, with scales ranging from a village to the empire, produced by modern British imperialism's pursuit of ganja. Echoing Mrinalini Sinha's approach to the cascading effects of imperial episodes, the contours of an "imperial social formation" around ganja and bhang became evident when specific events, controversies, or crises like the Rebellion exposed the dense historical connections forged around pursuits of ganja products in the British Empire.²⁸

Empire, as decades of scholarship has shown, is never just a space out there and away from the metropole. As an analytical category, empire is a webbed framework of historical processes resulting from colonizing ambitions to institute modern regimes of accumulation and govern the livability of human and nonhuman life.²⁹ As Antoinette Burton has insisted, empire is a crucial analytic fundamentally because it was not a stable location or a plethora of sites but an objective and a horizon, the pursuit of which generated anxious displays of authority and tense histories of difference. Empire was always on shaky ground, perennially anxious, and remained riven by anti-imperial mobilization. Insurgencies, counterhegemonic politics, tactical alliances for representation, and the physical character of materials, species, and environments directly troubled the life of empire on the ground.³⁰ In the long nineteenth century, both armed counterinsurgency and institutional modes of colonization revealed empire as an unceasing pursuit aimed at transforming relations among species, environments, social structures, and institutions of power.³¹ When ganja is not bracketed as medicine or drug in a corner of historical scholarship, its relationship to the British Empire's violent assault on geographies and peoples, extraction of wealth, and politics of colonial difference becomes clearer.³² Here, the political economy of excise in colonial conditions and the Rebellion structured how the colonial state in British India deemed ganja disruptive, superfluous, and unnecessary, yet protected, maintained, and expanded its circulation.

Entwined with these focal points, however, lay the commodity history of ganja, which further illuminated how the uneven effects of empire were material and political. Since ganja matter from different areas in British India produced nonidentical effects and had contrasting strengths, British pursuits to accurately commodify and standardize it effectively localized its identity, and the location and method of production combined to suggest intoxicant character. Echoing commodity names like Dhaka Muslin or Malabar Chintz in British imperial history, place-based identifiers like Naogaon Ganja, Bhagalpur Bhang, Garhjat Ganja, Mysore Ganja, and Khandesh Supply mapped on to differential rates of duties, taxes, and fees in relation to specific areas of the subcontinent.³³ In the major key of empire, ganja products were drowned out by Malwa Opium and Bengal

Opium, the two overbearing frames of reference for drug commodities exported from India, which carried histories of strictly regulated production, industrial warehousing, large-scale profiteering, the violent capture of Chinese markets, global consolidation of finance capital, smuggling by Indian Princely States, and interimperial management through bureaucratized governance.³⁴ However, within regional markets inside colonial India, the Excise Department governed opium (raw and manufactured) alongside all kinds of hemp drugs and liquors, a practice that routinely lent itself to conflation in official reports between the addictive potential of each and possible shifts in consumer desires between them, processes that helped fasten ganja under opium's shadow in official discourses. Drawing on commodity history's keen attention to the contingencies of commodification is key to disentangling ganja sufficiently and following its commodity forms repressed by the stated antagonisms of imperial administrators and thus materializing the unique biographies of differently potent and differently used ganja and bhang.

The repression of ganja's heterogeneity in the long nineteenth century reflected, and was complicated by, the politics of liberal empire. The formation in 1893 of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission (IHDC) and its ensuing work offer a pivotal example that looms larger in ganja's history than many other policies. The judicial commission was constituted to help the British government respond to critics and temperance campaigners opposed to earnings from opium and cannabis. Its seven members included three administrators, one military surgeon, and three wealthy Indian landowners with a record of public imperial service. W. Mackworth Young, the president, came from a family of professional imperial officers. H. T. Ommanney, then collector for the forested Panch Mahals, was well known for previously governing Adivasi peoples and forest lands in Khandesh state. A. H. L. Fraser, then commissioner of Chattisgarh, was an evangelical Christian with close ties to missionary societies who later served as lieutenant governor of Bengal and oversaw the suppression of Swadeshi (self-rule) activists. Surgeon-Major C. J. H. Warden, then chemical examiner for the imperial government and professor of chemistry at Calcutta Medical College, had previously experimented on the possibility of cannabis containing a tetanizing alkaloid and had coauthored *Pharmacographia Indica* (1891), an encyclopedia of Indian drugs of vegetable origin.³⁵ Lala Nihal Chand, a dominant landowner in Muzaffarnagar, was scion of a family that lent money to British officers during the bloody counterinsurgency against Indian rebels in 1858.³⁶ Raja Soshi Sikhareshwar Roy, zamindar of Tahirpur, in eastern Bengal, was one of India's richest men and had once joined Hume and the Indian National Congress but distanced himself after his proposal to ban cow slaughter in 1887 gained little traction. Kanwar Harnam Singh, member of the Kapurthala royal family and relative of the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh, had served the British state in several capacities besides famously leading the procession of Indian princes in London at Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887.

In July 1893, to aptly capture “Indian customs,” the Commission’s members, already familiar with several parts of British India, composed an extensive questionnaire using Dr. David Prain’s threefold typology of Indian “hemp drugs”—ganja, bhang, and charas—as flowering top, dried leaves, and resinous matter, respectively. Responses, testimonies, affidavits, and witness reports from all corners of British India were eventually collected in nine volumes. Like a rather selective vacuum cleaner, the Commission sucked up contradictory forms of evidence about cannabis in response to its seventy questions, leaving the white European and upper-caste Indian men to wrestle with a standard policy and debate the merits of cannabis’s drug-ness. Although women, workers, peasants, low-caste peoples, and any intersection of marginalized identities are not among the “voices” in this archive, ganja’s polysemy among the poor and subalternized groups percolated into responses. While the Commission’s priority was to interpret the economic, social, and political contexts of British India’s governance of hemp drugs and explore the feasibility of prohibition, the rich canvas of biological complexities of cannabis and cultural differences of meaning in its voluminous inquiries hindered any single overarching policy of prohibition. Of the seven members, five voted in favor of the final report, and Lala Nihal Chand and Soshi Sikhareshwar Roy dissented. Nihal Chand argued that bhang shouldn’t be taxed, because it was less injurious than ganja and charas, which needed complete prohibition. Roy concurred, noting *inter alia* that consulting more Brahmans could clarify how bhang was sacral but the others weren’t.³⁷ Their dissent captured growing tensions between elite upper-caste men and British bureaucrats over the governance of Indian religious traditions and customs under Victorian rule. The IHDC echoed similar differences over Indian medicinal uses of opium in the Royal Commission on Opium, which John F. Richards, Paul Winther, and Joyce Madancy have analyzed at length, but the IHDC’s motivations were not solely driven by the polyvocality of ganja’s governance.³⁸ In 1893, Britain demonetized silver, established British India’s rupee on the gold standard, and pushed more than twenty-seven subcontinental Indian kingdoms to close their mints. Given how the Royal Commission on Opium invited immediate backlash from temperance activists, and in light of rising tensions between Muslims, Christians, and Hindu organizations leading the cow protection movement across northern and eastern India, the IHDC erred on the side of caution.³⁹ It insisted on using the threefold rubric of ganja, bhang, and charas across India; rejected prohibition; cited inconclusive evidence of cannabis causing insanity; made arbitrary distinctions between “moderate” and “excessive” consumers among Indians; and recommended strengthening taxation, standardization, licensing, and antimuggling operations in India instead of risking aggressive reactions from users of cannabis that might further stoke the fires of discontent against Victorian rule.⁴⁰

In the conclusion of its report, the IHDC cited two starkly different British political thinkers united by their belief in imperial solutions for civilizational

backwardness and lack of moral and popular will.⁴¹ From James Anthony Froude, noted advocate of the Protestant Reformation, the English colonization of Ireland, and bonded labor for Xhosa subjects in the Cape Colony, the Commission took a lesson in history. Froude had argued that the decay in sixteenth-century cloth markets due to rising prices, after royal provisions limited the number of looms in weavers' homes to two, was not solely an economic problem. Despite being safeguarded from becoming ordinary mill hands, small weavers were continually oppressed by large capitalists. To Froude, this was a problem of legitimacy as a social and moral principle: Decrees or laws "above the working level of public morality" were limited in efficacy and could not prevent evasion by the powerful.⁴² Only public morality favoring the law could ensure its success. In this analysis of "feudal England," the Commission found a corelate for late-nineteenth-century India since, they noted, the British government in India was "superimposed" on Indians and its paternalist rule was thus already limited in scope.⁴³ The IHDC's idea of India was also a product of liberal political economy that rendered India as a state-space which, as Manu Goswami argues, was manifested through infrastructure like railways, currency, print, and the flow of capital in ways that held together a vision of the colonized territory of British India as spatially settled in the global unit of the British Empire. The "all-India" IHDC survey, like gazetteers, maps, commercial dictionaries, and annual reports, framed colonial India's geography as one territorial unit in an imperial global economy pivoting on Britain.⁴⁴

John Stuart Mill was the second thinker. His contributions to political thought, while quite unlike that of Froude, were the cornerstone of liberal paternalist government in India. Whereas Froude provided the language of public morality, the Commission drew from Mill a related argument about public conscience. It noted that while imperial reforms on infanticide and sati (ritually sanctioned widow femicide) in India, though not "universally accepted by the people," were enacted out of necessity earlier in the century, prohibiting hemp drugs was simply not necessary enough. Citing Mill, the report concluded that prohibition wasn't something already considered desirable by "general conscience."⁴⁵ Indian subjects, according to this liberal imperial framework, did not altogether desire prohibition, and thus regulation under imperial rule would suffice. As Uday Singh Mehta argues, such liberal imperial claims relegated the powerful heterogeneity of experiences, and knowledges derived therefrom, as provisional and passing.⁴⁶ Casting aside the polysemy of ganja as minor, fleeting, and contingent, such claims constituted liberal empire as the vantage of the future and the state as the organ of necessary intervention that improved the colony and propelled it ahead.⁴⁷ Otherwise coeval forms of knowledge in the colonies thus appeared as past, not present.⁴⁸ Imperial government was obligated to gradually raise subjects to a higher temporal plane or, as Mill put it, develop their character toward its freest expressions. Via Giorgio Agamben, Mehta argues that liberalism's self-assured claim to the present was bolstered by affirming a distinction between experience as contingent and knowledge

as certain. In contrast to the incoherence of relational experience, certainty derived from the bounded logic of experimentation on individual subjects in controlled environments. Only the incoherent, provisional, and incomplete could establish the necessity of new, and more certain knowledge. The Commission demonstrated this firsthand: It encountered diverse languages, nomenclatures, and articulations of a vast spectrum of relational experiences, before displacing them to the margins of a three-name classification system to delimit the plant's governability.

Plant matter, however, provides fresh weight to imperial history.⁴⁹ The materiality of the cannabis plant matter regularly broke through imperial logic as the plant's gender variance spilled over Linnean binaries; as excise administrators struggled with precise statistics, price variations, and nomenclature; and as cultivators pressed the state for concessions using their unique vocation. Such histories refocus attention in imperial history on how plant matter, despite being recessive, drove European pursuits of Asian spices, bioprospecting ventures for medicines, poisons, gardens and herbariums in Europe, and monoculture-driven plantation capitalism in general. Making the particularities of cannabis plant matter the engine of historical narrative contributes to studies of botany, therapeutic medicine, and bioprospecting by such scholars as Londa Schiebinger and Abena Dove Osseo-Asare who have scrutinized the uses of plants and herbs in human hands.⁵⁰ Instead of letting plants remain incidental to narratives of European extraction and capitalism or objects in modernizing waves of science and medicine, Prakash Kumar and David Arnold have focused on how seeds, plant science, and agricultural improvement schemes objectified plants like indigo and how fields and plantations in India became sites in the circulatory framework of scientific knowledge under empire.⁵¹ As knowledge of South Asia's plants, especially ones with medicinal value, became useful, it was schematized using Sanskrit and Persian but not other languages. Minakshi Menon has drawn attention to Sanskritic systems of nomenclature, many of which troubled William Jones's oeuvre, with their "enormous networks of semantic coordinates" whereby a plant's multiple names connoted combinations of normative ecologies, imagined physiologies, and contextual qualities. Other epistemologies of South Asian plant life likely suffered even as empiricism, philology, observation, and in Projit Mukharji's words, "embedding" led to some South Asian traditions of plant knowledge becoming entangled with European ones. Following Mukharji's fitting caution against retrobotanizing indigenous names with Linnaean latinized ones and further marginalizing cultural identities of plants, I maintain the recalcitrance and polysemy of ganja as a historical substance irreducible to *Cannabis sativa* L.⁵² The historicity of ganja as matter shaped by and under British imperial systems invites us to let its cosmologies and systems of meaning muddy the self-evidence of botanical categories and let the space of difference between ganja and cannabis be a site of fertile scrutiny.

My approach to imperial history draws on the analytical emphasis of critical plant studies, the biographical and processual thrust of commodity history, the

interdisciplinarity of histories of drugs, alcohol, and addiction, the theoretical contributions of gender history and political economy, and the rich tradition of agrarian and social history in South Asian studies to capture ganja across multiple scales and British India's different administrative territories.⁵³ Historicizing ganja as matter need not reify boundaries between local and imperial, or hierarchize their spatialities solely as below and above, fundamentally because seemingly separate processes that shaped ganja's biography, like Victorian imperial laws and Brahmanical revivalist movements, coincided in time and space. Instead, echoing Radhika Govindrajan's emphasis on interspecies relatedness, I eschew analytical separations of licit-illicit and virtue-vice in favor of relationalities of human, plant, and more-than-human as devices to track lateral, arboreal, and multidirectional journeys of ganja.⁵⁴ British imperialism not only transformed people and objects but also sought to colonize the *relations* between them.⁵⁵ As scholars of postcolonial studies insist, imperial pursuits and ambitions often failed but nonetheless engendered new transformations. Even though empire did not achieve hegemony, it caused the formation of new subjects marked by and differentiated along race, class, caste, gender, and sexuality. Ganja should be considered in the same vein as a material participant in modern empire, touched by its many histories.

The chapters in this book take up histories generated by ganja as plant matter and connected by empire. They insist that the nuances of retail and wholesale price indices belong in the same frame as the heterodoxy and heteropraxy of Bengal's contested devotional landscape. Ganja and bhang may appear overfamiliar to South Asian audiences, which is all the more reason why defamiliarizing and denaturalizing them through materialist history is crucial. To historians of empire, traditions like Trinath worship, at once not quite respectable and yet not unpopular, among rural populations reveal captivating facets of ganja that complement the repeated invocations of Ireland in the frameworks that colonial officials used to understand ganja farmers or the global echoes of the Indian Rebellion. Foregrounding the inseparability of such processes that pivoted on the materiality of the plant also alerts us to the porosity of state-making through excise administration and the inability of the colonial state to maintain cautious distance from the production regime of ganja in British India.

Exploring what empire history might be if one proceeds from the inseparability of human and plant, the chapters here absorb economic operations of revenue and excise, aural and performative practices of devotion, textual reifications of racialized insurgents, and political uses of cooperative economics under the umbrella of a social history of plant life and empire.⁵⁶ The social is a category shot through with difference, making visible how gender, caste, race, and sexuality were reproduced and transformed by practices of power. While the cannabis species has many histories in South Asia, I particularly materialize its nuclear location amid collisions of human and divine beings wrought by empire in the long nineteenth century. In these social histories, I consider the plant species cannabis not

as a static organism but as a co-evolving being that exists, propagates, reproduces, maintains, and distributes itself materially. These material actions that constituted the species and its relations had concurrent social and individual implications that considerably impede a clear analytical separation of human and plant. A formidable focus on materiality already exists in Indian historiography.⁵⁷ Yet, unlike the visuality of images and tangibility of buildings or objects, ganja's materiality and the implications of its use were predicated on its ability to intoxicate inside a human body, with each experience being likely different. Ingestion inside a human body is a specific mode of contact that transforms plant matter into smoke or liquid that disperses essential fatty acids (from seeds) and cannabinoid ligands for the cerebral cannabinoid receptor 1 (CB₁) and the more corporeally distributed CB₂ compounds. Most human beings have historically cultured receptors due to coevolution of cannabis plant biochemistry and what Samantha Frost has called the human body's sensory and neurobiological "history of responses" over millennia. Yet, even with frequent ingestion, cannabis produces consistently uneven and unpredictable effects that have shaped diverse senses of selfhood and perception. This fleeting temporality of single experiences of ingestion—combined with long-term bodily cultivation to its effects, especially as circulation expanded under British imperial rule in South Asia, and historically situated social practices in pursuit of ganja—makes it a fascinating subject of materialist and critical imperial history.

PLANT, MATTER, HISTORY

This book is built around bridging archives of ganja's materiality, undoing the effects of liberal empire, and thinking the plant anew outside histories of botany, health, and drugs. Like animal histories, plant histories are emerging to complicate both the homogeneity implied by "the vegetal" and the animal-heavy tilt in multispecies scholarship. Plant histories build on critical scholarship in the history of science in which colonialism and imperialism are central to both "science in translation" and "knowledge in transit."⁵⁸ Anticolonial arguments by Minakshi Menon, Emma Kowal, Banu Subramaniam, and Kathleen Gutierrez suggest how colonialism "invited the invasion" of plants and challenge how Linnean systems and botanical knowledge were made and undone by indigenous contributions of human and nonhuman actors.⁵⁹ Building on the ways these scholars challenge and undo the legacies of Linnean botany, this book charts other pathways of social and cultural history generated by the needs, sensitivities, densities, and experiences of the cultivated cannabis plant in India. Instead of aiming to undo colonial legacies of botanizing, I follow the plant's arboreal and transversal journeys over cascading temporalities and overlapping timelines. Centering on the density of social relations of production, of both meaning and matter, takes the book from a consideration of nouns in the first chapter to materializing an agrarian cooperative experiment in the closing chapter.⁶⁰

My focus on the interface between condensed forms of intoxicating plant matter recomposing through liquid and gaseous ingestion in a human body to stimulate and influence it, and thus generating histories and changes in social relations of production under empire, speaks to themes of corporeality and biopower in “new materialist” thought.⁶¹ In the vein of critical and feminist materialism, I am also revisiting Marx when he wrote that, “just as plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc., constitute theoretically a part of human consciousness, partly as objects of natural science, partly as objects of art, . . . so also in the realm of practice, they constitute a part of human life and human activity. Physically, man lives only on these products of nature, whether they appear in the form of food, heating, clothes, a dwelling.”⁶² Because ganja is not simply food, heating, clothes, dwelling, or even medicine, but is more ephemeral and provisional, does the human not live on it? And does the pleasure of ganja not reproduce the self? Indeed, how might ganja theoretically be inseparable from human consciousness? Taking in stride Fanon’s suggestion that “Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to deal with the colonial problem,” this book revisits Marx through the material worlds conjured by ganja, worlds evidenced in social and cultural pasts that have so far eluded historians of medicine and commodities, to argue that it is precisely the plural colonial conditions in which Britain’s subjects in the subcontinent understood the plant that illuminate new materialities worthy of study.⁶³

State pursuits of ganja products and creative pursuits of ganja producers and users co-constituted each other across South Asia in fascinating ways. A large majority of people in British India were not literate, and excise administration of ganja produced revenues that funded a lot of public expenditure in the provinces, implying that many buildings in colonial India were built with “ganja money.” Without examining how foundational themes of social history like knowledge, gender, class, production, state-making, print culture, caste, orality, and cosmology bore on ganja’s lifeways, it is difficult to analyze how other infrastructural histories stemmed from people pursuing the plant’s material products and flows. Throughout the long nineteenth century the creative, leisurely, and colorful pursuits of using and consuming ganja contended with the regulatory, managerial, and prohibitory pursuit of colonial officials across regions. Both pursuits, their entanglements and contentions, and their implications for posterity shape the methodology of time, scale, and archive in the following chapters.

The opening chapter contrasts the hollow uncertainties of colonial definitions of ganja’s biology with the ecumene of the ganjakhori to explore the challenge of writing a history of ganja in British India. Instead of repeating, as do many contemporary pop histories and older colonial catalogs, that ganja has coevolved with humans in South Asia for millennia and is a deep cultural resource, the chapter interrogates the problems posed in the first exhaustive glossary of names, cultivation methods, and uses of ganja, compiled in 1877. Three fundamental problems appeared: (a) The plant and its substances had dozens of names in the subcontinent’s language

geographies; (b) its dioecious reproductive system was well known to cultivators, but its genders were differently constructed in Bengali; and (c) ordinary knowledge of the disparate effects on human bodies were shared in songs, poems, and proverbs. While such details formed the ecumene of the ganjakhor, they fundamentally troubled colonial knowledge production. Ultimately, the priorities of economic botany shaped the systematization of cannabis's classificatory logic in the modern period. But the ganjakhor's ecumene persisted in proverbial knowledges even if its dynamism was slowly suppressed or faded out. The ganjakhor's discernment of context and awareness derived through intimacy with the intoxicant challenge and reproportionalize the historical value of Linnaean botany's certitudes.

The second chapter is an agrarian history of land, labor, space, and commercial capital in Naogaon, once a marshy corner north of the fertile Barind tracts of Rajshahi district, which later became South Asia's largest ganja cultivation and manufacturing zone. Instead of redescribing Naogaon's fame from colonial records on trade and medical journals, I spotlight the people, rivers, insects, and environments in the upland tracts of Naogaon that decided its four prominent types of ganja and, for a brief period, bhang. From the late eighteenth century on, the political and administrative boundaries of British India grew farther east of the Bengal delta. The clearing and settlement of ganja lands by the Atrai and Choto Jamuna Rivers ensued at the pace of colonialism's foremost excesses, such as the 1770 famine, the disruption of Santal migratory circuits on either side of the Padma River, and the discretionary power of petty officials empowered by mighty imperial laws and consistently underresourced infrastructures. In illuminating the spatiality of production and debt in Naogaon and looking outward from within the homestead, the chapter returns to Shahid Amin's foundational analysis of small peasant commodity production under colonial capitalism to train its insights on a much more mercurial crop than sugarcane, which was also produced and sold not for funds to nurture the home but to service debt incurred for the homestead's sustenance.

Chapter 3 explores the practices of state that were instituted in colonial India to administer the excise, a tool of revenue extraction that emerged with fiscal transformations in the early modern British Empire. Theoretically, the excise was a form of tax levied on manufactured goods that were, within contingent political contexts, considered a luxury or superfluity—in the case of ganja because it intoxicated the body, rather than sustaining it. The state taxed intoxicants to make them less desirable and to compensate for the social cost of indulgence and the risks of behavior under the influence. From the colonial context of rural eastern Bengal, from where ganja circulated all the way to Delhi, Mathura, Vrindavan, Puri, Calcutta, Patna, and various rural marketplaces, the excise state looked different. Although British officials considered ganja an excisable item, they protected, extended, and managed its circulation. Unlike opium's transcontinental circuits and industrial scale, the warehousing, retail shops, licenses, and tax infrastructures that commodified ganja and bhang evolved around the mercuriality and body of the plant, the regional tastes

of buyers, and a gradual disaggregation and non-correlation between the movement of wholesale and retail prices, which left the state perennially anxious about revenue lost to smuggling. The excise state resulted from practices that exceptionalized Naogaon-made ganja in British India, in the breach between colonial extraction, the need to viably respond to temperance campaigns, and the fantasies of plugging revenue losses both real and imagined.

Chapter 4 is a cultural history of the bhang-drinking (*bhangkhor*) Hindustani subject of the British Empire who consumed it to prime himself for deliberate, yet irrational violence while the state, paradoxically, sought to earn revenue from it. Thinking materially about culture, and culturally about empire, the chapter traces the global flows of English-language chronicles, Orientalist ethnographies, and military dispatches from the garrison towns and battlefields of the Indian Rebellion that defined bhang in imperial culture. Printed periodicals circulating between Great Britain, the United States, South Africa, and Australia did not distinguish bhang as a leaf, confection, or drink. Flattening it as another drug of ganja, writers blamed it for vitiating violence against white British rule. Bhang also exemplified weakness and languor among Indian kings, irrational bouts of violence among soldiers, and unreliability and insanity among Indians. Arguing that such regimes of representation and concomitant counterinsurgent violence were the historical basis for eventual associations between madness and cannabis by physicians and asylum officials in the 1870s, I resituate the Indian insurgent rebel's body in a longer history of addiction. Addiction's multiple meanings, the most powerful of which were rooted in the submission of the self to religious devotion, is the rightful framework for the highly durable, racialized, Islamophobic, and gendered history of bhang that congealed as an effect of imperial warfare.

Chapter 5 materializes devotion and the subaltern worlds of ganja through a historical excavation of Trinath, a deity conceived to supersede Vishnu in Bengal's sacral geography who later transformed into Tinnath Deb for many Hindus and, in the long tradition of cross-fertilization between Hindu and Islamic practices, also morphed into Tinlokh Pir, who blessed cattle in Muslim homes.⁶⁴ Narrating in a critical ethnographic grain so as to overturn the pervasive prejudice of educated upper-caste actors, I follow Trinath's arrival on earth as a provider of boons and dispeller of poverty, disability, and ill-health among humans and cattle.⁶⁵ Trinath observances required neither temple nor priest, and the tradition had no canon, normative strictures, or rites of induction. Proliferating across geographies in Bengal, Bihar, Assam, and Orissa, the tradition produced a historical double-bind—it was not respectable and yet not unpopular. It actively rejected the figure of the pandit or guru (preceptor or priest), promoted congregation and singing, and invited devotees to break caste boundaries by inhaling ganja from the same pipe. Instead of following bhang in better-known rites of Shiva worship in eastern India like Mahashivratri observances at Tarakeshwara and Baidyanath temples, the chapter seeks to uncover ganja's polysemic life by following subaltern castes

and the laboring poor, the textuality of the *pancali* genre, the aurality of its performances, and contests over Trinath's primacy in different editions.

Chapter 6 places the social history of the dramatic transformation of Naogaon and the ganja mahal, the tract surrounding the town, between 1916 and 1926 in the history of economic crises during World War I and globally circulating models of cooperative agricultural production. Addressing the de facto peasants' strike against fluctuating market prices, unsustainable levels of peasant debt, and suffocating control of brokers, I narrate the colonial resolution of a monopoly award as a tool that cultivators used to transform ganja profits into agrarian welfare. The Naogaon Ganja Cultivators' Co-operative Society experimented with modernizing production in the interwar years and ploughed profits back into public infrastructure, schools, scholarships, and Hindu and Muslim sites of worship. Nationalist detractors, the Indian National Congress, the enactment of the Dangerous Drugs Act (1930), and the Great Depression forced the Society to curb its ambitions by the 1930s. Even though it continued under the East Pakistan state, and briefly even in Bangladesh, the interwar period was the peak of its career.

The coda reflects on ganja and the nation through crucial interventions by important figures inside provincial legislatures set up by the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935. From M. K. Gandhi, C. R. Das, Syed Nawab Ali Chaudhuri, and Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy to H. C. Mookerjee, later the vice-president of India's Constituent Assembly, several figures debated the role of excise, revenue from ganja, and the feasibility of prohibition. In some ways, Mookerjee's extensive writings prefigured how the nationalist mainstream understood ganja and bhang in India.

Ganja matters, and in more ways than we have been given to understand. Other stories, particularly of taste, meaning, science, and surveillance, remain to be told. Many remarkable histories of ganja in South Asia remain out of sight today even though experiences of intoxication are widely social and public. The loss of archival holdings in Naogaon, the decline in Trinath traditions in Odisha and Bangladesh, and ganja's place as a touchstone in contests over class, Hindutva, and political affiliation in India are remnants of some of those histories. Given the little scholarly attention to ganja's material pasts, the wide scope and sometimes minute detail in this book's narrative is also part of its argument. Ganja's life mattered in important ways, encircled many states of being, and was simultaneously a troubling subject, a small peasant commodity, a quarry for excise tax administrators, a primer on rebellion, a delicacy of subaltern aspirations, and a vehicle for a remarkable experiment in cooperative agricultural production. As of 1918, Naogaon's ganja was sent to fifty-five large warehouses for distribution to every subdivision of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, United Provinces, and Assam. The narrative detail in this book makes visible the smallest labors, the specific periodicities of production and circulation, and even the slow transformation of Naogaon into a town in contemporary Bangladesh by embracing the concurrent historical forms of ganja

as a substance, a commodity, a sacral object, and a conduit to other embodied relations. “Ganja,” not “cannabis” or “hemp drug,” invokes that challenging complexity, which straddles multiple South Asian languages, signifies mutating habitations, and illuminates a detailed view of empire from various and simultaneous scales of analysis.

A Troubling Subject

Ganja is the flowering top of the female plant Cannabis Sativa, Linn. with the resinous exudation on these.

The vernacular names are either given to the plant or to forms of the narcotic. It has been found impossible to separate them for certain, and they have accordingly been left for the present in, what must be admitted, an unsatisfactory form. Much apparent confusion exists in the various provincial forms of the same word.

—GEORGE WATT, M.B., C.M., F.L.S., C.I.E., REPORTER ON ECONOMIC PRODUCTS FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, 1 NOVEMBER 1887

The educated classes certainly regard ganja-smoking with aversion and the word ganjakhor is an epithet of scorn and disgust, perhaps less so than matal or drunkard. The ganja smoker is believed to be light-headed, untruthful, and irritable.

—K. G. GUPTA, COMMISSIONER OF EXCISE, GOVERNMENT OF BENGAL, 1894

No one knows when the fable of the two ganjakhors began passing seamlessly between parents and relatives, satirists and storytellers, and friends and foes in rural Bengal. In this popular story, a stranger asks a man with a fishing rod his name. The fisherman says his name is *cho-mon ganjakhor*, or one who consumes six maunds of ganja. The stranger rebukes him instantly for thinking he deserves the name of a *ganjakhor*. According to the stranger, in his own village resided a man who did not get distressed or intoxicated even after consuming a full nine maunds of ganja. This nine-maund *ganjakhor* could ably walk himself home after he finished. The six-maund *ganjakhor*, incensed by the knowledge that someone could outdo him, sets off to find the nine-maund *ganjakhor* and challenge him to a duel. Along the way, he takes a break, consumes all his ganja, subsequently gets thirsty, and drinks up a whole pond of water, leaving not a drop for the king's elephant, which usually bathed there.

The six-maund *ganjakhor* finally arrives at a sugarcane field and sees his presumed foe cutting cane and challenges him to a fight. The nine-maund *ganjakhor* declines, on account of not having eaten for seven days. Not to be outdone again, the six-maund *ganjakhor* loudly announces that he himself hasn't eaten in nine days. Temporarily bested, the nine-maund *ganjakhor* concedes, then stacks on his head all the cane he had cut in the preceding week, and the two men set off to find a witness for their duel. Eventually, they find a fisherwoman on her way to sell fish in the market and ask her to serve as witness. She says she is in a rush and invites them to fight on her arm as she continues apace. Moments after they climb onto her arm and begin fighting, a kite swoops down on her. In a flash, the kite grabs the fish from her head and the two *ganjakhors* off her arm. Once in flight, a storm engulfs the kite, which lets the two men loose, and they fall in front of the king's daughter. Thinking them to be bits of straw carried up by the storm, the princess has them swept away.

In Bengali, *ganjakhor* literally means "one who consumes ganja" and, more ambiguously, "one who is related to ganja (in some way)." The maund, a common unit of mass in South Asia whose equivalent weight differed across regions, ranged between eighty and eighty-seven pounds in the markets of colonial Bengal. The Bengali verb for eating, drinking, and consuming are one and the same; so, when G. H. Damant, a British officer in the Bengal Civil Service, translated this "legend from Dinajpur," he called it the "Two Ganja-Eaters."¹ This fable, reminiscent at once of magical realism, Kafkaesque metamorphosis, and Lewis Carroll's *Alice*, belonged to a capacious unbounded world of multivocal Bengali knowledge. As a genre, such fables combined magic, the uncanny, and tales of wonder set in rural spaces that invited listeners to interpret different meanings embedded in the same story.² This parable was particularly about the futility of quarrels among the intoxicated. Yet it was simultaneously a warning that ganja was a preference of men who exaggerated and spoke in superlatives as a matter of habit. Ganja could reduce an able-bodied hardworking fisherman and a sugarcane farmer into specks of dust just as it could make them drink more water than an elephant or go hungry for a week. Gendered ideas of work, masculinity, gods, the body, and caste underlay this rich world of rural tales and fables, paving a path to understanding ganja beyond the obsessive calculus of definitions and naming under colonial rule.

Tales like *Dui Ganjakhor* (Two *ganjakhors*), replete with hyperbole and plays on scale, size, and hunger, could both entice listeners to ganja and discourage them from it. To colonial officials in British India, fascinated by the customs of the governed, tales like this one represented the charming antiquity of folk traditions in a peasant society where ganja was a ubiquitous intoxicant. Such tales invite us into the ecumene of the *ganjakhor*, a world inhabited by human, plant, and more-than-human actors. In this world, ganja had long been a subject that defied straightforward schematic definitions. Its meaning shifted based on context and subjective interpretations of those who shared the fables and proverbs and who themselves

bought, sold, or related to ganja. In this open-ended world of actors and beings, ganja was a form of intoxicating plant matter inseparable from the human, animal, and more-than-human bodies it animated and existed in relationship with.

The ganjakhor's ecumene was built around stories, proverbs, aphorisms, rhyming couplets, and songs about the experience of ganja intoxication. They connected experiences of consuming intoxicants made from the cannabis plant to the social relationships that surrounded the buyers or users. Together, they provided a framework of proverbial knowledge in which human and nonhuman elements were inseparable and people made meanings based on dynamic, subjective, and contextual interpretations. In colonial Bengal specifically, ganja's social life and cultural biography were captured in Bengali-, Hindi-, and Oriya-language proverbs. Proverbs were orally transmitted repositories of past experiences and observations in these languages, making them a deeply consequential site of knowledge. Their colorful and flexible use allowed them to anchor ideas marked by caste, class, and gender and to serve as pithy substitutes for longer explanations of received wisdom.

As the epigraph from George Watt's *Hemp or Cannabis Sativa, Linn.* demonstrates, British administrators found ganja to be a particularly troubling subject because of their inability to separate noun, object, and context. In the long nineteenth century, therefore, either the ganjakhor's ecumene was incomprehensible to colonial officials, or its elements, such as proverbs and fables, were relegated to the status of folklore and myth. Instead of solving any dilemmas, this relegation only entrenched the problem of what Watt called data in "an unsatisfactory form" because revenue calculations in the age of economic botany in British India demanded specific Linnaean classifications. Thus, in the manuals of British and Indian revenue collectors, ganja was the flowering top of the female plant, a definition that collided every day with the wide ambit of possible interpretations that characterized ganja and its proverbial knowledges in the ganjakhor's ecumene. Throughout the colonial period, intentions to govern cannabis production, circulation, and knowledge thus existed in perpetual tension with the open-endedness of proverbial knowledge about ganja.

One outcome of such collisions was that the tremendous multivocality in South Asian regional languages that surrounded the noun "ganja" seeped into, and further troubled, colonial knowledge that privileged botanical and chemical analyses of the cannabis plant's psychoactivity in fields and labs. Ultimately, despite the colonial bracketing of proverbial knowledges as folklore and legend, and laboratory and field and lab observation as scientific and rational, there was constant traffic between both spheres of knowledge.³ This interaction is not obvious at first glance. The regular grain of colonial medical and scientific reports on Indian cannabis reads like a linear coming-of-age story. Gradually, over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the story goes, imperial officials and men of science and medicine developed a progressively deeper repertoire of scientific knowledge about the

cannabis species and its agricultural history. This incremental process had many pivotal moments. It began with medical experiments in Calcutta in the 1830s, followed by the promulgation of excise laws across provincial governments in the 1850s. Then came the development of more attentive policing by the 1880s, agreements on agricultural requirements and chemical propensities in the early 1900s, and a systematized medicolegal structure for overseeing trade, use, and addiction put in place by the 1930s. This archive of regulation and circulation suggests that the British Indian state steadily and systematically developed fixed categories and governance mechanisms for cannabis substances successively across all its provinces.

At the heart of this incremental and linear narrative of scientists and administrators becoming masters of Indian cannabis governance lay the standard triplex of nouns: “ganja,” “bhang,” and “charas.” Each noun mapped onto a cannabis product that, in turn, neatly correlated to the flower, leaf, and agglutinated resin, respectively. As George Watt put it, bhang was the “mature leaf, but never the twigs,” and charas, the “resinous substance” found throughout the body.⁴ This triplex became a standard reference in every provincial administration in British India by 1900. So powerful was colonial officials’ faith in the certitude of their taxonomical classifications, nomenclature, and analysis of intoxicating experience with Indian cannabis products that international discussions of cannabis control and prohibition among British and other imperial governments at the League of Nations after the 1920s reproduced this set of historically rehearsed definitions in foundational policy documents without any debate.

As policy makers and writers continued to uncritically deploy this stable triplex, they ignored the fact that such linear narratives were selectively fabricated strategies to make colonial governance easier. Under their surface lay a terrain of contestation where Indian cannabis consistently inconvenienced revenue officers, botanists, chemists, judges, and administrative personnel up and down the hierarchy of state institutions that pursued a stable and fixed schema to objectify cannabis. People like George Watt were never really able to separate the matter, nouns, and references of the cannabis plant. Yet acknowledgements like Watt’s were rare despite how often British and Indian officials encountered unstable uses of the words “ganja,” “bhang,” and “charas” that were nonetheless entirely legible to those who used them.

This chapter stages this terrain of contestation seriously instead of taking the colonial insistence on standardized precise definitions of cannabis at face value. Proverbial and everyday knowledge collided with, and seeped into, colonial scientific and medical archives as the contextual, polyvocal, and polysemic knowledge of everyday relations between plant and human bodies left their traces in official correspondences, biographies, footnotes, margins of annual revenue reports, and sedimented notations in larger debates on tax and agricultural policy. The

dissonance between, on one hand, everyday experiences of variation that were captured in proverbs and names in the ganjakhor's ecumene and, on the other, the fixed classificatory schema of colonial revenue was not a coincidence. In fact, we now know that substantial variability is the most identifiable feature of cannabis biodiversity and its multispecies relations. Inherent differences between cannabis substances, the wide range of intoxicated experiences they contributed to, and the significant unpredictability of their effects on human bodies and minds are definitive in cannabis's species history universally. Scholarship on species variation and mutability of intoxicated experience with cannabis repeatedly attests to this fact.⁵ Even medical cannabis experts now affirm it. In 2018, leading psychologist and neuroscientist Linda Parker concluded that "cannabis does not fit well with the typical medical model for prescribing drugs" because of the complex pharmacology of cannabinoids, genetic variability, differences based on ingestion method, and shifting bioavailability, all of which make it difficult to "report precise doses for various conditions."⁶

The tensions between precision and variability in medicalized cannabis today mirror the knowledge of variability among people in British India regarding what cannabis was and what it did. In different regional languages, the multiple names and proverbial knowledges reflected the ways the plant's sociohistorical biography was marked by constant shifts and slippages in usages and meanings of nouns like "ganja," often relative to differences in the experience of intoxication. For consumers like the *ganjakhor* in the opening story, ganja and bhang were also names of comestible preparations that contained, wholly or in part, cannabis derivatives, and the experience of such items was relayed through stories and proverbs concerning the everyday effects of intoxication that centered context and variability. In effect, then, the noun "ganja" could signify many things: a plant species, its constituent parts, only its flower, or specific preparations made with the flower. Thus, in tales and fables that made up the ganjakhor's ecumene, it could conjure a range of effects on the body that were up to interpretation within an open-ended spectrum of relations.

When George Watt reproduced the definition of ganja as the flowering top of the female plant and yet conceded that names of the plant in regional South Asian languages were impossible to correctly apprehend, he implicitly acknowledged that ganja was a troubling subject in its own right. Ganja acted by exerting an organizing force on the bodies and structures that it co-constituted and which it existed in relationship to.⁷ As a plant species that reproduced itself over a life cycle, inhabited ecosystems, intoxicated human bodies, navigated imperial designs, and resided in complex systems of signs and referents within regional languages, ganja animated social relations of production and reproduction in highly heterogeneous ways. Yet Watt's prior publication, *The Dictionary of the Economic Products of India*, also represented the power of economic botany in British India. This period of intense

colonial efforts to homogenize and objectify the plant and its products—to put the noun in its place, in other words—spanned scientific and bureaucratic networks from the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, England, and Sibpur, Bengal, to the fields and farms of rural British India.⁸ Names of the plant and its reproductive morphology were crucial here. Botanically fixing the plant in Linnaean nomenclature helped narrate methods of isolating its potential for economic revenue and provided lower-rank tax officials with a systematic set of correlated nouns that they could use as they identified cannabis products in different provinces amid all their local and commercial diversity.

Gender and the proverbial knowledge of ganja lay at the heart of contestations and tensions with colonial objectification and economic botany. In fact, objectification brought Linnaean botany's gendered system of naming plants into conflict with existing Bengali modes of gendering cannabis plants. The cannabis species, unlike most other plants, naturally exhibits diclinism, in which the stamen (a flower's fertilizing organ) and the pistil (a flower's ovulating organ) appear in separate individual flowers. The anther and filament that contain pollen form within the stamen but also vary significantly in shape and form within the same species of the plant. In addition, cannabis is a dioecious species, meaning that the reproductive organs of the plant grow not on the same stalk but on different stalks. To make matters even more complicated, the stigma and ovaries that form within the pistil also exhibit substantial variations. That was not all. Since the species is only wind-pollinated, or anemophilous, its freely growing forms contain tremendous variance, and its cultivated form depended on growers in colonial India taking extreme care to separate pollinating stalks from pollinatable "female" ones. These biological conditioning factors were the basis of many Bengali names that accounted for gender variance in colonial eastern India but did not become part of any formal scientific lexicon.

This chapter materializes three interrelated histories of collision and traffic between the routine efforts of colonial officials to homogenize and classify cannabis and the gendered, multivocal, and polysemic ecumene of the *ganjakhors* and their ganja. These biographies of ganja as a troubling and troublesome subject in British India reveal how the colonial pursuit to constitute ganja as an object of knowledge led bureaucrats and scientists into the ganjakhor's ecumene. They struggled against abundant gender variance, polysemic names, and proverbial knowledges embedded in agrarian knowledge systems and the complex relationship between the nomenclature of intoxicating plant matter and the knowledge of the experience of intoxication itself. As Watt's words and the tale of the *ganjakhors* illustrate, nouns like "ganja" and "bhang" were unstable signifiers. This chapter inverts the regular grain of the archive's certitude and brings into relief the ordinary names of cannabis, the proverbial knowledges of the experience of intoxication, and the co-constitutive relations of the human, plant, and more-than-human within which everyday pursuits of cannabis acquired meaning. Eschewing stable

categories, the following sections embrace such dynamic interrelations as foundational to the history of ganja in British India.

GENDER INVERSIONS

Marda, or male, and *madi*, or female: For centuries, cultivators of ganja in Bengal used both words to identify and refer to stalks of cultivated cannabis. Consumers—smokers, drinkers, users, and eaters—likely did the same. In colloquial speech in Bengali dialects, *marda* often became *modda*. *Marda* and *madi* were derivatives from Persian and merely two nouns in a wider vocabulary for describing gender variance found among cannabis stalks in eastern Bengal. Historically, plant dispersal across southern Asia, whether by human action or not, had given rise to varieties of the same cannabis plant that produced different amounts of intoxicating resin, cordage, or seed oil, depending on the quality of soil, heat, moisture, exposure to sun, and method of cultivation. The mercurial nature of cannabis growth meant that two stalks growing even a few hundred feet apart in the open could produce remarkably different kinds of embodied features. Evidencing the way genders are produced as effects of the “collision of some bodies and selves with specific historical events or conditions,” these features and uses of the plants, in turn, produced new, differently gendered names as people learnt to identify them.⁹

In the spring of 1877, the words *marda* and *madi* caused Hem Chunder Kerr significant displeasure as he went about writing the first detailed report on the life of ganja in British India. By then, Kerr was well known in the Provincial Civil Service, having acquired a reputation for painstaking diligence in matters of agrarian governance in Bengal. His final report on Rajshahi’s ganja-producing tracts in eastern Bengal, submitted to the Board of Revenue in Calcutta in April of the same year, laid the ground for more systematic knowledge of cannabis production, consumption, and trade in colonial India. The report’s lasting power and frequent citation since its submission makes it, and its author’s efforts and methods, a crucial site of reinvestigation.

At the heart of this report lay a seemingly insignificant gendered contestation. “The cultivators,” wrote Kerr, “ignorant of the peculiar characteristics of the male and female flowers, and yet noticing the fact that the presence of the two kinds of plants in the same field leads to the seeding of one variety, have *at random* named them male and female, without being able to determine which is which.”¹⁰ To Kerr, the unschooled cultivator of ganja had arbitrarily and *incorrectly* gendered the plant’s body. Bengal’s cultivators had gendered masculine, or *marda*, the stalk that the standards of Linnaean botany identified as the female flowering one. To set the record straight, Kerr went the extra mile, corresponding with the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sibpur and revenue officials in other districts, to demonstrate conclusively that the female plant alone yielded ganja and that designating it male distorted the accuracy of scientific knowledge.

Notwithstanding Kerr's admonitions, by all available accounts, Rajshahi's cultivators and other users of ganja in Bengal did not alter their usage of gendered assignments in everyday life. Yet the circulation of Kerr's report among colonial government offices marked a key moment of consolidation in the process of knowledge formation. It was the first major effort undertaken by the colonial state to map out the contours of cannabis within its Indian territories in the greatest detail possible. Prior to this endeavor, low-ranking bureaucrats in the Excise Department, magistrates in districts where cannabis was grown, and physicians who medically administered cannabis or studied lunacy, would claim some degree of expertise on the subject. Kerr's appointment signaled that cannabis was shifting from a mere drug and taxed article that happened to be sold in urban and rural markets to a conspicuous object of scientific and judicial knowledge that underwrote agrarian revenue administration and evidenced the reach of economic botany across colonial offices. Fixing a botanical definition of cannabis was key to the way state officials sought to know the plant more thoroughly in order to more capably govern its circulation.

Kerr's appointment to this job was particularly significant. The 1874 report he had produced on jute cultivation had been widely lauded in agricultural and mercantile circles for its acuity and depth. It also helped him make a name for himself as a knowledge-producing intermediary between different language domains. Before publication of his jute report, Kerr had acquired a mixed reputation at best as an objective and diligent but also finicky, if not outright mercurial, official. After serving as a deputy magistrate under Commissioner W. H. Elliot in Murshidabad's court and the Dacoity Commissioner's Office in Burdwan immediately after the Indian Rebellion of 1857–59, Kerr found himself in the thick of the Indigo Revolt in Bengal. In 1859, during his tenure at Kalarooah, Kerr ran afoul of private indigo planters who were forcibly taking over farmland.¹¹ Having frequently received complaints from ryots "of forcible cultivation of indigo by servants of the planters and maltreatment by the latter," and citing then-commissioner Ashley Eden's insistence on "protecting the *ryot* in the possession of his land," Kerr issued a *per-wannah* that translated Eden's orders into Bengali.

Eden, during his tenure as collector of Baraset, had faced the ire of planters, such as the notorious Robert Larmour of the Bengal Indigo Company, for allowing ryots the option of renegeing on a previously signed contract to sow indigo by citing what he considered "unobjectionable reasons" such as misfortunes, loss of cattle, or oppression from zamindars.¹² If the ryot's intention wasn't mala fide and such causes could be proven, then Eden had established that the ryot could not be forced into arbitrary and punishing contracts with planters.¹³ Kerr's Bengali translation of the order was, without his direction, read out loud in the market in Bakra by a *phareedar* (a village police post orderly) and allegedly interpreted by ryots as an invitation to refuse to engage in indigo cultivation altogether. Kerr was seriously reprimanded for his "irregularity and indiscretion," despite the absence of

any direct evidence of peasant refusal as a result of the translation. If anything, the Indigo Revolt had been brewing for months before that.¹⁴ Later, in 1864, Kerr was again severely admonished for leaving his office at Diamond Harbor in early October without informing anyone. Without him in office, news of the destruction of Diamond Harbor reached Calcutta a full two days after 5 October, when a devastating cyclone blew in from the Indian Ocean.¹⁵ The otherwise “zealous and energetic” officer was harshly blamed for delays in providing relief and removing the bodies of the dead.

Nine years later, Kerr’s appointment as an officer on special duty to the Agricultural Department of the government of Bengal in 1873 provided him the opportunity to significantly mend his reputation, especially with Eden, who was now lieutenant governor. He was tasked with producing a comprehensive report on the production and trade of jute in British Bengal. In this undertaking, Kerr surpassed all expectations of thoroughness. Praised by Lieutenant Governor Eden as “minute and exhaustive,” the report methodically brought together Kerr’s research into history, linguistics, plant botany, soil fertility, agricultural experimentation, and fiscal policy regarding jute in British India.¹⁶ Kerr’s thorough Bengali and Sanskrit translations, catalogs of Indian names for jute and its related plant species, multiple interviews with peasants, bureaucrats, and scientists, correspondence with other presidencies, and citational depth in imperial records and published literature positively redeemed his previous reputation for finickiness. Kerr’s important suggestions about expanding cordage, rope, and paper manufacturing using by-products of the jute plant and related species were lauded in colonial correspondence.

This fillip to Kerr’s reputation and his working knowledge of medicine, botany, Bengali, and Sanskrit landed him the deputation to Rajshahi three years later, where he was to produce another exhaustive report, this time on ganja. Kerr’s findings about ganja were meant to be useful across colonial offices, particularly the Revenue, Excise, and Judicial Departments. His translations from Indian languages were supposed to supplement and reconstitute the scattered notes of botanists and doctors since the 1830s into a touchstone for future regulations. To meet this comprehensive goal, Kerr went above and beyond his commission: He interviewed several large- and smallholding cultivators, exchanged letters with botanists, cross-checked details with previous administrators of Rajshahi who had since moved to other offices, evaluated fiscal policy, and dove deep into philology to find Bengali and Sanskrit cognate terms and to organize them next to words for cannabis in other languages. According to C. T. Buckland, the Officiating Member of the Board of Revenue who first commented on it, the final report contained “a permissible display of almost cosmopolitan erudition,” making it a “valuable fund of much new information . . . for fiscal and commercial purposes.”¹⁷ Ashley Eden found it to be a “credible” effort and a basis for new policies. Kerr’s voice emerged as authentic and expert for his colleagues and superiors, and his conclusions were treated as a genuine and inclusive and a true basis of knowledge of ganja.

At first blush, then, the quarrel over *marda* and *madi* as assignments of masculine and feminine identity to the plant seems an unimportant detail tucked away in Kerr's report. However, given the extent and influence of Kerr's inquiries, it is easy to miss that the inversion of gender assignments by ganja cultivators was in fact a key pivot of the entire report. European botanizing used binaristic gender frameworks, and the claim that the intoxicating resin developed in the female stalk had become a standard reference well before 1876.¹⁸ The first Briton to study cannabis closely in a lab, the renowned surgeon and chemist William Brooke O'Shaughnessy, had observed that the "dried hemp plant which has flowered and from which the resin has not been removed is called ganjah."¹⁹ Laboratory experiments in 1855 and 1871 on stalks grown from cannabis seeds collected from across British India by scientists like J. F. Royle and N. C. Macnamara had confirmed that the female flowering plant of the Indian hemp species produces ganja. In other words, to the extent that anatomy, resin, and flowering were the basis of gender, the ganja-producing plant was feminine.

But outside the chemist's lab, in the fields of Naogaon, gender worked differently. There, Kerr found "an exaggeration" rife in statements from cultivators. Not only did they insist on calling male that which he was certain was a female plant, but they also believed that "all the *madi* (female) plants, which grow in the fields in large numbers along with plants of the other sex, should be carefully searched out and removed or destroyed before they flower, as otherwise they are sure to cause all the ganja-yielding plants in its neighborhood to run into seed and not produce the narcotic." So, not only did both kinds of stalk flower and cultivators invert the gender assignment, but their nomenclature implied that the feminine bodies pollinated the male ones into producing seed. This was hardly the end of Kerr's perplexity. He had carefully read Royle's references and conclusions that some cannabis plants were actually monoecious, not dioecious, with both male and female flowers growing on the same stalk. On finding these kinds of stalks in the fields, Kerr became even more disinclined to take the cultivators at their word. After all, he wrote, "it is the female which can bear seed in the ordinary course of nature," and the plants removed must therefore be male since "that removes the source of pollen, absolutely necessary for impregnation."²⁰

Kerr thought it necessary to correct the error for the record. Emulating methods of European botany, he carefully described the plant's dioecious occurrence. The male flowers, he wrote, "grow in small bunches on a separate plant; they are lax and pendulous, and are either axillary, or drooping," while the female plants grow "erect, in packed clusters," producing flowers with "perianths with a single sepal, . . . embracing the sub-globular ovary with one pendulous ovule . . . prolonged into a short style bearing two elongated and glandular stigmas."²¹ Reproducing European botanical methods also made Kerr legible to his British colleagues and superiors as an authority. Londa Schiebinger has shown how the implicit use of gender to taxonomize different plant organisms and the explicit use of human

sexual references and metaphors to explain plant reproduction were powerful elements of Carl Linnaeus's eighteenth-century oeuvre. Both became commonplace in natural history writing in colonial territories by the mid-nineteenth century.²² To confirm his own observations, Kerr also sent his reports and samples to Dr. George King, a key official at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sibpur. In his concluding remarks on observable anatomy, Kerr described how "the marks of difference between the male and female plants before flowering are so slight that to non-professional persons, they are not easily perceptible." So, how did the cultivators weed out one and not the other? They, he wrote, "notice one or two rounded bristles which in the male plant look much thicker than in the female ones."²³ These rounded bristles, he thought, "definitively settled the question."

Only, they did not. What confronted and troubled Kerr was the wide spectrum of gender variance and species diversity that existed in cannabis growth in tropical Indian regions. The inverted mismatch of gender assignment between English and Bengali terms, while explained in the pages of British official correspondence using plant anatomy, did nothing to change the practices or structure of social relations in which ordinary Bengalis referred to the cannabis plant. Bengali cultivators had historically distinguished between the capacity of the plant to produce resin in a regional agrarian, riverine, and commercial world where the resin's potency equaled both quality and profit. Although they correlated sex to reproduction, the social function of earning a livelihood through the plant's resin superseded reproductive anatomy in deciding gender.

The stalk that bore resin and held the ovulating pistil was made *marda* because of historically structured relations of power and political economy that shaped this ordering of sex and sexuality. As chapter 2 discusses further, the masculinized stalk embodied the social function of ensuring the cultivator's homestead had the money to service its debts for nearly half the agricultural calendar. On the other hand, the stalk that held the fertilizing, nonovulating organ of the plant, the stamen, was *madi*—incapable of producing the kind of resin that might serve a regional commodity economy. The stalk that did not earn, and could potentially impregnate its opposite into an unproductive nonearning being, was feminized within this dichotomous organization of gender where ovulation and resin, not anatomy, constituted productive and generative "maleness."

Marda and *madi* were not the sole categories for organizing gender. The ecological conditions of northern Bengal had historically also produced immense gender variance within the species. Kerr's notes described what was locally called *khasia ganja* as a "hermaphrodite plant" that was "more bushy than the other two [i.e., *marda* and *madi*]." These stalks did not flower and were "perfectly innocuous."²⁴ From 1873 to 1893, this account of a male-female-hermaphrodite separation of Bengal's ganja plants remained the standard reference as officials cited Kerr's conclusions to compare cannabis growth in other colonial provinces, such as Oudh and Bombay. Wherever *marda*, *madi*, and *khasia* were not colloquial referents,

colonial officials used Kerr's botanical descriptions to make analogous conclusions in their own districts. By 1893, the government of Bengal was pushed by imperial and temperance politics in London to revise its assessments of the plant and the commodity economy it sat at the center of. As these efforts cataloged more nuanced Bengali agricultural knowledge, they also revealed differently gendered features of the labor Naogaon's cultivators put into cannabis cultivation.

GENDER VARIANCE

Early in 1893, as antiopium campaigners in Britain pushed questions about cannabis into debates on imperial governance, the renowned botanist David Prain was deputed to survey Naogaon in a fresh effort to update existing botanical know-how and systematize definitions of cannabis across Indian territories. Prain, then a surgeon-captain, armed with a deputation from the colonial government of India's Board of Customs and Excise, sailed upriver to northern Rajshahi to conduct research that would produce an enduring preoccupation with the sexuality of the cannabis plant. Previously, Prain had never found the cannabis plant interesting. But in Naogaon's fields, he witnessed up close the modes of cultivation and care undergirding ganja production and became particularly fascinated by *parakdari*, the practice of weeding out the anatomically male plants by men, often known by the caste name *poddar*, who seasonally migrated north from Jessore precisely for this task.

To Prain, the ingenuity of agricultural skills and the use of knowledge of plant sexuality were key to the way Naogaon's peasants "force the plant into production of the narcotic principle to an abnormal extent." Indeed, Naogaon's ganja had the highest amount of intoxicating principle compared to samples from elsewhere in British India. Prain concluded that, through their cultivation techniques, Naogaon's cultivators had exaggerated the plant's natural feminine traits to make it produce too much resin. However, they lacked the scientific know-how to articulate their method and its relationship to Linnaean botany. Prain also noted the inversion of genders that illustrated contradictions between his botanical training and the specifics of Bengali agrarian knowledge. "It may be mentioned in passing," he wrote, "that the cultivator, looking at the plant entirely in its resin-bearing aspect, considers the sex that produces this intoxicating substance the nobler of the two, calling it *marda* or male."²⁵ According to Prain's interviews, the "worse than useless male" plant, which could "fertilize his field and ruin his crop," was indeed feminized. Citing Jacques Dalechamps's treatise *Historia Generalis Plantarum* (1587), in which the French naturalist distinguished cannabis in Lyons as male if it bore seed, and female if it was "useless and vain," Prain suggested that Bengali cultivators were certainly not alone in the "misapplication of sexual names."²⁶ While they "knew exactly how the practice affects their crop," the cultivators' inverted gendering "practice was not the result of reasoning, but a purely empirical one."

Prain's dismissal of the Bengali cultivator's practices as empirics placed them hierarchically below the domain of scientific reason he embodied as a British scientist in the colonies. This was no trivial contest over European and Indian knowledge because, based on this internally heterogeneous repertoire of names, modulating and curating the reproduction of the cannabis plant by Naogaon's families was exactly what ensured that large quantities of potent intoxicants circulated in eastern India annually and could be subjected to British colonial taxes.

On the surface, Prain cast the Bengali cultivators' knowledge as deficient in depth and erroneous, and concluded that correct scientific nomenclature must identify ganja as a product of the flowering top of the female cannabis plant and that this should be the official administrative definition irrespective of whether cultivators considered the plant male or not. Scratching below the surface, however, reveals that Prain embarked on a more extensive intellectual pursuit in the decade following his visit to Naogaon. The importance of tenacity and care in Bengal's ganja fields, and the place of plant sexuality and gender variance in its cultivation, became apparent to him as he reflected on material he collected during and after this trip. Specifically, he was puzzled by the many plants he found in Naogaon's fields that naturally did not bear any seed. His Bengali interlocutors called these *khasia*, the plants that Kerr had previously written about and the term he had translated as "hermaphrodite." In contrast, Prain saw them as "emasculated" stalks whose "appearance, [was] organically perfect, yet [were] incapable of bearing seeds."²⁷ Whereas in Bengali, *khasia* implied an incapable male, Prain recorded the stalks as "barren females." Prain understood them, growing freely among highly resin-bearing stalks, as a test for natural sexual diversity in this agricultural ecosystem where stalks were productive only when pollination was curbed. As he put it, "As soon as the flowers are fertilized, the leaves begin to wither," but "if the plant were to be prevented from setting seeds," the resinous substance would exude to the top and become the raw matter that could be "reaped and converted into commercial ganja." This fundamental principle of cultivation, and its attendant labor and knowledge framework, had been perfected by Bengali cultivators over many centuries.

Parakdari, or examining for quality, was the fulcrum of such routines of sex selection. As Priti Ramamurthy has argued, gendered human labor that reshapes plant reproduction ought to be situated critically as "floral sex-work," a category that succinctly captures the labor of *parakdari* in the field.²⁸ Known by the caste name *poddar*, these "special men," Prain wrote, were able to "recognise the sexes long before the plants are mature" by diligently walking through thousands of *big-has* of cannabis fields four times in the middle of the cultivating season. Prain found their work "remarkable" and rued not having been able to see them firsthand, as they had finished just days before he arrived, at which point he found not a single male plant in the fields. This meant the possibility of cross-pollination had been reduced to practically nothing. In fact, he suggested, if only other cultivators

outside Bengal had deduced how Naogaon's cultivators and *parakdars* worked, the "art" of Bengal's ganja manufacture might have been more prevalent across India. Their mastery in manipulating and ordering the sexual life of the plants had historically ensured that ordinary sexual diversity was visible not in the field but only in "the stunted uncared-for plants of the seed-beds" and some "plants growing by road sides."²⁹ In other words, the field, despite its openness, was annually turned into a highly controlled cannabis production zone where flowering stalks were carefully selected and their reproduction manipulated for manufacturing different intoxicants.

Besides the issue of whether *khasia* stalks were hermaphrodite or barren, Prain recorded several instances from across eastern India of cannabis plants with congenital abnormalities and natural features that generally defied or complicated existing botanical data. After 1893, while the definitions in his report became the standard reference text for Excise Department officials throughout British India, Prain gathered a variety of cannabis seeds to grow under controlled conditions in the herbarium of the Royal Botanic Garden at Sibpur. In 1904, after the conclusion of his career in British India, he presented his findings at the Linnaean Society in London. Since 1893, he announced, "the subject of cannabis has occupied the attention, at various intervals, of this writer." "Various intervals" was putting it mildly—since 1893, Prain had meticulously followed every European scientist working on cannabis, and he cited them at length in his 1904 address. Later published as *On the Morphology, Teratology, and Diclinism of the Flowers of Cannabis*, the presentation engaged extensively with botanical research published in Italy, Scotland, France, Spain, and England that had shed light on the peculiarities of cannabis flowers.³⁰ Within cannabis botany, he specified as his primary topics of interest the "obscurity of the plant's original habitat, the strange effects and peculiar character of its narcotic resin, the mystery that surrounds the problem of its sexuality, and the dubiety that exists as regards its floral structure."

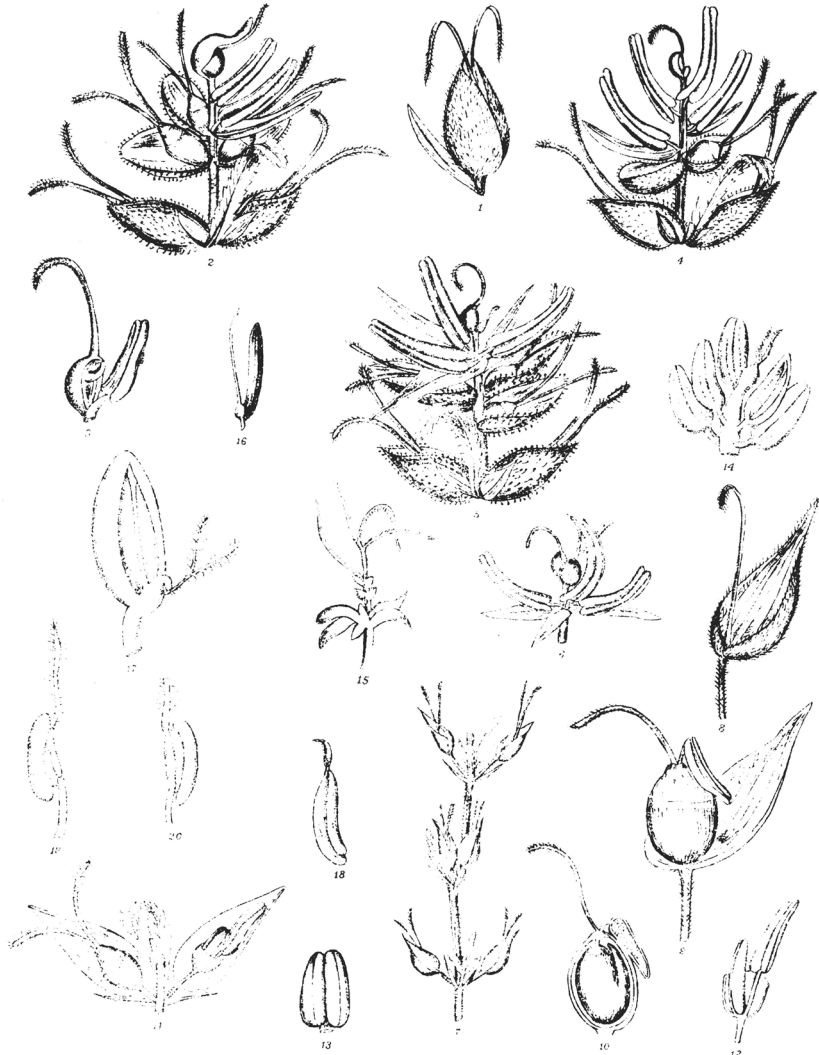
Of these topics, Prain had spent most of the decade researching the last two: the mysterious sexuality and the floral structure. Prain was the first botanist to study cannabis plants in open fields from a teratological perspective, encompassing the entire spectrum of "normal" and "abnormal" botany. "Teratology," from the ancient Greek *teratologia*, meant accounts of the marvelous and monstrous. In the early Victorian period it was emerging as a niche but significant branch of plant botany and horticultural experimentation. Concerned with congenital abnormalities that challenged existing knowledge of plants, the field's foundational text in English, Maxwell Masters's *Vegetable Teratology*, was published by the Ray Society, London's premier naturalist association, in 1869.³¹ The field's attention to plant life features that were, in Masters's foundational framing, "deviations" from the normal—such as altered positions of anatomical parts, out-of-place plant organs, stasis in plant growth, unexplainable inflorescences, and self-aborting functions in which a plant killed nearly all of its own seeds to let only one or a few fertilize—was provocative, but it struggled to catch on. By the turn of the century, thorough studies

of plant teratology were few and far between.³² In 1915 the Ray Society published an updated text for the field, *The Principles of Plant-Teratology* by Wilson Worsdell, in which the author praised the “enormous increase in knowledge of abnormal structures” while regretting that “only one teratological treatise of real importance, viz. Penzig’s *Pflanzen-teratologie*” had appeared.³³ David Prain’s effort to revive teratological analysis of plant abnormalities through his studies of Indian cannabis spoke volumes about his dissatisfaction with conventional platitudes about the species in European botany.

Prain’s first botanical argument about Bengal ganja as a particular form of Indian cannabis proved historically crucial. In many apparently male plants growing in India, Prain observed, the lowest stipular panicles on the stalk produced a female, not male, flower. Since his sojourn in Rajshahi, Prain had marveled at the results of *parakdari* during November and December. After reminding his readers that “a remarkable but well-known feature of hemp cultivation in Bengal is the care and success with which all male plants are eliminated, long before they flower,” he proceeded to explain his careful resolution of the puzzle.³⁴ After eleven years of thinking about how Bengali *parakdars* selected stalks, he had finally corroborated that they had, over time, developed the ability to tell a male plant apart by the “often abortive solitary female flowers” growing at the bottom of its stalk, with visible partially grown stipules. This single abortive female flower, which blossomed on male stalks but did not grow to bear seed, essentially helped set apart the male plant from the rest. *Parakdari*, in other words, was the skill of spotting an emergent female flower on a male stalk that would bear no seed.

Gender variance was key to Prain’s other set of arguments. Here, he built on the widespread assumption that the female flower, which organically bore the intoxicating resin, was likely more complex in its natural history of evolution and transmission across the world than other variants. In Bengal’s fields, Prain had found several female flowers that had initially grown within themselves fertilizing organs (stamens) that were replaced over time by the ovulating pistil that ought to have been there in the first place. While botanists in Italy and Germany had noticed this as well, no one had yet offered a viable explanation.³⁵ Indian cannabis and its deep heterogeneities provided the clues for this problem of plant sexuality and reproductive morphology.

Prain turned to two other Hindustani and Bengali nouns, *moria* and *sheoria*, to explain his reasoning.³⁶ *Sheoria* referred to female flowers that grew on male plants but were different from those single female flowers growing at the bottom of the stalk that *parakdars* used as their finding aids. The *sheoria* were unique, yet “so well-known in India” that Prain had found many who could identify a *sheoria* plant easily. This meant that *parakdars* also had to be able to tell the difference between male plants with single female flowers and stalks that were instead potentially *sheoria* ones. In Europe, Prain noted, plants had been observed and studied in depth that had “up to half the stalk [covered with] nothing but male flowers in close fascicles, [and] the upper part [covered with] nothing but females,



D. Prain del.

K. P. Dass lith.

FIGURE 3. David Prain's lithograph of *khasia*, *moria*, and *sheoria* cannabis. Plate V in Prain, *On the Morphology*. Digitized by Google. HathiTrust and Archive.org.

PLATE V.

KHÁSIÁ, MÓRIA AND SHEÓRIA *CANNABIS*.

- Fig. 1.—Flower from plant of Khásiá Hemp, abnormal female apparently organically perfect but functionally sterile—*from nature*.
- „ 2.—Inflorescence from plant of Mória Hemp, *i.e.*, *Cannabis* with male flowers on a female plant—*from nature*.
- „ 3.—Terminal flowers from Mória inflorescence—*from nature*.
- „ 4.—A second inflorescence from plant of Mória Hemp—*from nature*.
- „ 5.—A third inflorescence from plant of Mória Hemp—*from nature*.
- „ 6.—Terminal flowers from a fourth plant of Mória Hemp—*from nature*.
- „ 7.—Portion of inflorescence from plant of Sheória Hemp, *i.e.*, *Cannabis* with female flowers on a male plant—*from nature*.
- „ 8.—Flower of Sheória Hemp showing only an involving bract and stalked stigma—*from nature*.
- „ 9.—Flower of Sheória Hemp with anterior style replaced by an anther—*from nature*.
- „ 10.—Vertical section of Sheória Hemp with anterior style replaced by an anther—*from nature*.
- „ 11.—Pair of flowers of Sheória Hemp, one perfect, the other deformed, the anterior carpel and style replaced by a perfect stamen, the posterior carpel and style replaced by a monstrous 4-celled non-polliferous sessile anther—*from nature*.
- „ 12.—The same abnormal flower, half the perianth removed—*from nature*.
- „ 13.—The abnormal monstrous sessile anther of the same flower, seen from behind—*from nature*.
- „ 14.—Male flower 'with sepals whorled' but with the 5 stamens spirally disposed on an elongated receptacle tipped by a slightly modified carpel—*after Gasparrini*.
- „ 15.—'Hermaphrodite' flower, occurring spontaneously, the anthers removed, so as to show scattered 'female organs'—*after Autenrieth*.
- „ 16.—'Hermaphrodite' flower with single style, the ovary adnate to an anther—*after Autenrieth*.
- „ 17.—Carpel in which the ovary, adherent to the base of an anther, is almost entirely abortive except that the styles are developed—*after Gasparrini*.
- „ 18.—Anther with connective prolonged as a short style—*after Autenrieth*.
- „ 19-20.—Two instances of carpels united, by means of the abortive ovary, which is reduced to a connective, to the face of an anther of which one loculus is almost completely abortive, the other little developed—*after Gasparrini*.

FIGURE 4. Key to Plate V in Prain, *On the Morphology*. Comparisons between field samples "from nature" and citations of Italian botanist and mycologist Guglielmo Gasparrini and German pharmacologist and chronophysicologist Johann Autenrieth. Digitized by Google. HathiTrust and Archive.org.

[even as] the main stem [was] female." What he observed on Indian soil was the reverse: in *sheoria* plants, the whole lower half of the stalk bore female flowers, while the upper half had male ones. *Moria* plants, another "common abnormality in India," were slightly different. They developed "axillary spikelets between the base female flowers" that in turn produced "male" stamens. These spikelets could

continue to exist over the plant's lifetime, making the stalk entirely insubordinate to the dichotomous gender system of European botanizing.³⁷

Nouns like *sheoria*, *moria*, and *khasia* in Hindustani or Bengali parlance captured a spectrum of evolutionary gender variance in cannabis as a cohabiting life form, notable and yet not exceptionalized in Bengal's villages. Only in Prain's teratological approach did they become signifiers of abnormality and monstrosity. In this entwined and contradictory traffic of knowledge in the nineteenth century, the question, What is ganja? produced multiple answers. In Bengal's villages, gendered nomenclature emblemized and encapsulated the heterogeneity of cannabis in its natural and social environments. In the pages of colonial revenue documents, such gendered complexities troubled dichotomous systems, and as demands of revenue administration prevailed over scientific rigor, colonial officials continued reproducing gender dichotomies in order to identify taxable ganja products. Prain's efforts to contend with the spectrum of gender variance in the plant's cultured agro-environments remained limited to scientific circles.

The material body of ganja, its substances, gendered names, and the Bengali agrarian knowledge of its sexuality and evolutionary particularities transformed the work of men like David Prain. To grapple with that materiality, Prain fitted its particularities into European schemas of monstrosity and abnormality. Other officials, such as petty clerks and legal and medical officers in British India, opted for different pathways: They simply narrated how local knowledge in different social contexts had produced a diversity of names for ganja, then translated the names and gave examples of proverbs, couplets, and fables to explain their translated meanings. Thus, for scientists like Prain, gender made visible the discordance between social formations of plant sexuality, whether by anatomical definitions in colonial botany or by domestic roles in the cultivator's mind. On the other hand, for officials, doctors, and traders, gender signaled the unstable and vast heterogeneity of nouns prevalent across British India. South Asian-language names for the cannabis plant and its substances cataloged in colonial records helped officials identify correlates to ganja, bhang, and charas when they oversaw revenue collection. However, since these names did not exist as standalone nouns and were meaningful only within an interpretive schema of knowledge transmitted through proverbs, couplets, and fables that I am calling the ganjakhori's ecumene, colonial actors were forced to contend with how people understood the inseparably twinned questions of what ganja is and what it does.

EVERYDAY NAMES, PROVERBIAL KNOWLEDGES

By 1900, colonial officials in India had widely institutionalized the tripartite classification of Indian cannabis substances as ganja, bhang, and charas. In specific presidencies, addenda in the hands of excise officers and parentheses in the texts of laws informed readers of a few additional names. For instance, in excise laws and inspectors' manuals in Bengal and Punjab, *siddhi* was equated with bhang,

and charas with hashish, to help identify them should an official seize a smuggled consignment or find some in the possession of an arrestee. Repeated use of the ganja-bhang-charas triarchy in state documents and by government functionaries over time buttressed the nouns' relative currency. The three were popular in Punjabi, Hindi, and Bengali and appeared across different regional dialects in northern, central, and eastern India, but were far from the only ones in use. In the twentieth century, however, they became more singular points of reference in public discourse. By the interwar period, it was commonplace for officials in the Revenue, Police, and Excise Departments of different colonial provinces of British India to write one of these three names in describing seized cannabis products even in localities where the terms "ganja," "bhang," or "charas" were not commonly used. The three names with their pronounced public life sat atop a heap of others popular among diverse language communities. In 1877, when noun glossaries for ganja were first cataloged, their numbers, diversity, metaphoricity, and malleability vividly demonstrated to people like George Watt how the same word could mean different things at the same time. For these reasons, we should not read their usage in colonial documents as stable categories.

"Ganja" is the foremost example. In official documents from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, references to *gunjah* jostle with terms like *ganja*, *gunja*, *guaza*, *gunza*, and *gunnjah* as British men posted across South Asia recorded instances of cannabis use and circulation. On comparison, correspondences between departments in Burma, Bengal, and Bombay even as late as the 1870s reveal numerous variations of the same word, with new colonial deputies confusing "goonjaa" or *ratti*, the seed-based weight measure of the plant *Abrus precatorius*, locally called *gunja*, with "ganja" or cannabis. Colonial pursuits of cannabis were marked by a struggle to understand how nouns, spellings, and pronunciations for the plant and its substances were rooted in social references to use and context. Nomenclature for cannabis primarily acquired meaning through the language geographies and the social worlds they constituted such that, at any single moment, nouns like "ganja" could mean several things, depending on who was using them and what set of relational references scaffolded such use. Since cannabis seeds, stalks, leaves, and resin have historically been cultured into rope, fiber, oil, food items, and intoxicating substances, the resulting names, words, metaphors, and conjugated nouns used to refer to the plant across tens of South Asian languages are dizzying. Nouns akin to "ganja" could refer to one, some, many, or all of them.

Since names of substances and commodities derived from cannabis have often been interchangeable and produced locally contextual meanings, Kerr glossarized an extensive collection in 1877. His method included intimacy and familiarity beyond the textbook botanical knowledge that he otherwise relied on. His report became the bedrock of subsequent colonial efforts to create appendices of cannabis names. For it, he consulted as many Sanskrit texts as he could find and interviewed ganja cultivators, traders, and scholars of Tantric texts in Calcutta. He categorized the tens of names he found using a template of linguistic roots, social use, and sacral

meaning. For instance, “bhang,” he argued, derived from the Sanskrit word *bhanga*, meaning “to break,” and thus was likely a reference to the actions of debarkation and separation of flower from stem involved in producing intoxicants from cannabis. More important, he noted several names that connoted victory and conquest. *Jaya*, “the conquering one,” was common both in texts and everyday parlance alongside *vijaya*, “the all-conquering,” and *ajaya*, “one who couldn’t be conquered.” When gendered feminine, the latter two nouns referred to sweets or drinks made with ganja, whereas the masculine-gendered versions of *jaya* and *vijaya* referred to the two doormen of the god Vishnu in Bengali Vaishnava devotional theater performances. Kerr interpreted the circulation of these names to “the use of the plant as a narcotic to fortify the courage of warriors.”³⁸

These names also resonated with the more colloquial name for cannabis in Bengali—*siddhi*—meaning “prosperity,” “victory,” and in Kerr’s translation, “the success-giver.” *Siddhi* referred to both the plant and a beverage consumed by Bengalis who worshipped the deities Shiva and Durga. Feminized nouns were arguably the most common references for cannabis plant matter across the Bengal presidency. Kerr’s collection divided many of these nouns according to meanings of social use and pleasure. These included the names *ananda*, the feminized noun for joy; *chapala*, which he translated as “the causer of unsteadiness”; and *madini*, or “she who intoxicates.”³⁹ Other names had more sacral connotations. Of these, the one that stood out was *indrasana*, which Kerr translated as “food of the deity Indra,” though it more accurately meant “Indra’s seat or throne.” Kerr described Indra himself as the “Jupiter of the Hindus,” a parallelism increasingly common among enthusiasts of Indo-European Orientalism in the nineteenth century.

In contrast, other, more confounding names, such as *matkunari*, or the enemy of the *matkun*, meaning “flea” or “bug,” understood the plant as a bearer of protective potential. Kerr attributed this meaning to the circulating beliefs in cannabis’s supposed vermin-destroying ability. The most common colloquial name from his Bengali collection was *harshini*, or “she who delights.” Besides these instances, Kerr marked linguistic similarities with names in Greek, Latin, Arabic, and other languages and attempted to trace, albeit extremely tenuously, the phonemic roots of nouns for cannabis to Sanskrit linguistics. He also noted that “a number of other names of a highly poetical character” to be found in Arabic, such as the “the increaser of pleasure” and “the cementer of friendship,” could further expand the colonial glossary in the future. His ultimate version was circulated as two-column tables with more than seventy names in Asian and European languages. Besides Sanskritic names common in Bengali and Hindi, Kerr also recorded onomatopoes like *lacki-lacki* in Malayalam and words specifically connoting flowers yet generically referring to cannabis, like *kusumu* in Oriya.

Londa Schiebinger has described how linguistic imperialism in the development of natural history emerged through narrative strategies of colonial scientists that placed tropical flora in lineages beginning in ancient Greece and Rome.

Kerr's history exemplified this approach. He absorbed the heterogeneity of cannabis into a single narrative with historical roots, or frames of legitimization, firmly set in an imagined European past that simultaneously incorporated Sanskrit. In a model now familiar to scholars of colonial modernity in South Asia, Kerr narrated the history of cannabis linearly from an Aryan and Vedic Sanskrit provenance in which Vedic Brahmans knew it first, before its knowledge in ancient Greece.⁴⁰ The name cannabis formally derived from Greek and was specified further as "indica" (from Persian) and "sativa" (from the Latin for "cultivated"). Even though British scholars such as William Jones and Whitelaw Ainslie had criticized the application of Linnaean classification and its sexual system of ordering plant life in British India, their alternative aimed to ground new species classifications in Sanskrit and sometimes Persian grammar.⁴¹ Sanskrit's function in texts of colonial botany in British India mirrored that of Latin in Linnaean thought, working to institutionalize Sanskritic linguistics over other Indian language systems and thereby enabling the predominance of Brahmanical names over others.⁴²

Yet, in ganja's case, naming was thoroughly contextual and polysemic. Many names for cannabis straddled metaphor and materiality in ways that did not fit in colonial glossaries. Take *chabuk*, literally meaning "the whip," a noun common in and around Mymensingh district in eastern Bengal. Pran Kumar Das, deputy magistrate of Burdwan, who had worked in excise departments in Bengal since 1878, had learned it from his friend, "a Hindu Gentleman," who told him that after consuming spirits and smoking *madak* (a form of opium), he "closed the evening with a pull at ganja, which he said was the whip."⁴³ As a habit of the rich and propertied elite, it also came to the notice of Assistant Surgeon Devendranath Roy, who taught medical jurisprudence at Campbell Medical School in Calcutta and supervised wards at the Campbell Hospital. He recounted how many "well-to-do people" in Mymensingh "smoke ganja to make the intoxication of drink more profound, calling it *chabuk*."⁴⁴ However, he noted that poor palanquin bearers, after carrying travelers on their shoulders, also used cannabis the same way. "The whip" connoted an intense moment of forceful impact during an intoxicating experience. More than a metaphor, it captured pleasure as indulgence for the rich on one hand and necessity of the poor on the other. The experience could be reproduced only by mixing different stimulants in a specific sequence, at certain times, and in certain proportions to each other.

British and Indian officials unfamiliar with the nuances of languages and practices of ganja often gleaned such details from local informants, who might themselves have gathered their knowledge superficially. Names, metaphors, and practices in the *ganjakhori's* ecumene were polysemic and shifted along lines of caste, class, and gender. After Kerr's first collection of names traveled across colonial offices in British India, it was the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission (IHDC) that invited respondents in 1894 from all colonial territories in the subcontinent to provide as many possible names as they could find locally. In the intervening years,

other authoritative voices in the official bureaucracy also registered the diversity of names. For instance, in Bihar, the famous Irish linguist and colonial administrator George Grierson found *chapanta* (flat); *girgitiya* (lizard-like) for round ganja in southwestern Shahabad; and words like *jasari* (from Jessore) and *baluchari* for imported ganja (also in Shahabad), *dadhi* (beard) for ganja still attached to a stalk, and *rora* (broken or *chur* ganja) in south Gaya and Munger.⁴⁵

The IHDC's ultimate archive of names was shot through with the dynamic relationship of nouns to the proverbial knowledge of the experience of intoxication in everyday life. When demonstrating meanings of cannabis in India, both British and Indian respondents, across regions and languages, offered proverbs, songs, couplets, ditties, and idiomatic expressions as valuable repositories of such knowledge. While trained physicians, botanists, chemists, and Indian medical practitioners testifying before the Commission marshaled observational knowledge of cannabis intoxication from laboratory experiments, medical practice, and patients' case histories, revenue officials presented statistical and ethnographic knowledge gathered through routine procedures of governance, whether by themselves or by their Indian informants and subordinates. Yet both groups of respondents also bolstered their "expertise" through recourse to the proverbial.

The proverbial is a deeply consequential site of knowledge. Proverbs are easy to memorize and repetitive, which endows them with ontological longevity in popular discourse. As distilled forms of knowledge, proverbial forms circulated widely and could convey plural perspectives pithily. Proverbs were more capacious as orally transmitted repositories of knowledge, and the proverbial genre allowed for flexibility in contingent situations where one could relate insights from other related contexts to approximate, yet not overdetermine, the intended message. When figures of higher social status or influence, such as spiritual teachers or elder patriarchs, used proverbs to substitute for longer explications of received wisdom, the sayings themselves acquired an evidentiary weight, enabling others to deploy them to make future authoritative claims. Proverbs, short songs, and couplets, commonly described as *probad* (proverb), *lokgit* (popular lyric), *kahavat* (sayings), or *misaal* (illustrative parable, example, or allegory) across northern and eastern British India captured the attention of both local chroniclers and colonial administrators. Compilations of the extensive corpora of proverb collections rose to prominence in late-nineteenth-century colonial India. For British and Indian writers, extensive proverb collections served as gateways to popular culture, and by turning to proverbs and rural fables as sites of authentic and everyday Indian knowledge, such writers delivered the social and oral worlds of cannabis into the historical record.⁴⁶

In everyday life, proverbs about the experience of intoxication anchored the usage of conjugated nouns that denominated different forms of ganja. In these nouns, what ganja was and what it did were exchangeable and fundamentally interrelated. Their mutual co-constitution reflected dense social relations in the

places where the nouns were in common use. Nearly every respondent to the IHDC admitted that in British India, cannabis was consumed in collective social gatherings, often among laboring-caste groups and communities and rarely ever by individuals in solitude.⁴⁷ Respondents mobilized the proverbial to specifically evidence and demonstrate the collective character of cannabis consumption in caste groups and religious communities, as well as its popular character, generally consumed as it was in mass festivals and fairs. These submissions confirmed that names for cannabis that Kerr had collected in 1877, like *vijaya* (or *bijaya*) and *harshini*, were much more widely in use across northern, central, and eastern India in 1894. These names could be further interchangeable. For example, Babu Chandu Lal, a Khatri official serving as deputy collector of Orai in Jalaun district, who had occasionally used cannabis and was familiar with ganja cultivation in Nainital's hills in north India, noted that he knew bhang to be popularly called "*sabzi*, *buti*, *vijia*, *harshni*, and *kamalapati*."⁴⁸ *Sabzi* derived from the Persian for "green," *buti* meant "herb," and *kamalapati* literally translated as "orange leaf," presumably for the color of the dried cannabis bud.

Such names thrived in proverbial worlds and usages, not in the vacuum of colonial glossaries. Each uniquely signified social relations—and, in Lal's case, methods of production or concoction in recipes—that were conveyed through songs and proverbs. Lal recounted a translated proverb to illustrate his point: "Having purchased *buti* worth half a pice, pepper valued at half a pice, and ingredients worth a pice, [and then] rubbed them well and made into a ball; Bring a new piece of cloth and strain it carefully and patiently. Whoever will drink it will repeat the name of Har in intoxication."⁴⁹ Besides proverbs bearing recipes with monetary equivalents of the ingredients turned into rhyming couplets, Lal offered more colorful ones that conveyed lay practices of bhang use rooted in devotion to the deity Shiva. In one that Lal recounted, the speaker hopes the bhang may "produce such intoxication that I may sing the praises of Har and view the elephant rider as a mosquito." Idiomatic and proverbial expressions like this captured the viscerality of intoxication as a compression of one's sense of size and dimension, ensconced with effusive praise for such effects and their place in devotion to Har, or Shiva.

In his longer testimony urging the Commission against recommending prohibition of cannabis in British India, Chandu Lal's proverbs provided a window on the relations between self and god that scaffolded ordinary intoxication. *Har*, meaning "to heal," was a common referent for the god Shiva's restorative power to undo the distress of devotees. Shaivite practices of devotion and worship, whether ordinary ones or those followed in specific temple complexes with patron deities, was the most identifiably coherent set of religious uses of cannabis. Personifications of Shiva, like the deities Vaidyanath in Bihar and Tarakeswara in Bengal, attracted thousands of people on pilgrimage while annual festivals like Holi and Mahashivratri involved ritual offerings of cannabis to the god alongside

consumption by devotees. Popular devotion to Shiva across South Asia involved similar uses of cannabis.

Yet available accounts of temple rituals and holy days could not fully capture the everyday life of ordinary Shiva devotees. The proverbial offered a colorful alternative. In central India's Chota Nagpur region, Commissioner W. H. Grimly used proverbs to illustrate the deep-set practices of Shaivism. "Those who worship the god Shib," Grimly wrote, "rarely begin to smoke without calling out his name 'Bam Mahadeo' or chanting couplets in the praise of ganja of the bacchanalian type." For instance, he translated a proverb: "How can I recite the virtues of ganja with an alphabet of only thirty-two letters. The consumer of ganja is sanctified and even the messenger of death flees from him." This proverb referenced the incredibly popular tale of Shiva protecting his devotee, the sage Markandeya, and subsequently killing Yama, the god of death.⁵⁰ Here, narrative tropes of Shiva's incredible and unique place in everyday Hindu beliefs converged and became intimate with ganja's equivalent abilities to breach the boundaries between self and god.

Grimly also collected couplets illustrative of the experience of insouciance toward class structures and hierarchy under intoxication. "One pipe leaves you as you were; be persuaded, take two," recounted Grimly; "with the third, you are a vazir; the fourth, you are a king."⁵¹ The potential of intoxication to make possible, even if provisionally, the imaginative leap from *vazir* (minister) to king required exact measure.⁵² This intentional and gradual approach to intoxication was also echoed by Pandit Mewaram, a retired deputy collector of Lakhimpur in northern India, who argued before the Commission that bhang drinkers imputed to bhang not just Shiva's powers but those of several other gods as well. He also noted that colonial classifications that originated in eastern Bengal, such as flat (*chyapta*) and round (*gol*) ganja, were not understood commonly in Oudh, where the nouns *kali* (flower) and *chur* (powder) were more common. To illustrate the measured gradualism of drinking cannabis, he described the intentional principle of drinkers as "*chillu chillu sadhai*—meaning to increase [intoxication] by handfuls." Mewaram further elucidated local understanding of bhang by recounting how some consumers read a little poem as an ode to it. The poem addressed the substance bhang in second person, running thus: "For accomplishment, thou art like Ganesh, for intellect like Brahma, for wit and cleverness like Saraswati, for retard of semen discharge like opium, for religious meditation like Rudra (here, Shiva), for separation like Rama, for enjoyment like Krishna, for diseases thy effects are like *nim* leaves, for divine contemplation like Dhruwa, for awaking like Gorakhnath, for sleep like Kumbhakaran, for eating like Bhimsen, and for charity like Raja Bali."⁵³

Each of the figures named in this poem featured prominently in practices of multiple Hindu devotional communities in Oudh and originated in older textual traditions and oral tellings of Vedic, Jain, and Buddhist thought. This capacious ode on the intoxicant's abilities tied beliefs about Ganesh's power to remove obstacles, Brahma's omniscience, Sarasvati's knowledge, opium's supposed ability

to affect male ejaculation, Shiva's intense meditative faculties, Rama's exile and dispassionate treatment of Sita, Krishna's adolescent mischief, the therapeutic qualities of neem (*Azadirachta indica* L.), Dhruva's penance and devotion to the god Vishnu, the contrast between the sage Gorakhnatha's yogic awakening and Kumbhakarna's half-yearly sleeping cycle, the gluttony of Bhima in the Mahabharata, and the generosity of King Mahabali, all into one string of salient qualities. Drinkers could thus eulogize their beverage as a versatile and superlative vehicle for one or more intentions and desires. Crucially, intoxication was meant to purposefully accompany and aid one's intentions, not impede them, and thus left ample room for one's own discernment to shape one's practice of intoxication.

In colonial Bengal, proverbs similarly conveyed meditation, strength, sexual pleasure, and hunger as pursuits that might be combined with intoxication. Instead of suggesting uniformity in the experience of ganja, they correlated bodily dispositions as conditioning factors for the experience of intoxication. Abhilas Chandra Mukherji, the second inspector of excise in Bengal in 1893, had spent many years as deputy excise collector of Rajshahi overseeing cannabis cultivation for the colonial state. A Brahman by caste, he personified the formally educated clerical Bengali *bhadralok*, who combined a profound interest in rational inquiry with disdain for lower castes he considered degenerate. To the IHDC, Mukherji presented a proverb he had collected himself: "The *jogi* smokes for the concentration of thought necessary for *joge*, and for pronouncing the name of Hari; the Rajput smokes for becoming strong and for extracting the tusks of elephants with the hand; the merry smoke for becoming cheerful and for pleasing women; the hungry smokes for intensifying his hunger and for eating a *handi*-full of boiled rice."⁵⁴ The proverb's four categories captured uneven social locations and relations. Jogis (akin to the figure of a yogi) were itinerant ascetic mystics, practitioners of yoga, and heterodox spiritualists, while Rajput was a dominant upper-caste identity rooted in clan relations and lineage claims to military and martial labor. In contrast, "the merry" and "the hungry" described affective states with imprecise connotations of caste and class. Each had a purpose for indulging an intoxicant, the proverb suggested to listeners, and underscored the importance of intention in conditioning the ultimate end of an intoxicating experience.

Nobo Gopal Bose Rai Chowdhury, a sixty-year-old Kayasth man employed in clerical jobs in excise departments since he was nineteen, also collected proverbs. He had taken several trips to northern Rajshahi's ganja fields during his tenure as a munsiff in a court in Natore. He had an ear for rhymes such as "The *rogi*, *jogi*, *bhogi*, and *dagi* use ganja"—the ailing, or *rogi*, "to get rid of diseases," the jogi for "devotion purposes," the *bhogi* (eater or glutton) for "digesting purposes," and *dagi*, a Persian word meaning "stained" or "convicted," for "encouragement in desperate acts." If this proverb echoed the importance of intention in taking ganja and its power to become what one made of it, Chowdhury also furnished songs to illustrate practices with greater layers of meaning. His English translation of one

song, apparently sung by ganja smokers in Bengali, went thus: “Ganja is the king of all intoxicating drugs; it maketh a man easily merry and it produceth pleasure in the mind. It removes all sorrows and pains of deaths of relatives, makes an old man young, and weakens the pain of whipping.”⁵⁵ The reference to whipping suggested an alternative use of *chabuk* in relation to ganja. Not everyone, however, was singing odes to ganja’s miraculous capacities. To evidence his familiarity with ideas “current among the lower class of people,” Chowdhury cited an idiom that implied that with ganja, “one becomes talkative like a parrot, another becomes solemn like an owl, and the third, sleepy like Kumbhakarna.”⁵⁶ Such lyrics captured how the same intoxicant, in the same social context, was unpredictable and could produce chatter, gravity, or sleep. Discernment, intention, and purpose were, in short, absolutely vital.

South Asian oral tradition in Bengali and Hindustani had a long history of capturing the unpredictable variability of cannabis intoxication in capacious frameworks open to interpretation. The relation between variability and discernment in the *ganjakhori*’s ecumene was lost on British doctors and officials who looked to proverbs as indexes of exact causality between an Indian body’s physiology and the controlled ingestion of cannabis, assuming that longer civilizational history with cannabis meant a proclivity for addiction or accustomed tolerance to ingestion. Often, however, they were forced to concede that such racialized historical reasoning could never quite be exact. Colonial pursuits of the proverbial for evidence, however, only reinforced the stark contrast between the proverbial and the medical. Colonial medical logics individualized addiction inside the subject’s body by using racialized ideas of heredity and observations of compulsion or habit. Proverbial knowledge, particularly aphoristic sayings loosely described as *jukti* or *bochon* in Bengali and *kahavat* in Hindi, was different. Such aphorisms compared experiences of different intoxicants to bring one or the other into relief and suggested the importance of taste and distinction, not compulsive habit. Aphorisms used social costs as forms of deterrence to make the stakes of intoxication clear to the listener. Intoxication was a practice that aided and lubricated one’s intentions much like a springboard but did not impede one’s will and made one aware of the range of costs involved in potential transgressions of social norms. Short aphoristic proverbs could also convey distinctions of class and caste. As casual truths observed in passing, aphorisms revealed embedded social relationships and symbolically carried forward memory and experience. As a niche set of the proverbial, aphorisms resisted classification in tables, grids, or two-column glossaries of British recording conventions. Left open to interpretation, aphoristic sayings channeled knowledge of human experiences and social relations as if they were general truth.

Manmohan Chakravarti, the deputy magistrate of Jajpur, Cuttack, found illustrative examples of definitive aphorisms in Orissa. He had previously worked in Puri, the Hindu temple town and pilgrimage site, where he oversaw the circulation of Garhjat Ganja for devotional rituals and leisure. Born and raised in Orissa,

Chakravarti told the Commission in 1894 that Oriya traditions and the Tantras both contained expositions on the social and spiritual life of ganja. "An opium eater is a thief, a ganja drinker is tipsy (incapable of acting reasonably), while a user of dried tobacco leaves has too much *golmaal* in his house (everybody asking for some more leaves)," Chakravarti explained to the IHDC.⁵⁷ Interestingly, he referred to drinking but called the substance ganja, not bhang. Such slippages in nouns and modes of use ran counter to colonial tripartite classifications between flower and leaf of the same plant. For Chakravarti, the definitive effect of intoxication on social relations within family and community stood out as both a deterrent and a common acknowledgment of the banality of excess.

Europeans also attested to this form of social deterrence. Lieutenant Colonel A. Crombie was serving as surgeon-superintendent of the General Hospital in Calcutta in 1893, having finished a seven-year tenure as superintendent of the Dacca Lunatic Asylum. Well known in medical circles, Crombie provided the government of Bengal with key recommendations on criminal lunacy by drawing on his assessments of homicidal frenzy cases in which perpetrators were recorded as ganja smokers. Crombie understood excessive intoxication to be a social problem and cited a "metrical proverb published by Dr. Morison of Rajshahi," which said, "The ganja smoker cherishes his wife, the opium smoker's wife is a widow, and the drunkard is a Brahmini bull (brutal and uncontrollable)."⁵⁸ Here, the aphorism cast cannabis favorably as an aphrodisiac as against opium and alcohol, both of which could take a toll on family life when taken in excess. Relations of family and conjugal life provided the framework in which intoxication's merits could thus be understood and relayed in the hope that they would deter or contextualize another's experience.

Whether taking the form of a definitive aphorism, rhymed couplet, or ditty, proverbial knowledge was extremely pliant and allowed for layered expressions of satire, mirth, and hyperbole. Beprodas Banerjee, a Brahman pleader who edited a local newspaper and chaired the Baraset Municipality in Bengal, counted *sabji*, *patti*, and *pata*, all connoting green leaves, as the common names for ganja. In answer to the IHDC's question about differences in charas and ganja smoking, he translated a popular ditty that was a satire against liquor but indexed both forms of cannabis: "Ah! What a fine sensation wine creates! The legs stagger and methinks I fall. Ganja smoking makes a man poor. We get headache by smoking charas. Red water in the belly makes the body unsteady. Slip once and you fall in the ditch. Then the constables titter and the magistrate sends you to jail."⁵⁹ While ganja might have cost more money and charas may have produced headaches, wine and liquor would inevitably cause injuries and send one into the hands of scheming policemen and a judge's courtroom.

North of Baraset, Lieutenant Colonel G. Price, the civil surgeon of Burdwan, told the IHDC he had met and conversed with several consumers of hemp drugs in his twenty-one years in India. According to him, drinking siddhi and

consuming ganja had different social outcomes. He provided the following rhyme: “*Siddhi khaley budhi barey, ganja khaley lukhi charey.*” He translated it as “The man who drinks bhang thrives, he who takes ganja goes to the bad (is deserted by the goddess Lukhi).” Being forsaken by Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, recalled poverty as the ultimate trap of ganja consumption in rural Bengal. Price’s other illustration was more aphoristic: “*Ganja kheley baaper naam bhuley jaaye,*” which literally implied that one forgot one’s father’s name if one consumed ganja.⁶⁰ However, the function of hyperbole missed its mark: Price confidently asserted to the IHDC that Indians *in fact* regularly lost their memory from ganja consumption.

The IHDC also interviewed contractors who distributed ganja and bhang under government-issued license outside Bengal, notably in northern and western India. Salig Ram, a Kayasth contractor in Delhi, provided translated songs by Girdhar Kabra, a local poet, alongside a proverbial fable. “There is a proverb” he recounted, “that a donkey, by seeing and smelling the hemp plant, ran away. [Offended,] the plant said to the donkey—What?! [do you think you] are superior to Mahadeoji [Shiva] that you run away from my odour? He has chosen me [as his favorite drink.] The donkey replied—If man, who is very superior [to myself,] drinks thee and resembles a donkey, if I taste you, there is no knowing what I will resemble.”⁶¹ A donkey who preferred the wisdom of sobriety strongly implied social deterrence by suggesting that drinking bhang transformed one downward on the species hierarchy of civility, intelligence, and animality. Smoking charas in northern India, Ram offered, was nonetheless worse. With flourish, Ram presented a popular undated couplet: “Charas pila gurgyan ghala, aur bij ghalawaka ander ka; sukh sukh lakar ho jawa, munh howa jaise bandar ka.”⁶² This, he translated as “A charas smoker loses religious wisdom imparted by the guru and vitality. He is reduced to a mere skeleton, and his face resembles a monkey’s.”⁶³ The word “vitality” euphemized the Hindi word for male semen and seed (*bij*) in the poem, highlighting popular fears of loss of virility and likeness to the base animality of the monkey. The melting away of *gurgyan*, the teachings of gurus, reminded the listener of humility and subservience to a higher power. To the IHDC, Ram emphasized charas to make the proverbial more specific than it actually was. In fact, elsewhere in northern India, this same proverb referred to ganja and noted flatulence and coughs as effects.⁶⁴

Besides interspecies registers with which to compare suggested effects of cannabis like foolishness, arrogance, and emasculation, some proverbs in Panjab and Oudh provinces also advanced judgments on difference in quality of cannabis substances. Before giving his testimony to the IHDC, then–deputy commissioner Denzil Ibbetson, who later published a prominent survey of the “races, tribes, and castes” of Panjab and the North West Frontier Province after serving as lieutenant governor, visited the northern edges of Jalandhar tehsil. On tour, he noted that the

shallow hill streams from the Shivalik Mountains helped disseminate hemp seeds across the foothills, leading to luxuriant wild growth of the cannabis plant. While Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur were well-known for small-scale cannabis cultivation, Ambota in the tehsil of Una was more renowned for its quality of bhang beverages. Ibbetson translated the proverb “Bhang jo piwe Ambota ki, sudh na rahe langote ki” correctly as “He who drinks Ambota bhang forgets to tie his loin cloth.”⁶⁵ Experiencing such carefree abandon in an intoxicating experience that one was unaware of one’s own clothes and invited shame in public implied the distinct favor that Ambota’s confectioners enjoyed, as well as the potential risks of indulging in their bhang preparations.

Even though everyone had some bhang to consume in their homes in Punjab, Ibbetson noted, the sphere of production was shot through with caste and class. Landless Dalit laborers harvested an annual crop for contractors.⁶⁶ Habitual cannabis drinkers in Punjab, Ibbetson found, were most aptly described in the following proverb: “Chukki phirti na sune, kutta bhaunkne na sune,” which he translated as “He hears neither the mill grind nor the dog bark.” This figure of the Punjabi habitual drinker, fast asleep in the heat, complemented other proverbs that noted how the drinker “weeps, and occasionally feels the after-effects.” This image, Ibbetson wrote, was exemplified by another couplet, “Charhi par charhawe, sir dukhne na pawe,” which he rendered as “If you don’t want a ‘head,’ put one drink on top of another.” The proverb suggested that while a single dose or drink might produce a headache, two would prevent it. Ibbetson collected so many proverbs that he even lost a few in his notes. But, he insisted, they “stressed without exception” the “timidity induced by bhang.” He also recollected a proverb that “described the bhang-drinker as a little child while the other said that if a leaf falls on his head, he thinks it a tiger.”⁶⁷ This pattern left him wondering why the idea that bhang produced violent frenzy was so popular—a question addressed in chapter 4 of this book.

Other registers of proverbial knowledge in northern India relied on transferred epithets. Pandit Mewaram of Lakhimpur, who had collected the proverbs on gradualism and superlative eulogies described above, was helpful on this front. He recorded proverbs that demonstrated a versatile transferring of epithets about mellowness and femininity onto the body of ganja or bhang. On mellowness, he recounted, “Who call it hemp are fools, who say it’s bhang have no eyes; its name is lotus leaf, whence come such mellow roseate eyes.”⁶⁸ In Hindi, the word for lotus, *kamal*, is homophonous with the Bengali word for orange, *kamala*, which described the color of dried cannabis flower and connoted beauty. Bhang might have been beautiful, and yet, as other Hindustani proverbs put it, it was not opium, the most notable of intoxicants produced in the North Western Provinces. In the proverb “Bhang kahe main rangi jangi, post kahe main shah-i-jahan, afim kahe main chunni begum, mujhko khaake jaaye kahan?” both poppy seeds and opium

outdo the persona of bhang.⁶⁹ Bhang, gendered feminine, claims to be colorfully hued, the poppy seed claims he is the king of the world, and yet both are outdone because raw opium claims she is Chunni Begum, an archetypal courtesan emblematic of sexuality, sensuousness, music, and temptation, which one couldn't resist if one tasted it.

Masculinity constituted other epithets and social relations altogether. Mewaram's point of reference was the pilgrimage city of Mathura, where virile masculinity, devotional pride, and shows of public strength were embodied in the *mastram*, a masculine figure who was intoxicated, wanton, and careless particularly during daylong religious festivals. Becoming *mast*, or intoxicated on bhang, in the streets was routine practice. Mewaram had seen how the Choube community, a Brahman kin network that organized pilgrimage at shrines to the deity Krishna, regularly recited proverbs that authorized appropriate forms of bhang consumption for men.⁷⁰ From them he collected the proverb "Mahadeva said to Parvati—Hear unto me, it is not advisable to give bhang to ganwars or to boys and old men, but male adults only, who if they drink, should be able to pluck out an elephant's tooth."⁷¹ *Ganwar*, the colloquial word for an unlettered or unsophisticated villager, sat oddly next to youth and old age as constitutive opposites of the able-minded strong man. Its place drew on uses of the rural ganwar figure in spoken Hindustani that signified one who couldn't observe restraint. The popular aphorism "Sabji mat do ganvaran ko, handiya bhar bhati bigran ko," implied that giving bhang to a visiting ganwar risked them eventually finishing a full pot of the host's rice.⁷² The association between indulgence of cannabis and virile masculinity was more positively emphasized elsewhere in the region. In Fyzabad, Syed Abu Ibrahim, a Yunani hakim, testified to the IHDC that men who did not "smoke ganja flower" were taunted as less than feminine. In Lucknow, M. Mahomed Hassein, a drug contractor, agreed with Ibrahim, noting that proverbs among Thakur caste groups promoted inherited ideas of masculinity taught to children, who might be tutored thus: "Jo nahi piye ganja ki kali, us se to larki bhali," meaning that it is better to be a woman than one who doesn't smoke ganja.⁷³

To recall George Watt's words at the start of this chapter, his inability to separate South Asian-language nomenclature for the plant from words for its parts was an effect of how the abundantly gendered social relations between human and plant matter in Hindustani and Bengali were shot through with relations of power among caste groups, among workers, within devotional communities, among men of different generations, and inside families. The same relations shaped the proverbial knowledge of the ganjakhor's ecumene, wherein what ganja was and what it could do were inseparable modes of experience and knowledge. Form was defined by function and encapsulated polysemic modes of knowing and relating to the world. This ecumene, inhabited by the plant and the user, was an open-ended world that invited versatility of interpretation, linked human and plant to

the more-than-human, and allowed the density of social relations to define and name a plant and its many substances.

THE GANJAKHOR'S ECUMENE

This chapter began with a fable from rural Bengal about the ganjakhor's ecumene. Just as British officials recategorized the telling and consequential knowledges contained in such fables as mere folklore in the nineteenth century, Calcutta's urban writers were capturing these contradictions and contestations of modernity in satire.⁷⁴ Satire responded to British rule by identifying, mocking, and sometimes condemning its effects while reflecting the visions and desires of Indian, predominantly Brahman, writers and thinkers. In 1876, Kalidas Mukhopadhyay, an up-and-coming satirist in colonial Calcutta's thriving literary market, penned a scathing nine-part polemic identifying signs that confirmed that colonial India was indeed in an age of moral decline.⁷⁵ Mukhopadhyay's polemic took the motif of the Kaliyuga, a popular theme derived from interpretations of the epic *Mahabharata*. Writers in colonial Bengal used Kaliyuga as a temporal category to narrate social critiques of the times they lived in. While Kaliyuga discourse was dominated by literary expressions of upper-caste men in cities, the oral and performative worlds of Kaliyuga-related ideas in rural theater and devotional congregations of heterodox sects in rural Bengal were equally significant. In many texts following the Kaliyuga motif, the urban and rural often came together as entwined sites of moral decline without neat separations of town and country. Mukhopadhyay, for example, began with clerks in colonial institutions (the *kerani*), cash-seeking upper-caste priests, independent women, and the railways that had enabled comingling across caste lines as they cut through India's villages. Each was standard fare in the traffic of Brahmanical anxieties and was saturated with observations of changing urban-rural relationships of caste, class, and gender. But, to this mix, Mukhopadhyay added intoxicants like the opium *guli* (mixed opium balls) and liquor, along with the ganjakhor. He was not alone in identifying opium and liquor, but commentaries on ganja in Bengali and Hindi were usually less moralistic in tone.

In his satire, Mukhopadhyay vividly described the habits of an ordinary ganjakhor. For him, ganjakhor was a pejorative for any regular ganja consumer in Calcutta's streets. Mukhopadhyay's satirized ganjakhor was to be found smoking, sitting on a raised platform, commenting on the experience of his intoxication. This man, relaxed in pleasure like a king or emperor, affectionately calls out to others passing by. The text describes his eyes drooping and his hair fluttering in the wind like feathers on a bird's wings: "Come come, my dear father, my wealth, the very sign of my life . . . my brother, if you don't come, who will have this ganja with me?"⁷⁶ This invitation welcomes older and younger passersby alike, and if one

sits down, the man shares his ganja. "Here, prepare it, pour it, have it, and sing," he says to his momentary guest.⁷⁷

The satirist thus recounts meeting a locally well known *ganjakhor*. He finds him sitting with another man from the same village.⁷⁸ To his friend, the *ganjakhor* says, "My desire is simply one chilim ganja . . . it is my umbrella, and my mosquito net."⁷⁹ This leap of imagination, through a single smoking pipe (*chilim*), metaphorically captures multiple embodied experiences of intoxication otherwise transmitted through proverbs. Here, a small amount of ganja immanent within the human body became that which delivers shelter from the weather and mosquitoes. The umbrella, capable of sheltering one from sun and rain, was an ordinary necessity in Calcutta's summer and monsoon seasons. Mosquitoes both recalled the pain and irritation of an insect bite and sedimented popular fears of malarial fever. Historians have often misread ganja as a form of preventive medicine that Indians have believed in. Paying attention to the *ganjakhor's* ecumene shows something more complex: Such expressions simultaneously captured the relative yet specific visceral effects of *not feeling as severely* the worst of the heat or the pain of the bite under the influence of ganja.

Predictably, though, these nuances were lost on a moralistic, skeptical Brahman writer like Mukhopadhyay. In the satire, Mukhopadhyay's narrator retorts, completely unprompted, to this *ganjakhor*, "Why even wear clothes then? With one *chilim* then, you might as well be nude."⁸⁰ Immediately, the *ganjakhor* becomes upset and "enflamed" by this comment. "What? What kind of *ganjakhor* are you?!" Mukhopadhyay's narrator becomes so scared by this man's gnashing teeth (*donto kotmoti*) that he swiftly departs the scene. Mukhopadhyay then apprises his dear readers that ganja was undoubtedly the root of all failures (*shokol onortho*). His next words are, however, more crucial. He asserts, first, that consuming ganja leads to the departure of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, from one's life, and, second, that ganja so inhibits the brain that one mounts a donkey thinking it to be a horse. And finally, the swirling passage of smoke from *turitanondo* (*turitanonder bhno-bhnowaani*) effectively dulls one's senses or conscious discernment (*bodhi*).

Each of these references captured elements of Bengali proverbial knowledges that shaped the *ganjakhor's* ecumene. The departure of Lakshmi, a common metaphor for one's fall into poverty, channeled the power of the more-than-human to deter a human body's proximity to ganja. As noted before in G. Price's words, Lakshmi was the distinguishing factor between siddhi and ganja whereby drinking siddhi and smoking ganja had different socially understood outcomes in Bengal. Proverbially speaking, liquefied cannabis in moderate amounts was deemed to enhance memory, while market-bought ganja could impede productive work. Referencing the donkey and the horse drew on the former's animality, marked by ignorance, stupidity, and embarrassment. *Turitanondo*, a conjugated noun, was a common reference to cannabis in Bengali proverbs. The term literally connotes one that quickly delights or one that casts happiness. It was common in

southern Bengal and was circulating widely by 1894 according to the IHDC. The word *ananda* could also be feminized as *anandaa* for happiness or delight, much as the word *harshini* was. As a conjugated noun, *turitanondo* meant many things depending on colloquial everyday use: not only “the substance that delights,” but also the substance personified as a spiritual teacher, as in “*sri/guru turitanondo*”; or the substance equated to self, sometimes meant as double entendre, as in “*ami/amar mon turitanondo*.”

As this chapter shows, the ganjakhor’s ecumene was vast and beyond the comprehension of colonial bureaucratic rationality. In 1894, the IHDC opposed prohibition of cannabis drugs in British India because, it argued, most Indian bodies were acclimated to cannabis substances due to their widespread long-standing use in everyday and socioreligious settings. This usage made most Indian subjects “habitual but moderate” consumers. In colonial Bengal in 1895, “habitual moderate” consumers were estimated to make up more than 95 percent of buyers or consumers resident in any district. For years, this population had had various names, the most popular and pejorative one being *ganjakhor*. Of the three terms the Commission’s report cemented as categories of Indian hemp—ganja, bhang, and charas—subsequent official reports repeatedly specified each using a chemical consistency relative to a spatial unit, like a district or region, of growth and manufacture. As this triplex became common and gained currency in state-subject relationships after the 1890s, nouns like *anandaa*, *harshini*, and *turitanondo* fell relatively out of use.

In South Asia, the power of forgotten names and the dynamic social and intellectual worlds of the proverbial troubled the question of what cannabis was, is, and is not. Recall the satire by Mukhopadhyay. The ganjakhor affectionately seeks community and social bonds, inviting others, like the man from his own village navigating a new city, to participate in a relationship of mutual exchange and sharing. He measures a small but exact amount of ganja relative to its ability to shape his embodied feeling of shelter and relief, but draws a line when rudely confronted by a critic. The ganjakhor is not without reason: Appearing unclothed in public might indeed be indecent, which the ganjakhor is decidedly not. The satirical critic, while using *ganjakhor* pejoratively, also calls the substance *turitanondo*, acknowledging, though dismissively, the mutual sensual relation of happiness between plant matter and human body. In Hindustani, the same spirit was echoed in aphorisms, common to bhang-drinking practice, such as “Laage ragra, mite jhagra,” which meant that bickering and cacophony ceased the moment the stone began to grind bhang.⁸¹

Unlike the practice in colonial glossaries whereby multiple names for cannabis were squeezed together flatly as synonyms for ganja, bhang, or charas, for ordinary subjects of the British empire, socially discerning between cannabis substances was always marked by relationality between context, plant matter, and human and more-than-human forces. Such complex sets of relations and literary and poetic

strategies fundamentally structured everyday experience and knowledge of cannabis intoxication. Relations shaped by gender inversions and variance, corresponding social understandings of raw and manufactured substances derived from the plant, relations between its relative source and agrarian environment, between mode of consumption (solid, liquid, or smoke) and specificity of the method of preparation ultimately resulted in naming repertoires in which intoxication was understood relationally and remained open to interpretation. Relations between husband and wife, human and animal, deity and devotee, self and community were dynamic central frames of reference in discerning when and how much to consume, knowing social sanctions for and against consumption, and knowing which various bodily and sensuous transformations to expect on consumption.

Such social relations had a material basis in specific regimes of production that were results of British imperial expansion in the subcontinent since the eighteenth century. As the following chapter shows, ganja and its substances in British India were often sourced from one agrarian zone—Naogaon on the banks of the Atrai River—where Bengali cultivators transformed ganja from a disparately grown substance into a small peasant commodity that sustained complex agrarian lifeworlds.

A Small Peasant Commodity

Naogar unnoyoner mole rohiachey ganjar chash.

At the root of Naogaon's upliftment lies the cultivation of ganja.

—KHAN SAHEB MOHAMMAD AFZAL

Khyati, the Bengali word for fame and social renown, appears often in historical accounts of Naogaon. A small village nestled in an upland agrarian tract on the banks of the Atrai and the Choto Jamuna Rivers, Naogaon was a part of the expansive Rajshahi district for most of its history. Although an outlier in the district's economy, Naogaon owed its *khyati* solely to ganja. In the ganjakhori's ecumene, Naogaon and its ganja held pride of place even if many didn't know where exactly the village lay on a map. Over the long nineteenth century, Naogaon transformed into a central town and eventually became the headquarters of a subdivision with the same name that was territorially bounded by the Rajshahi division. After the partition of British India, the states of East Pakistan and Bangladesh retained these territorial boundaries such that Naogaon is the name of at least three administrative units: a district within contemporary Rajshahi division, an *upazila* (subdistrict), and a *sadar* (central town). The fame and recognition of the name Naogaon, the boundaries of the actual town, and the shape of the larger district are all products of the British Empire's pursuit of ganja in colonial India. This singular relationship was structured by interlocking historical processes of land, labor, and intricate social relations of debt and production, without an appreciation of which, Naogaon's *khyati* alienates the materiality of ganja from the inter-species environment, spatiality, and temporalities that produced it.

For many writers, Naogaon, ganja, and British India's geography were intimately connected. In 1901, Kalinath Chaudhuri's sweeping history of Rajshahi included Naogaon as a relatively unremarkable corner that paled in consequence compared to the landed gentry of Natore, the silk trade of Bauleah, and the indigo planters of southern Rajshahi. Except, he wrote, Naogaon was "*bikhyato*," or renowned,

for producing “*shomudoy bharotborsher ganja*” (ganja for the whole of *bharata-varsha*).¹ Chaudhuri was echoing several others before him. In 1873, the supplementary report by the deputy collector of Rajshahye in the *Calcutta Gazette* had referred to Naogaon as the “single tract of land in the extreme north of Rajshahi that affords the sole supply, with but a few insignificant exceptions, to the ganja smokers of the whole of India.”² *Bharatavarsha*, as Manu Goswami has shown, was not the whole of India but a specific imagined historical geography of *bharata* that was claimed as a singular space by Indian, often Brahman, officials. Chaudhuri’s *bharatavarsha* was similarly a region that spanned colonial provinces in eastern, central, and northern India, pivoted on the Indo-Gangetic plains but excluded major parts of the provinces of Bombay, Punjab, and Madras.³ This placement was entirely by design. Naogaon Ganja was directly associated with eastern, central, and northern India because state institutions in Bengal and officials in provincial and tributary jurisdictions in these regions made concerted efforts, in tenuous correspondence with one another, to ensure that Naogaon’s cultivators produced ganja for circulation in state-regulated shops. Between the governments of Bengal and other provinces, officials often suppressed small-scale cultivation in regions outside Naogaon, policed cannabis sales across provincial borders, and ensured that only Naogaon’s ganja was occasionally exported abroad in small batches to London and Trinidad for pharmaceutical use and trade.

These imperial connections pivoted on a production regime in Naogaon that resulted on one hand from particular histories of land settlement and Santal migration and, on the other, from rigors of labor demanded by the plant and patterns of intergenerational debt. Among the few remaining accounts, the chronicles of Kalimohan Chakrabarti are crucial windows on this production regime. Chakrabarti was a small-time clerk from Nadia district who settled in Naogaon in the 1870s as a moneylender-accountant for the estate of the Balihar Rajbari. In 1910, he began a serialized account of the life and customs of Naogaon in the weekly periodical *Hindu Ronjika*, published by the Dharma Sabha, an orthodox Hindu association in Rampur Bauleah.⁴ The *Ronjika* and *Palli Bandhab* were the main local newspapers before the *Desherbani* appeared in Naogaon town in the 1930s. For unstated reasons, the Dharma Sabha stopped publishing the account, and the weekly *Noakhali Sammilani*, collectively owned by nine merchants, all talukdars and zamindars from Noakhali, began carrying his essays. The last of them appeared in 1913 after the Delhi Durbar where George V (“*ponchom jorjo*”) was crowned Emperor of India.⁵ Yusuf Ali Kazi, who ran the Kazi Press in Naogaon, published the ten essays in one volume titled *The Tale of Ganja (Ganjar Golpo)* sometime in 1913–14 (1320 BS).⁶ Alongside government reports by Kerr, Prain, Rainy, and Platt, Chakrabarti’s vignettes reveal the foundations of what British imperial records called Bengal Ganja, Rajshahye Ganja, or the “Indian Drug.” References using such terms metonymized ganja products from Naogaon’s fields and homes while erasing the complexity of Naogaon’s history. Naogaon Ganja recalled other commodity-place

connections, such as Rangpur tobacco, Dhaka muslin, Malwa Opium, and Calcutta jute, but unlike their entanglements in global structures of trade and governance, ganja's circulation depended on the sensitivity of the crop and the regional tastes for it. In light of dehistoricizing logics that erase Naogaon's people from its most famous product, this chapter argues for the significance of the histories of land, labor, and debt that formed the bedrock of imperial discourses about Indian ganja.

Naogaon's ganja production regime required hours of attentive labor by cultivators, workers, and Santal families and pivoted on cycles of intergenerational debt. Unlike most large-scale agrarian products in the British Empire, Naogaon Ganja was what agrarian historians have called a small peasant commodity, grown and manufactured in packaged forms largely by small peasant households, which in this case were catering to a wide regional circulation. While many local villages and towns had their own cannabis-made sweets and drinks, with variable intoxicating capacities, none held the same prestige, recognition, or preference reserved for Naogaon Ganja in trade circuits spanning Awadh in the north and Chittagong at the southeastern edge of the Bengal delta. Wholesalers from these districts imported every kind of ganja from Naogaon: the two types of highly sought-after Round Ganja called *motadal* and *mihidal*; the two types of chur ganja known as *golchur* and *chyaptachur* derived from the manufacturing process of Round and Flat Ganja, and the four kinds of Flat Ganja, classified using Persian ordinal numbers and priced in decreasing order of potency and refinement—*aol*, *doem*, *siam*, and *chaharam*. While Round Ganja was the most biochemically potent, some chur ganja (called *rora*), made by boiling ganja stalks into a homogenous mass and then drying and breaking it into chunks, was also extremely popular. For the predominantly Muslim smallholding peasantry of Naogaon, the popularity of such ganja products became a window on the rest of Bengal, India, and the empire.

As a small peasant commodity, the debt-servicing role of ganja and the social worlds of Bengali and Santal families, which included business arrangements, shared tools, and gendered labor, were fundamental to Naogaon's history. In many parts of South Asia, peasant households with small landholdings generated relatively little agricultural surplus but augmented family incomes with commodity production. In colonial Bengal, families that took up commodity production on the homestead or in association with others who owned implements of manufacture constituted a small proportion of all families.⁷ As in other regions, small peasant families used their own means of production, including wooden or metal tools, and locally purchased or home-produced fuel like cow dung cakes and oil cakes to manufacture commodities in and around the homestead. They sold their wares in bulk to wholesale traders or retailed them in small periodic markets to generate income during specific segments of the agricultural calendar. Depending on the materiality of the commodity, particular forms of task-based labor, structured by gender, caste norms, and embodied skills and knowledge acquired through

familial division of labor over generations, became crucial to sustaining the social reproduction of the homestead. Small peasant commodities were also defined by the relative urgency and need for cash in rural households that had to pay different types of rent to landlords or colonial collectors, as well as interest and principle at contracted times to moneylenders. In Naogaon, debt cycles complicated the plant's intense reliance for its psychoactive potential on ecology, care, and cultivation methods, and this dependence was baked into land and population growth and the labors of cultivation and care that straddled the spatial relationship between fields, homes, and manufacturing yards.

Analyzing small peasant commodity production requires attention to contextual, endogenous, and locally rooted developments within unique agricultural and commercial worlds in a specific region. Gur, a form of boiled sugar molasses used in South Asian homes, is the most significant historical example. In a pathbreaking study of Gorakhpur gur, Shahid Amin established the importance of the cultural and historical uniqueness of locally manufactured sugar molasses to the geography of Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Banaras, Ghazipur, and central Indian regions connected by the Ghaghra River. Forms of domination in the region shaped by global sugar market dynamics under British rule continued under capitalist enterprise despite successive years of profits. To explain this paradox, Amin eschewed top-down, exogenous factors to demonstrate how the peasantry remained entrenched in relations of dependency before and through the rise of capitalist enterprise in sugar production because people in the eastern United Provinces preferred gur over raab, another kind of sugar. Gur's value to the homestead was further defined by the three overlapping calendars of harvest, debt, and obligation separated by the temporal rhythms of Nakshatras (lunar calendrical sectors). Further, the relation between periods of production and periods of work, and the reliance on indigenous tools and implements like the *kolhu*, constituted the material basis for the continuation of dependency not outside but *within* peasant life.⁸ Amin showed how indigenous technologies, temporalities, and agrarian environments of subaltern life together mediated and constrained the effects of exogenous factors, market rationalities, and speculative lending. His analysis rooted the history of capitalism firmly inside the home and field of the sugarcane peasant by showing that gur, as a small peasant commodity, was not only a high revenue earner *but also* an effective debt-servicing commodity. Peasants manufactured gur in the homestead for some months in the agricultural calendar to repay debts in other months, not because manufacturing yielded extra savings that might subsequently reduce structural dependencies and intergenerational indebtedness to moneylenders. Even cooperative production and lending in the twentieth century failed to "free" the peasant homestead to engage further in a colonial capitalist economy.

Naogaon Ganja was a similar, though not identical, small peasant commodity whose role as a debt-servicing and revenue-earning product continued reproducing dependent agriculture under colonial conditions. Most of the ganja in Naogaon

was produced by small landholders with a particular historical social fabric and forms of indebtedness.⁹ But their history and the considerable presence of Santals, especially in photographs of the ganja mahal, has been entirely overlooked so far.¹⁰ The small peasant economy in Naogaon revolved around two key factors: first, a history of land tillage and population expansion shaped by environmental catastrophe and colonial violence and, second, the spatial configuration of work routines and debt relations extending from the homestead to the field and manufacturing yard. Ganja's journey from seed to smoking pipe is incomplete without an account of land, labor, debt, and space.

LAND AND POPULATION IN THE GANJA MAHAL

When the British East India Company acquired the diwani of the subah of Bengal in 1765, Jessore, not Naogaon, was the home of renowned ganja. When, in November 1876, Kerr held "conversations with most of the oldest and intelligent among the Ganja cultivators" in Naogaon's largest villages, he encountered a history barely more than a century old.¹¹ From elderly villagers, he learned that "about the year 1127 BS [1722 CE] . . . the narcotic was for the first time cultivated in the village of Balubhora in the district of Bogra and in that of Muradpur in Rajshahye which adjoins it, the seeds having been imported from Kushtea where there were shops for the sale of the drug."¹² Kushtia was an important entrepot on the banks of the Padma at the southern edge of the Rajshahi district borders, more than 130 kilometers south of Naogaon, where petty vendors sold ganja bought from cultivators in Jessore district. In Jessore, villages spread between Kushtia in the north and the central town of Taragunia had earned wide repute for manufacturing "Jessori Ganja." Its signature trait was a strictly timed manufacturing method of drying and curing under the sun. "The floral spikes were rolled on a mat so as to make the florets adhere to each other and assume a long tapering cylindrical form," Kerr reported.¹³ The method further relied on a delicate balance of rain and moisture during cultivation, and the final product simply went by *gol*, meaning "rolled" or "round," in marketplaces. In the 1720s, cultivators from Jessore likely moved to two villages, namely, Balubhora, abutting the Choto Jamuna, and Muradpur, 60 kilometers to the north.

Significant changes occurred between 1770 and 1840 when more people migrated to the villages that are now in Naogaon. Like most of Bengal, Jessore confronted calamity when the rains stopped in September 1769. News of widespread famine in the countryside began to trickle into correspondences of the East India Company as early as November, but Harry Verelst, then president of the company's Court of Directors, chose to ignore them.¹⁴ The effects of the insufficient spring harvest that year and the dry summer, coupled with new land taxes, led to the Great Bengal Famine of 1770. Ensuing starvation, a smallpox epidemic, and vagrancy caused the death of between one-third and one-fifth of the population

across the colony—a demographic decline in millions that fundamentally restructured peasant life for the following six decades. Smallholding peasant families in the southern Bengal delta deserted their holdings and migrated in search of more cultivable land in the north or to find employment as seasonal laborers.¹⁵ In Jessore, one of the company’s tax collectors, the aumil Ujagger Mull, petitioned for immediate relief, noting that “the people are bringing in the leaves of trees from the jungles for food . . . [and] many of the ryots are running away.”¹⁶ Thousands were forced to migrate to Dhaka, Calcutta, and other towns. Colonial officials reckoned with depopulation on one hand and land passing out of tillage on the other.¹⁷ The severity of tax collection, the lack of food grain, and the bare circulation of currency in the years of the famine only deepened the impact of financial insecurity and poverty.¹⁸

Over Jessore’s history, prolonged changes in agrarian environments came via famine and drought cycles, often caused by overflowing rivers or ill-timed rainfall. Especially between 1787 and 1801, wrote L. S. S. O’Malley, “when Jessore was frequently inundated, famine due to the destruction of crops by floods was by no means rare.” In 1787, when a cyclone immediately followed the floods in September, “a great quantity of rice floated away, or was submerged and rotted . . . and the date trees, mustard seed and pulse crops were seriously injured.”¹⁹ The slow devastation caused by the smaller famines in 1787 and 1791, when the rice crop failed and the collector reported that “all hope was gone,” further compounded the adversities facing the agrarian and commercial economy in northern and central Jessore district.²⁰ In the following decades, many deserting peasants from Jessore migrated northward to upper Bengal districts like Rangpur in search of cultivable land. Sugata Bose has described this migration as the motor that expanded cultivable land in agrarian zones where “the logic of the person-land ratio” could put small peasants in a good bargaining position.²¹

For ganja cultivators from Jessore, the elevated lands of Naogaon and Muradpur in Rajshahi district presented an advantageous opportunity, and ganja cultivation in Jessore declined sharply by 1830. It continued sparsely in some areas until 1843, after which it dropped sharply and then dwindled further until the district administration officially suppressed it with little opposition in 1875. Reasons offered for the continued unprofitability or undesirability of ganja production in Jessore were often vague. Officers cited interference from zamindars or Company servants posted in Jessore. Charles Cornwallis had introduced an excise licensing system in Bengal in 1793 that empowered officials to collect taxes from liquor distillers and traders of ganja and opium. His tenure as governor-general of the East India Company’s territories in Bengal (five years after his surrender at Yorktown in 1781, which ended the US Revolutionary War) is better known for the zamindari system that created permanent large landholding estates in Bengal. Revenue farming by zamindari estates was meant to bolster the company’s treasury after mismanagement under Warren Hastings’s tenure (1773–85) led to his impeachment in

a trial prosecuted by Edmund Burke in 1788. Cornwallis's excise policies, however, often led to arbitrary methods of revenue collection and to excessive use of force by company officials and zamindars charged with accumulating the fixed rent assigned to their estates or charges levied in market sites in their localities.

In Jessore, excise rules caused immediate conflicts. Ganja merchants (*byaparis*) who conducted wholesale deals regularly evaded excise fees while buying approximately fifty to sixty thousand maunds, at four or five rupees per maund, from village markets in Noapara, Fakirhat, Keshubpur, and Kushtia.²² By 1809 the comprehensive failure to levy state power on ganja traders was not lost on British bureaucrats. "The byaparis might come, make their whole transactions in a single night, and clandestinely export large quantities of ganja without paying tax," recalled J. Westland. Boat traffic, especially before dawn, on the Padma, which was navigable almost year-round, helped traders evade the revenue collectors and watchmen (*chaukidars*) stationed at docks and market sites. The district collector's frustration led him to "propose making ganja a monopoly" in 1809, which the company immediately rejected.²³ As chapters 3 and 6 show, monopoly production nonetheless kept reappearing as a much-debated possibility into the twentieth century.

Since the Permanent Settlement in 1793, the deep unevenness of colonial operations on the ground repeatedly revealed cleavages within the company-state. In Jessore, tensions grew between the expanded jurisdiction of the civil judge and the executive authority of district collectors on questions of excise licensing. For instance, the overbearing approach of J. Melvill, the civil judge of Jessore in 1799, resulted in continuous frictions between the state's judicial and commercial branches. In 1800, when ganja traders were prosecuted by the Collector's Office for selling without a license, Melvill decided that they were "not obliged by law" to take out sale licenses. He fined the company "five rupees as compensation to the traders on account of false accusation."²⁴ When the district collector appealed the judgment, Melvill fined him 200 rupees before again punishing him with another, 100-rupee fine for taking the matter to the Board of Revenue in Calcutta. Jessore's ganja traders were gradually finding themselves increasingly perceived by the colonial state both as subjects of policing and as appellants in court. By the 1820s, the new ganja-growing tracts, northward in Rajshahi district's Naogaon, began to appear as a much more promising prospect.

After 1793, the company-state had delimited Rajshahye into two huge subdivisions—Natore and Sadar, which included Naogaon. Both had low-lying rice cultivation zones and, by 1810, witnessed a gradual expansion of police and revenue bureaucracy at the subdivisional level.²⁵ Two more urban sites—the towns of Natore and Rampur Bauleah (later, Boalia)—grew into administrative centers. Natore was synonymous with the wealthy estates of the Tagore family, and Rampur Bauleah's commercial and geographic centrality led to its designation as the district's administrative capital.²⁶ North of Bauleah, Naogaon remained cordoned

off by two rivers which fed the lower paddy-growing lands. These tracts grew *aus* (early rice) and *aman* (winter rice) and abutted marshy lands that grew *boro* rice. The central and southern parts of the district had started growing jute by the 1860s. In 1872, *macchat* and *chhot* (shorter) jute were grown on 14,333 acres in the Sadar lowlands.²⁷ Rajshahi's riverine geography underwrote its commercial importance to local merchant capitalists, indigo planters, and the East India Company. For nearly the whole year, tugboats and cargo vessels carried agricultural products and commercial goods across the central and southern parts of the district, both home to some of the largest zamindari estates in colonial Bengal.

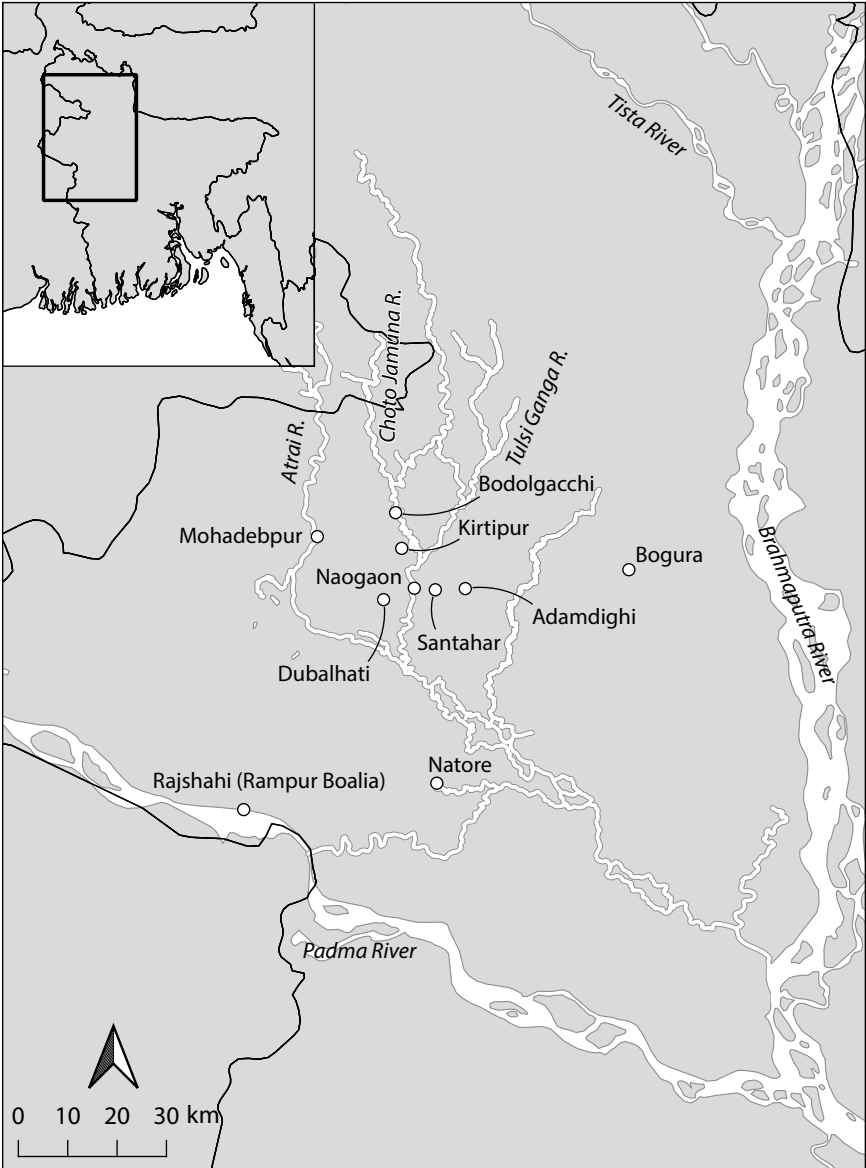
In contrast, Naogaon sat tucked away at the district's northeastern edge, full of leopards and marshes and bordered by a densely forested tract that straddled newly formed rivers—the Atrai and the Choto (little) Jamuna. These smaller rivers were barely navigable by two-ton floats in the summer, when they largely dried up. Naogaon's access to the rest of the district and extended trading networks increased seasonally only after the monsoon months of September and October, when up to thirty-five-ton cargo boats could ferry goods through Naogaon.²⁸ Some villages on the Choto Jamuna depended entirely on the river trade: Fishermen and boatmen earned extra income from transporting local agricultural commodities. Interior villages depended on small-scale rice and subsistence farms of potato, ginger, and pepper.²⁹ Rajshahi had three kinds of agricultural soil: the *barind* in the south, which had red clayey soil rich in iron and lime; the central alluvial plains, with loamy soil that had risen with years of silt deposits to a height where flood waters couldn't submerge the lands anymore; and the upland tracts that were submerged only during heavy rains but otherwise remained dry. Naogaon, situated on the upland fringe, had loamy soil (*pali mati*), which was ideal for ganja cultivation despite not having the higher alluvial nutrients of the lower reaches. Its elevation worked to its advantage because the ganja plant was extremely sensitive to rainfall, moisture, and humidity during cultivation and manufacture. Raised lands relied on rainfall in spring for irrigation and, except in years with heavy rains, were not as severely affected by the riverine flooding that historically reshaped the ecology of the lower Bengal delta.³⁰

Popularly known as the ganja mahal, the agrarian tract surrounding Naogaon grew in area as more cultivators from Jessore and surrounding areas chose to settle within its reaches after clearing forested and fallow land. The category *mahal*, literally “home” or “estate,” connoted a demarcation of land that drew its identity either from its primary yield or those who owned or dwelt on the land. In juridical and fiscal terms, mahals were precolonial arrangements of revenue division, usually pertaining to a specific neighborhood or tract of land, which bound together items of production and exchange in each tract with a jurisdictional authority to tax granted by the state to its agents as acknowledgments of power and patrimony. Between 1770 and 1855, ganja cultivation and manufacture in Naogaon expanded by leaps and bounds. With Naogaon at its heart, by 1830 the ganja mahal spread

outward from the large villages of Balubhora and Muradpur to neighboring ones like Kirtipur and Gobindopur. The mahal's ganja-growing villages were tabulated in one list in 1853, which had become dated by 1876 as the mahal expanded to a radius of about sixteen miles covering sixty thousand acres between the forested northern edges of Adamdighi and Badalgachi in Bogra district, Patnitolla in Dinagepore district, and the mango cultivating lands immediately south of Naogaon. Even as the "Ganja Mahal" circulated as an official referent in colonial documents, its boundaries undulated in scope and remained thoroughly slippery. The village of Naogaon remained a relatively fixed focal point within the triangle formed above the confluence of the two rivers, while the ganja-growing tract itself was more fluid, changing annually in relation to the rotation of cultivation plots and fluctuations of seasonal yields.

The mahal was also an imagined geography. It resembled a sea of green cannabis fields shifting year by year while remaining bounded within the totality of a tract whose contiguity drew on people's perceptions of where the mahal began and ended. Regardless, this imagined geography had a physical foundation. It sat on a complex set of land tenures and occupancy titles. Many ganja plots were chosen based on the extent of land cleared in previous years. Plots grew in different shapes and sizes and did not always fall within the boundaries claimed by the local zamindar's estate. The largest landholding estates in the area were Dubalhati and Bali-har, which belonged to different branches of the same family of zamindars.³¹ The Dubalhati estate was first mapped in 1791 following Major James Rennell's maps of Rajshahi district's land, roads, and rivers—maps based on scanty data from 1770.³² Dubalhati had 44,813 bighas of culturable land, which increased to 53,059 bighas in 1804. The reclamation of 8,246 bighas in these thirteen years (1791–1804) reflected the gradual investments made by ganja cultivating families in turning fallow or forest land into cultivable tracts.³³ By 1920, Dubalhati had increased to a total of 1,09,782 bighas (36,594 acres), covering 195 villages and nearly half the ganja mahal. When Rajshahi district was completely surveyed in the 1920s, settlement officers relied on ganja survey maps produced by excise officers and Dubalhati's settlement records. They investigated discrepancies in the maps, verified them against their observations, and concluded that ganja cultivators had cleared forested tracts and expanded the mahal far beyond Kerr's description in 1873.³⁴ Naogaon's cultivable ganja land, Settlement Officer W. H. Nelson noted, were larger than Natore's rice plots.

Much of ganja growing land inside Dubalhati estate was *khas-khamar* land, which meant that occupancy rights had been secured due to "undisturbed possession for a number of years" by peasants who were *nij-jotdars*, with medium-sized holdings. They were not as land rich as *jotdars* in neighboring districts of eastern Bengal, and their cash rents varied based on plot allocation and debts owed annually to the zamindar. In 1872, for instance, the rent on ganja lands ranged between 1 rupee, 4 annas (7s, 6d per English acre) to 2 rupees, 8 annas (15s per English



MAP 1. Naogaon and the Ganja Mahal, skirted by the rivers Atrai, Choto Jamuna, and Tulsī Ganga. Cartography by Juan Cobo Betancourt.

acre).³⁵ As more land was cleared for ganja cultivation in the nineteenth century, peasant families carved them into plots for settlement as well. Often a single peasant family held small plots as tenants within the locally recognized village boundaries of the Dubalhati estate, as well as portions of newly cleared land outside it. As the ganja crop rotated between plots in successive years, competing claims over percentages of rent, sizes of smallholdings, and the standard baseline for measurements produced significant land disputes.

In 1888, Munshi Nundjee, armed with a plane-table and instruments from the Government Mathematical Instruments Department, began survey operations on the forty thousand acres in and around Dubalhati estate. The area's history of acrimonious land disputes meant he had his work cut out for him. Raja Horonath Roy Chaudhuri, scion of the Dubalhati family, had been embroiled in disputes with his tenants for decades, and Nundjee discovered that measurement was key.³⁶ As local legend had it, sometime in the sixteenth century, the merchant Jugat Ram Roy anchored his boats at night near Dubalhati. Apparently inspired by a dream in which the goddess Rajarajeshwari asked him to take her idol out of the river and worship it, Roy decided to use this divine drama to claim control of the lands by the river and announced the offer of loans to any peasants who wished to clear more marshy land and expand the estate. In the years after this invitation, the estate grew and Jugat Ram's descendants negotiated a tax worth 22 kahans of koi fish with the Mughal Empire, along with "nominal revenue" assessed by Raja Todar Mal, the *mashrif-i-diwan* (revenue minister) in Emperor Akbar's court, when he was briefly posted to Bengal in the late sixteenth century. The estate likely maintained its size over the next two hundred years, following which Lord Cornwallis's agents negotiated a fixed zamindari revenue of Rs. 22,000 under the Permanent Settlement. Kishto Ram, the descendant who made that settlement, died soon thereafter, and his widow lost all four of her adopted sons early in life. Kishto Ram's brother, Raghoo Ram, took over the Dubalhati zamindari responsibilities and was awarded a *toori* and *donka* (tom-tom and bugle) as signs of distinction by the nawab of Murshidabad.³⁷

Horonath Roy Choudhuri was an adopted descendant of Raghoo Ram who, for his good relations with British officials, was awarded the title of raja on 12 March 1875.³⁸ With the more formal title, now-raja Horonath Roy Choudhuri went about consolidating his dominion and sought to move past a previous infamous quarrel with his mother to secure his ascent to the head of the family. Since property was inherited by male descendants, his mother had adopted him early in his life to ensure a stable inheritance, and family strife, Nundjee's interviews suggested, were reflected in Horonath's exploitative actions. To assert his place, Horonath had repeatedly manipulated land title documents, charged arbitrary cesses, and tried to raise rents, which tenants resisted tooth and nail. The location and exact measurement of plots in land titles were unclear for a number of reasons. Originally, sometime in the early eighteenth century, several tenants had been allotted

plots measured using the *hath-kati*, a unit equal to the length of the forearm of Horonath's great-grandfather, Shibnath Roy. Numerous disputes that came before the local *munsif* (judge) in the 1850s made it clear to Nundjee that a large mass of tenants understood their standard allotment to have been 110 *hath-katis* or *haths*, whereas Horonath insisted it was, in fact, only 80, and that tenants ought to pay more on land they had seized without authorization. Horonath did not stop there. Besides asserting that each *hath-kati* had a strict equivalent in eighteen inches, he flipped the script on the shadow cast by his status as an adopted son. In a dramatic plot twist, he claimed that Shibnath Roy, the original bearer of the forearm, was in fact not a member of the Dubalhati family at all.

Land disputes and Horonath's desire for more rent payments were further complicated because cultivators had indeed turned land into ganja plots larger in size than what they received licenses for. *Gomashtas*, the revenue functionaries and collection agents who maintained client relationships with generations of zamindar patrons, knew this reality and often used it to extract cash payments for themselves or speculate on ganja yields. As more land was cleared, many tenants occupied or rented land "scattered in two or more villages," and the raja's *gomashtas* formally assessed lump-sum rents. Nundjee discovered evidence of the *gomashtas*' expropriation of land and rent over decades as ganja-growing plots rotated over several villages in the ganja mahal. He established an average rent schedule and concluded that "while a raiyat cultivated no land in the village, a certain amount of rent was entered against his name in the jama wasil baki papers of that village, and that while a raiyat did cultivate a certain area of land in [another] village, his name did not appear in the papers of that village."³⁹

In the widespread "absence of any record of mutation of holdings, subdivision of tenancy, and distribution of rent in the Rajah's serishta [tenancy record book]," Nundjee was able to locate the source of the problem. The *gomashtas* "generally admitted that they had prepared the papers, but alleged that they were compelled by the Rajah." They claimed Horonath forced them to go through "old rough *chittahs* supplied by [his] *jummanavis*" to produce rental papers that were "not based on any measurement [and] showed areas that were fabulous and could not be the basis of a comparison to assess excess area." In general, plot deeds (*chittah*), tenancy account books (*jumma wasil baki* papers), and new land registers (*jumma navi*) were all riddled with errors. Amid a volley of accusations, Nundjee concluded that the rajah had been operating with a dedicated crew of *gomash-tas*, some of whom were given the title *gram mandal* (headman) and who had formed a veritable "agrarian league" since 1885 (1291 BS) to solidify their arbitrary use of power. The recorded rent for the village *mandals* was "exceedingly low" even though they had leveled and expropriated much bigger plots where small water bodies had dried up and the land was left untilled for considerable time. Nundjee also found that if a tenant deserted a plot of land with, "say, 10 bighas assessed at re. 1 per bigha," *mandals* simply carved out a portion of it, say 5 bighas, and handed

it over to another peasant family at a rate of 2 rupees per bigha. This left the gross collection of rent in any village the same while *mandals* encroached on half the available plots.⁴⁰ Ganja cultivators also had calendrical interest payments based on money borrowed from wealthier *gomashas* and landholders who also served as moneylenders. Of the 195 villages settled within Dubalhati estate, 84 were predominantly ganja-growing villages lying in the “nonrice” upland north and east of the village of Naogaon, many of which had such layered and contentious histories of tillage.

The social fabric of these villages was also shaped by subaltern insurgency. In the early 1850s, after two decades of exploitative lending, fraudulent land grabbing, cattle theft, and sexual exploitation by Hindu moneylenders and merchants in Birbhum and the Rajmahal Hills in western Bengal, Santal rebels took up arms in the *hul* (insurrection). British imposition of rent on land in the Damin-i-Koh, a region cleared and settled by Santals under company encouragement, and efforts by indigo planters to coerce Santals into indigo cultivation, justifiably drew the ire of Santal leaders. In the *hul*, Santal rebels attacked prominent moneylenders and indigo planters, freed Santal men from police jails, and proclaimed themselves lords of their own land. Defeats for British forces in Bhagalpore and the Rajmahal Hills were followed by larger troop deployments from neighboring districts and the declaration of martial law in November 1855. The Santal *hul* was cruelly repressed by the company’s military, supplemented by soldiers serving regional Hindu kings. The colonial state subsequently declared the Santal Parganas to be a territory subject to special protections under Act XXXVII of 1855 and sought to remove middlemen in the relationship between British administrators and Santal subjects.

Direct colonial oversight gradually produced two displacements: forced recruitment of laborers for plantations, and voluntary migration to cash crop zones east of the Padma. Coercive British resettlement of Santal labor on tea plantations in Assam after the counterinsurgency was aided by Bengali *arkattis* (labor recruiters) who operated over new networks of freight railways. Bound by regimented workdays, indentured servitude under white planters in fenced plantations in the Duars and Assam was an organized assault on Santal practices of spatiality and temporality.⁴¹ To colonial officials, sedentarized labor was an antidote to the seasonal migratory practices of Santals, always already racialized as “uncivilized nations” and “primitive races.” Migratory patterns of Santal families were the other site of disciplining.⁴² Historically, geographies of Santal mobility that predated colonial rule had extended from western Chota Nagpur, Murshidabad, and Birbhum across the Padma River deep into eastern Bengal. The *barind*, covering southern Rajshahi and parts of Bogra and Pabna, was cultivated seasonally by immigrant Santal families from the early nineteenth century. With the demographic decline in eastern Bengal, Santal, Munda, and Oraon families found more work clearing and cultivating land there. This process expanded manifold in eastern Bengal after the repression of the Santal

Rebellion and the Rebellion of 1857–59 in central India and what B. B. Chaudhuri has called the “gradual weakening of Santhal social and economic structures” in the period after 1865.⁴³

Santal families from west of the River Padma cleared and settled new land, but lack of capital and caste-based structures restricted them from transitioning into land ownership in rural Bengal.⁴⁴ In Naogaon, census estimates were often inadequate and data on Santal in-migration was quite patchy. When British revenue agents first estimated Rajshahi’s population in 1834, they did not record Naogaon as an important rural center, but the gomashtas of the Dubalhati and Balihar zamindars who worked as temporary surveyors recorded 8,847 Hindus and 23,668 Muslims inside Dubalhati. However, in the 1872 census of Rajshahi, when Naogaon was placed in the “jungly” police circle (*thana*) of Bandaikara, 2 percent of the resident population in the district was Santal, 77 percent Muslim, and 21 percent Hindu.⁴⁵

Naogaon’s peasantry, for whom Santal families worked, was deeply stratified. The largest landholders held anywhere between 35 to 50 bighas (12–17 acres) of land, out of which at most 25 bighas were licensed out to ganja cultivation in a year. In contrast, most of the other cultivators owned much smaller plots, between 20 *cottahs* and 4 bighas at most (0.33–1.32 acres), of which a minimum of 10 *cottahs* (0.16 acres) would be farmed out for ganja.⁴⁶ By comparison, in the 1870s, less than 10 bighas (3.5 acres) was considered a “very small” holding, and anything near 100 bighas (33 acres) would be a “very large” holding in Rajshahi.⁴⁷ Smallholders were predominantly Muslim families, some of which practiced polygamy. Chakrabarti noted that Muslim wives deserved the most credit for handling the ordeals of peasant life in Naogaon. In his view, the *krishok-kamini* (peasant wife or woman) was pivotal in producing things that Brahman Hindu cooks could serve for the pleasure of the elite women who employed them. Peasant wives ran entire homesteads, maintained good health (*nirogini shokti shalini*), and hardly ever fell ill, whereas the wealthy Hindu women in the neighboring zamindari estates barely moved a muscle and demanded labor from a subservient peasantry.

Chakrabarti’s vignettes of peasant polygamy in Naogaon provide a rare glimpse of family structures. As a narrative device, they allow him to fictionalize elements of peasant life while inserting political and social critiques of British colonialism into his essays. In one instance he recounted, a Muslim cultivator’s two wives went to a judge (*kaji bicharok*) and asked him to arbitrate their irreconcilable differences. It turned out the judge knew that the husband had yet other wives living in another village in the ganja mahal. In the vignette, the judge rues the onset of British rule before mocking the peasant by telling him that during the rule of nawabs in Bengal (*nobab-badshar rajotyokale*), the young nawabs had to keep track of how many marriages, for pleasure and strategic alliances, they had entered. But now that the British were in power, the judge observed, things had changed, and one man could have only one wife by law. “If people can stumble through life with one wife,” the judge asked the cultivator, “why, say, do you need so many?”

The poor peasant was equally caustic. Referring to British colonial masters, he retorted, “Those who freeze and melt with the smallest change in weather, it is to feed them that I need so many wives.”⁴⁸ Subtly, Chakrabarti grounded polygamy in the political economy of peasant labor and rural poverty, and not in an ahistorical idea of custom.

His witty and humorous commentary on peasant consumerism further illustrates his attention to women’s roles, desires, and labor. As colonial trade expanded to envelop the interior reaches of the ganja mahal, Naogaon’s households increasingly engaged with markets in consumer goods from overseas. As Tariq Omar Ali has shown, the rural Muslim homestead was not just a unit of productive activity: It was also a habitation of consumers.⁴⁹ In Chakrabarti’s memoir, Naogaon’s households were part of emerging commercial relationships of exchange whereby visiting wholesale dealers from different parts of India brought goods like decorative smoking pipes (hookahs), French shawls, English handkerchiefs, handwoven carpets, Western Indian tunics and shirts (*chogha* garments), and long buttoned cotton dresses called *chapkans*.⁵⁰ The *chapkan*, commonly a name for a traditional Indian cloth, was also used for the nightgown or nightie worn by English women. These were creatively adapted to suit the tastes of elite women in Calcutta, where they became fashionable. Rural desires followed the evolution of urban tastes, and sales of women’s clothes rose in particular years proportionately with income from ganja. For instance, in the early 1890s when wholesale ganja prices were high, Chakrabarti noted that Muslim women bought shawls made of white silk with red borders (*goroder chador*) imported from towns west of Calcutta, foreign-made shoes (*biliti juta*), and stockings (*ishtoking*). The internal dynamics of desire and taste in peasant homes that run in Chakrabarti’s narrative also contextualize how Naogaon’s homesteads navigated their growing inclusion into the world market in the nineteenth century.

Peasant consumption was one aspect of a complex history of intergenerational indebtedness and rural dependency in Naogaon. Especially before new licensing rules took effect in 1855, wholesale buyers brought consumer goods from elsewhere in India to pay peasant cultivators in kind, not cash, and interlace business relations with nonmonetary forms of mutuality. However, rapid increases in regional demand by the 1880s brought in a system of cash advances that soon outmoded in-kind exchange. In-kind payments covered only a part of the cost owed to the peasant and were a key component in forestalling full payment on a year’s contract, leading to social relations of debt rolling over into the following year. Before exploring how histories of indebtedness accumulated over time to shape credit crises and excise administration, it is crucial to understand the spatiality of labor in the manufacturing season that followed the cultivation and harvest.

Both cultivation and manufacture of ganja products depended on the complex dynamics of the peasant homestead and the migratory cycles and eventual settlement of Santal labor. Together, these histories, with their corresponding divisions

of labor, fundamentally decenter the title-holding figure of the ryot. Agrarian histories of South Asia have recently shown that the ryot, always a male peasant figure defined as an engaged subject in British India's land revenue systems, has repeatedly overshadowed how the entire homestead was a dynamic unit. Far from being fixed, homesteads moved across rural landscapes, as family members migrated seasonally for work between villages. The family, extended kin, the spatial organization of domestic space, and modes of desire and consumption in the household, which together made up a homestead, was the actual and fundamental unit of social reproduction.⁵¹

In the ganja mahal, the labor of harvest and manufacture had different rhythms of work defined by the spatiality of the *chator* (manufacturing yard) and the home. Laboring relationships underlying social reproduction in the ganja mahal went beyond the gendered work of culturing the biological reproduction of marda cannabis stalks explored in chapter 1. While parakdari during cultivation was crucial to capitalizing on the intoxicating resin formed before pollination, the labors of shredding, curing, pressing, drying, and packaging in an arduous manufacturing process came thereafter. This interlocking gendered process of reproductive and "capital-positing forms" of labor that bridged homestead, field, and manufacturing yard constituted what can be called, paraphrasing Doreen Massey, the *spatial form and spatial content* of ganja production.⁵²

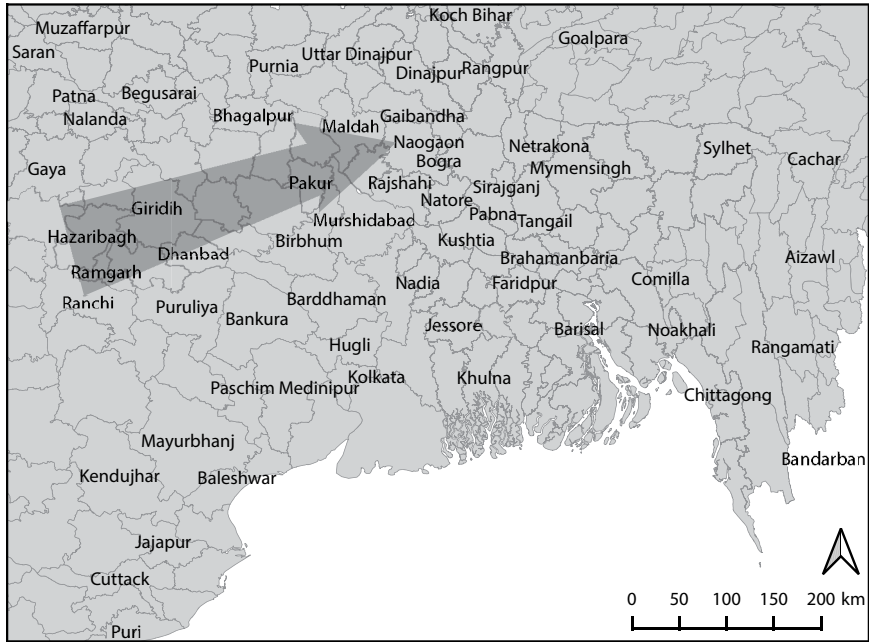
LABOR AND SPATIALITY IN THE GANJA MAHAL

The spatiality and rhythms of work linking the homestead to the field and yard capture the richness and complexity of care, labor, and gender that formed the bedrock of small peasant commodity production in Naogaon. The labor of parakdars in detecting the anatomy of cannabis stalks and the social basis of classifying plants as marda and madi constituted a symbolic and material gendering of plant-human relations in Naogaon. The overlooked gendered history of Santal family labor and the spatiality of the peasant homestead complements such relations.⁵³ Land reclamation processes that turned marshy or forested land into cultivable plots to produce the spatial configuration of an agricultural zone began with migratory Santal workers in the early nineteenth century. Santal families that had migrated as seasonal farmworkers began permanently settling in Naogaon's villages in the mid-nineteenth century after the repression following the *hul*. The gradually growing number of Santal families found work in land reclamation, a fact that colonial discourses about Naogaon's "virgin soil" often overlooked. Chakrabarti described the labor of Santal women as "*hanr-bhanga khatuni*," or bone-breaking labor.⁵⁴ As larger numbers of wholesale buyers from all over Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and Hindu temple cities around India like Mathura, Puri, and Vrindavan began making annual trips to Naogaon to lock down batches of ganja, successive waves of land clearing followed. The first wave in the 1830s was

followed by another, in the 1860s. “Jungle lands in the northern and western parts of the *Ganja Mahal*,” Kerr wrote in 1873, were being cleared because the “narcotic was very good.” Requirements for the successful cultivation of this “virgin soil was by no means small,” he noted.⁵⁵ Framing soil in terms of virginity, specifically in Naogaon’s context, hitched the gendered discourse of the primacy of the first cultivator, turning soil into land and improving it through tillage, to a middle-class Bengali discourse that framed Santals as innocent, gullible, and hardworking; both discourses contributing to the erasure of Santal histories.

Clearing and leveling land for ganja was indeed labor-intensive. In gangs of four or five members, Santal families engaged in large-scale forest clearing in the 1830s. They encountered several outbreaks of cholera and malaria. In 1831, when cholera spread to Bauleah, Rajshahi’s collector, under orders from the district commissioner, hired prisoners from the Rajshahi jail to build embankments to keep the rivers from flooding southern Naogaon and Sadar. The collector argued that convicts were healthier “when on working parties distant from the station [Bauleah] than when crowded together in a close jail.”⁵⁶ New embankments (*bundhs*) and Santal labor helped Dubalhati and Balihar estates grow in size. Chakrabarti described generations of Naogaon’s Santals as the most hardworking members of its social fabric.⁵⁷ He emphasized how “simple-minded” Santal women worked “equally hard” alongside the men in coolie gangs, underscoring their indispensability to, and their difference from, Hindu and Muslim homesteads where women worked less in the field than in the home.⁵⁸ After the first wave of land clearing, Hindu and Muslim *nij-jot* peasants also began employing settled Santal families in the ganja manufacturing process. Regular seasonal employment swelled their numbers. Chakrabarti’s use of common Bengali stereotypes for Santals—“hardworking,” “docile,” “gullible,” and having a predilection for alcohol—reflected how others in Naogaon perceived the Santal presence. Framing the Santal as primitive, as opposed to modern sedentarized agrarian selfhood, was part of a colonial Victorian compact that sought to evacuate the political, and its accompanying history of insurrections and epistemology of armed anticolonialism, from the indigenous or Adivasi figure. In settling down and no longer seeking migratory work, Naogaon’s Santals represented a laudable development in Chakrabarti’s telling.

By 1877, the high revenue-earning potential of ganja and the ecological suitability of Naogaon had ushered in an era of renown for the region and of specialized rhythms of labor. The manufacturing process was a composite sequence of multiple stages. Cultivation in any year began with the culturing of lands: In the months of March and April, lands selected for cultivation were bounded or provisionally earmarked in a process called the *bhorakata*. The *bhora* (filling) and the *kata* (division) formed a conjoined process of leveling land according to elevation. The ganja crop relied on higher plots that could withstand flooding and drain out water in case floodwaters approached. New plots, once prepared, would be cured to prevent any kind of weed taking root. The curing was relentless: Weeds



MAP 2. Sites of major warehouses that stored Naogaon Ganja. The arrow shows migration of Santal families into Naogaon from the erstwhile Santal Parganas west of the Padma. Cartography by Juan Cobo Betancourt.

sapped the land's fertility, and cultivators agreed they substantially reduced the plants' intoxicant power.⁵⁹ Kerr described how "the sites selected are open fields upon which the shadow of no large trees can fall, for shade of all kinds is held to be injurious." In intervals of three to four days, he wrote, cultivators ploughed up the land "four to ten times according to the state of the field and the means of the person owning it" so as to "free the land of all herbage and stubble." By May, "fresh earth taken out from surrounding ditches of the field, and if sufficient earth cannot be had there, then some low land close by, is put on the field."⁶⁰ With an estimated cost of six to seven rupees for the *bhorakata* and the manuring, cultivating families that couldn't afford the labor pooled resources and shared work among kin.⁶¹ Tools such as spades (*kodalīs*) and "two round flat baskets suspended from a piece of split bamboo" (*bangi*) were usually shared. Kerr found that "the quantity of earth deemed necessary is a basketful over an area of about 3 square feet or as the cultivators express it, 1.5 feet apart, but when the soil is good, a greater width is adopted," taking about "8 to 10 men to dress a bigha of land in one day."⁶²

The careful balance of exposure to sunlight and the manicuring of plots was complemented by cutting ridges and creating beds for ganja saplings. Ridging (*shoolikata*) created channels for rainwater to irrigate and circumvent the plot and

mirrored techniques for cauliflower and potato farming in Naogaon. After raising the plot boundary by nine inches, cultivators planted seeds (*pul*) in beds created next to the fields.⁶³ At equal distances of three feet, workers planted clumps of sod or grass for fertilizing the earth. Then, planted at intervals of four to five inches, the saplings were allowed time to grow. To prevent rainwater from rotting the saplings, family members took turns checking and maintaining the physical stability of the ridges. In September, when the saplings were ready, Santal workers were employed to chop off lower leaves along the stalks, leaving about five inches of growth from the top of each stalk. This procedure, known as the *ganja jhora*, inaugurated the process of curing that continued intermittently until November. Each bed required at least three rounds of stalk cleaning and curing. The *kodal chanch*, or repeated ploughing up of earth near the bed of saplings and using it to firm up the base of each stalk, was, as with the ridging, largely undertaken by cultivators. Continuously clearing any grass that took root in sapling beds was called the *daul chanch*, which often occupied younger family members.

Simultaneously, the intermittent leveling of land using flattened bamboo ladders (*moi*) took acute care. Cultivators surveyed plots endlessly for warning signs of insects, damage, or erosion. Often, the ladders were covered with coconut coir used in carpets to help better flatten the beds. The transplantation of the saplings from the flower beds to the field occurred thereafter.⁶⁴ The previously described unique skills of parakdars came into play once stalks began blooming. *Poddar* and *parakdar* were hereditary titles associated with families that held and transmitted agro-ecological knowledge of ganja cultivation, and were also specific caste names. The separate staminate and pistillate flowering on cannabis stalks was complicated by simultaneously monoecious flowering among stalks considered *khasia*. Often, these flowers were left until the end of the harvest process to be used for their seed oil or consumed as fuel. Over the course of three rounds of inspection per plot (*bhita*), parakdars weeded out the pollinating cannabis stalks to avoid cross-pollination by wind. The labor of parakdars was often the most scrutinized and highly rewarded. In cases where pollination happened, cultivators destroyed “male” stalks in a process called *madi marai*, literally meaning “killing the madi.”

The cultivation process ended and manufacturing began as soon as the resinous sap (*bhuya*) emerged in the stalks. Besides the timing and thoroughness of weeding and curing, hydrological factors complemented the sun and heat in amplifying uncertainty. The timing of rainfall, the humidity in the soil when cultivated, and the moisture from dew during manufacture were key. Wetness also affected the spread of plant diseases: Chakrabarti dwelt on *ombol*, *hirkati*, and *bhuyachata* (sap fungi), which debilitated small peasant resources.⁶⁵ Kerr found that the *hirkati* was only one of many diseases; the insect *sidlepoka*, known to blacken the stalk and leaves of the ganja plant, was also a major problem. Another duo was *kharkhari* and *gorjali*, both forms of blight that dried up the plant. Spiderwebs could also kill ganja saplings. In April 1898, after a substantial loss of crops, Naogaon’s subdivisional

officer sent samples of affected stalks to resident entomologists at Calcutta's Indian Museum who traced the diseases to the *Heliothis armigera*, a moth infamous for attacking hemp and poppy in its caterpillar stage.⁶⁶

The uncertain and sensitive life of production, contingent on factors like the suitability of elevated land, specific hours of sunlight exposure, and peculiarities of the *sidlepoka*, was also stretched spatially. The homestead was complemented by the nurseries for saplings and the portion of a field that was, in rotation, prepared for the cultivation of ganja. The manufacturing process introduced another spatial configuration—the chator. Chators were temporary manufacturing yards built of mud, clay, thatch, and even corrugated tin by the twentieth century. They were erected at carefully calculated distances from ganja plots. These shelters became sites where cultivators and workers gathered to transform the plant into various products sold to wholesale buyers. At some chators, intensive manufacturing could engage up to eight hundred Santal men and women in “coolie” gangs of five, paid at a piece-rate of two rupees per maund (eighty-two pounds) per head. Santal workers extracted seeds, separated resinous flowers, threshed leaves, pressed stalks, and packaged the final cakes readied for shipment.

The homestead, the plot, the field, and the chator were all coordinates that together anchored the gendered social space of ganja in Naogaon. As chapter 1 shows, British revenue laws regularly described ganja as the “unimpregnated dried flowering tops of the cultivated female hemp plant and the resinous exudation on them.”⁶⁷ Such flowering tops, David Prain noted, were a “consequence of having been unable to set seeds freely.”⁶⁸ Principally, the commodification of ganja depended on the human culturing and delimiting of the plant's ability to reproduce, which then enabled the homestead to command higher prices and reproduce itself over time. Cultivating men regularly engaged in “care” of the plant in the nursery and the field, which colonial reports described as rendering ganja an artisanal product and garden crop. The spatiality of production highlighted the gendered world of men caring for masculine-gendered plant stalks, which were otherwise recorded as biologically female in official reports, before families of Santal workers manufactured intoxicating commodities from the plant through wage labor for peasants who subscribed to a view of Santals as docile and primitive.

The first photographic evidence of Naogaon, created in 1894, threw the historical erasure of Santals in relief and produced a compelling view of the spatiality of gender and labor. Textual archives of government correspondences, excise licenses, land deeds, agricultural statistics, and gazettes and surveys had all reproduced an identifiable single cultivator as the figure in charge of producing ganja. Male patriarchs of households that applied for cultivation licenses became legible documented subjects in the interface between a colonial state and a regional and imperial economic circuit. Photographs of fields and chators, however, revealed the labor-intensive work undertaken by *kuli* (coolie) gangs of Santal workers.



FIGURE 5. Four men harvest ganja plants with sickles. 16 February 1894. Survey of India Office, Calcutta, and Wellcome Library.

In these photographs, an excise *darogah* (subinspector or constable), carrying a customary wooden *lathi*, is overseeing the harvest and the first round of separation at the *chator*.⁶⁹ Bearing some similarities with indentured-labor plantations, coolie labor in Naogaon was organized into gangs of men and women supervised by individual heads, identifiable in these photos by their cotton shirts and caps. Manufacturing began with the separation and cutting of ganja stalks, which were subsequently passed on for pressing and trampling. In the photograph, two women in the foreground are engaged in the spreading and drying of the short stalks intended for the manufacture of round ganja. Women from the same family often worked in the same gang. Family relations are difficult to locate in extant records. In fact, Santals were not the only source of family labor. Another term for family labor in ganja was *krishan*, which referred to workers of a single family employed either for the sowing or for the harvesting of ganja.⁷⁰ Colonial reports often imply, but never elucidate, the presence of family labor in ganja manufacture. For instance, Kerr's report accounted for the "value of family

PLATE I.



Fig. 1.—Ganja fields.



Fig. 2.—Harvesting.

FIGURE 6. Two images show (*top*) an excise subinspector standing in front of a field of ripe ganja and (*bottom*), with a clerk, overseeing a manufacturing yard where Santal workers engage in plucking and disentangling ganja stalks. 16 February 1894. Survey of India Office, Calcutta, and Wellcome Library.

labour” when calculating the cost per bigha of ganja cultivation. He estimated that a bigha equaled twenty *cottahs* (or *kathas*) and that the wages paid to a single family for its labor and for the fertilizer it purchased for manuring work in the fields, came to fifty to sixty rupees per bigha.⁷¹ Such makeshift arrangements were common during manufacturing in January and February, as cultivators brought new stalks of green ganja to the chator as soon as older ones had finished being manufactured. Dividing time, labor, and attention between the different steps in the manufacturing process, with bales of ganja in various stages of readiness arrayed or collected around the chator, led many families to engage in flexible labor- and cost-sharing arrangements.

Among some homesteads, joint cultivation was a common practice, as was the sharing of chators during manufacture. Peasant families that conjoined their fields in a practice called *dharani* and those who owned land but not ploughs or oxen engaged in sharing agreements that made up the *adhidari* or *adhiari* system. An *adhiar* shared half the produce of the land with the landowner on condition that he plough and cure the land at his own expense, in addition to bearing most of the responsibility for any taxes owed to the zamindar of Dubalhati. After 1864, Excise Department supervisors often helped oversee *adhiari* agreements to earn the goodwill of cultivators. The relationship between *adhiars* and *nij-jot* tenants who had occupancy rights on land in the large Dubalhati estate for having settled there for a prolonged duration was constituted by shifting burdens of debt. While most expenses of cultivation and manufacture were halved, it was not uncommon for smallholding tenants to advance money to *adhiars* for obtaining fresh earth, buying oilcakes and cow dung for manure, or paying the parakdar’s fee. Usually, half of such costs were recovered after the crop was sold.⁷² In situations where the cash advance was substantial, it was up to the *adhiar* to pay all the labor costs of manufacturing at the chator. Where there was no sharing of land or implements, cultivators often relied on moneylenders and wealthy landholding peasants for cash advances to complete manufacturing.

These relations of debt financed further divisions of labor at the chator. While women and children worked in harvesting and curing the ganja before manufacture, the treading was an exclusively male task. Larger chators of wealthy cultivator-moneylenders were often made of bamboo stalks and thatch, were 200 to 500 square yards (*gaj*) in area, and were divided into four or eight rooms separated by thin bamboo curtains. Each tiny room contained a square pit dug into the earth where two men pressed stalks into shape using their feet and sometimes hands. Most chators were constructed not too far from surrounding plots. However, depending on which of the ganja mahal’s chators wholesale buyers were willing to tour to inspect manufactured batches, larger chators could dominate smaller ones and force small cultivators to bring their ganja to large chators for manufacturing and access to buyers. The distance to be covered between field and chator was also reflected in daily wages. Often, if plants were ripening while standing in the

PLATE II.



Fig. 3.—Spreading and drying.

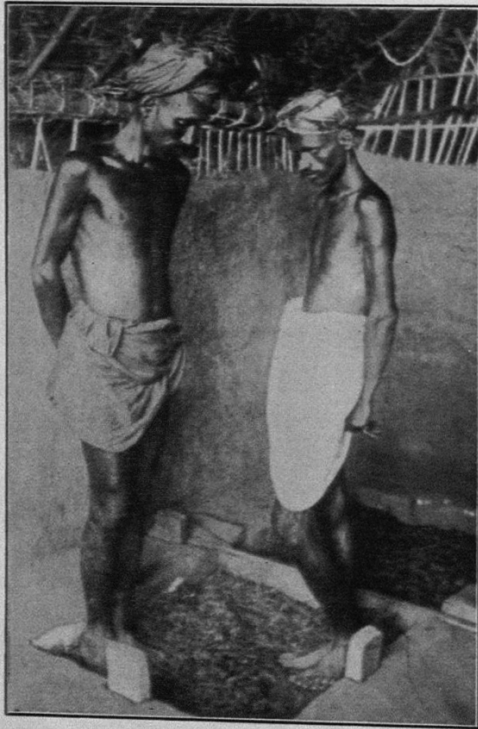


Fig. 4.—Treading.

FIGURE 7. *Top*: Santal women spread and dry ganja on one end of the chator. *Bottom*: Two men trample and tread stalks to massage the resin out. 6 February 1894. Survey of India Office, Calcutta, and Wellcome Library.



FIGURE 8. On the left, two men tread on ganja together. Others prepare a circular arrangement near a *dorma* (mat) and ladder pole. Their chator has only a small pyramidal thatch-bamboo shed. 16 February 1894. Survey of India Office, Calcutta, and Wellcome Library.

field, cultivating families harvested them in the morning and transferred them to chators themselves where employed hands could lay the stalks out, leaving them overnight to be moistened by dew.

For manufacturing *chyapta* (flat) ganja, stalks were bundled together the morning after harvest before they were pressed by individual workers using their feet. Kerr and Chakrabarti recounted how a mat was “spread on the ground upon which the bundles were placed one by one in a circular form with their tops pointing to the centre and overlapping each other.” This circle, about fourteen feet in circumference, was trampled upon by “four or five persons, holding each other by the shoulders . . . stamp[ing] and press[ing] down the plants with their right foot while they held them with their left foot.” Trampling and treading continued until the bundled layers were a foot high. The resin exuded in the process glued together the stalks while seeds got loosened up. Once the resin dried sufficiently, workers thrashed each bundle against another or against chator walls to shake off leaves and seeds, following which trampling continued with the side that was

previously on the bottom now facing up. Trampling continued for four days, with a continuing cycle of exposure to heat and moisture, such that almost all the resin in each stalk of the bundle was, with a discernible consistency, massaged by foot to the top. The seeds that fell off onto the mats were collected and divided among the peasants for cultivation the following year. With more force, useless dry leaves and sharp twigs (*khoncha*) were broken off (*patibhanga*), and the final flattened stack was tied up in bundles with “strips of plantain and bamboo bark” and often then stored privately in the cultivator’s house until wholesale buyers paid for it.

For the manufacture of *gol* (round) ganja, Naogaon’s most prized product, stalks were cut individually into segments measuring approximately 1.5 feet. Resinous flowers were left intact and exposed to the sun for two hours, then taken into the chator. A long bamboo bar hanging on 4-foot-high posts that spanned the length of the room, was then used for *ekmalai* and *dumalai*, a double-pressing technique where workers held the hanging poles for support while forcefully pressing down on stalks laid end to end. Using toes and thumbs to roll each stalk over individually, as many as twelve workers lined up in a row to massage stalks in a process Kerr called “pedipulation, not manipulation.” Less experienced men tied the stalks with twine to keep them organized. These short stalks were then tied, twelve to fourteen pieces in each bundle, and the pressing continued with short breaks to shake off leaves and twigs. *Dumalai*, the second pressing, included feet and hands (*hath muta*) to carefully ensure that each stalk had the highest intoxicant consistency. After being left overnight to gather moisture, bundles were untied and exposed to sunlight (or, on a cloudy day, fire) to ensure their color darkened. The most experienced workers packaged the product in chests, and if only a few were available, more workers were recruited from neighboring Jessore, where elder men had manufactured *gol* ganja before Naogaon’s rise to fame.

The final packaging of round ganja was a point of contention among cultivators and wholesale buyers. Usually, the designated head worker in each chator, often a trusted and experienced hand, assembled groups of three laborers, often Santal, to select stalks of long, medium, and short lengths.⁷³ They arranged these according to length and bundled them so that the long ones covered up the shorter ones in each bundle. Subsequently, bundles were tied with thin jute string, placed under weighty bamboo poles, and exposed to sun the next day and rolled again. Since many wholesale buyers purchased standing crops from individual cultivators, they also oversaw or were present during manufacture and packaging and took only the best bundles. Alternatively, cultivators packaged round ganja on their own, in which case they had greater incentive to include a range of stalks in each bundle.

By 1890 the Excise Department sanctioned machine presses with lever and pulley to be purchased by some large peasants who had previously worked with the government on time-saving methods and even organized entrepreneurial ventures to produce ganja and flour-based food products. Prain found that machine installations added more “pressure” and the “force” necessary for making

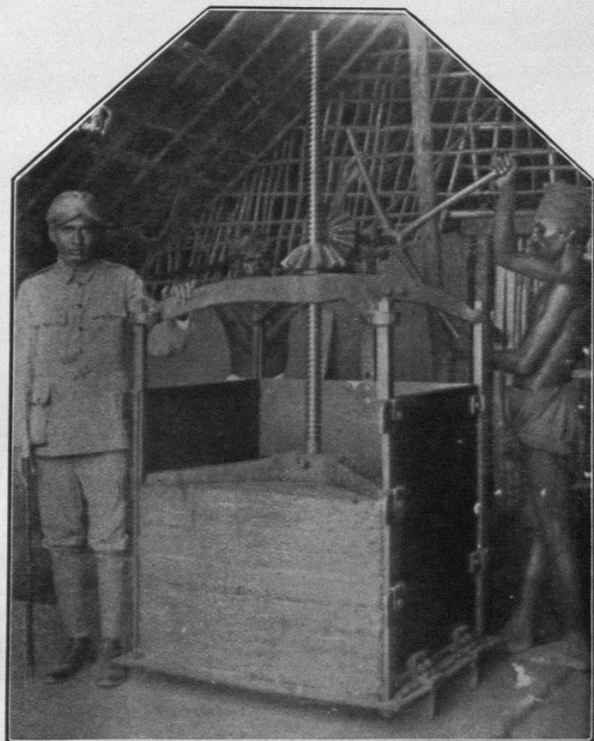


Fig. 5.—Pressing and making flat cakes.

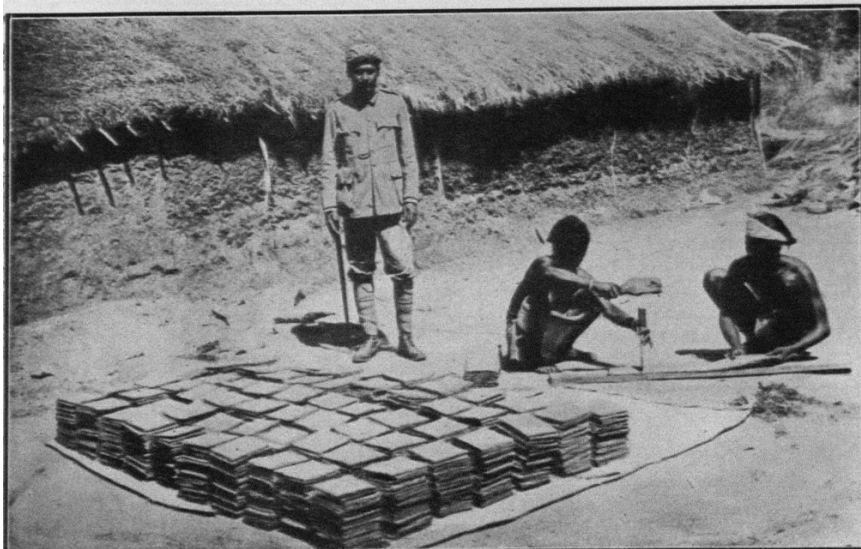


Fig. 6.—Cutting cakes for the market.

FIGURE 9. *Top*: A subinspector poses next to a worker operating a machine press. *Bottom*: Two men cut pressed ganja into cakes for storage and shipment while a subinspector stands nearby. 16 February 1894. Survey of India Office, Calcutta, and Wellcome Library.

the manufacturing process less time-consuming. He claimed that presses could produce at least one maund (82 pounds or 37 kilograms) of ganja in one pressing.⁷⁴ Forceful bodily motion, often by foot and exclusively by men in the chator, appeared prominently in official discourses, gendering ganja production in new ways. Kerr, for instance, emphasized the “forceful stamping” and how feet went from stalk to the flowering tops “with considerable force.”⁷⁵ Treading was the final part of manufacturing, and was considered the most essential because resin agglutinated at the top of the stalk concentrated the potency into a smaller-portioned mass, thus increasing the exchange value. Machine presses, few in number, didn’t depose the individual treader’s primacy but did reinforce the gendering of manufacture as masculine, further cementing the erasure of women and family labor. Presses also promoted packaging of ganja as cakes that could be stacked in wooden chests to preserve quality.

Astral forces of lunar harvest calendars and devotional customs were particularly influential during manufacturing season. Hindu cultivators commonly avoided cutting stalks on a Thursday afternoon or on days considered unholy according to almanacs. Muslim cultivators began reaping, as well as sowing and planting, on Fridays, the day of congregation (*jumma*). Men, following an unspoken rule, bowed to the stacks in the chator before each round of manufacture by feet. The chator’s spatial centrality mediated rhythms of work between the homestead and the farm and became the site where cultivators, workers, moneylenders, and state officials most visibly negotiated deals and performed social relationships of debt, patronage, and favor that were emblematic of Naogaon’s structures of domination.

The world came to the chator with wholesale buyers (*byaparis*), who arrived in Naogaon by early January to oversee manufacturing. They stored purchased bundles, chests, and sacks in warehouses (*golahs*) run by Excise Department appointees or contractors called *goladars*. The *fariahs* or *dalals* (brokers), many of whom were employees of large landholder-moneylenders, negotiated deals between visiting wholesalers and cultivators large and small. Overlapping relations of debt and obligation emerged over the nineteenth century as some brokers also cultivated ganja and engaged in petty moneylending (*mohajoni byabostha*) to emulate the success of large landholders who were powerful creditors in the area. Blurred boundaries and interlocking interests made the identity of *ganja krishok* (ganja cultivator) both deeply differentiated and widely shared.

Wholesalers came from across all the districts of the Bengal presidency, the United Provinces in northern India, Bihar, Assam, and Orissa to purchase round ganja. Vendors in Delhi, Mathura, Vrindavan, and Puri prioritized Naogaon’s ganja in months particularly auspicious for Hindu pilgrims and devotees. As Chakrabarti noted, visiting wholesalers preferred to enter relationships of debt and kinship with large landholders first. In January, wholesale buyers from as far away as Mathura (fifteen hundred kilometers distant) would undertake circuitous

journeys by river and land to the ganja mahal, where they would reside in the houses of wealthier peasants or in accommodation provided by certain landlords. Brokers would escort them around ganja fields so they could select the best round ganja to take back to their respective districts. Kerr recorded 254 wholesalers visiting Naogaon in 1877 who returned with ganja to warehouses in Monghyr, Bhau-gulpore, and Patna in the North Western Provinces, as well as Calcutta traders who bought it for transshipment to Akyab in Burma and Trinidad. The *dalal*, especially in the flat ganja trade, was so powerful that “not a blade of ganja [was] purchased without him and he [was] the man who, of all others, derive[d] the largest profit from the business.”⁷⁶ Kerr added that three or four individuals with huge brokerage networks dominated the area, while others worked in their shadows (a problem addressed further in chapter 3).

Once large landowners completed deals for ganja on their own chators and those belonging to fariah they employed, wholesalers wound their way to farms of smaller peasants who were either indebted to the dominant landholders or had bribed them to get preferential access. Large peasants catered to the continuous demand for cash advances among small ganja farmers throughout the agricultural calendar. These relationships of debt were further complicated by competitive speculative investments by fariah who made cash advances to specific small cultivators early in January after inspecting their fields in order to preemptively “book” their forthcoming yield. When the promised yield at the end of February was lower than expected, the fariah would demand a partial repayment of the advance to the cultivator.⁷⁷ Visiting wholesalers and cultivators of round ganja entered into transactions both before and after the crop was harvested and manufactured.⁷⁸ The former was called the *bhita kharid*, and the latter a *desashoi* transaction. For the *bhita kharid*, the entire price of the crop was fixed before purchase, whereas the *desashoi* system involved small cash advances averaging between two and five rupees per field, but always set under 25 percent of the estimated value of the final crop. *Desashoi* deals were made by the deputies of the wholesaler with the cultivator, who began the manufacturing process on condition that the final product would then be bought at prevailing market rates on the day of the final sale.

Powerful dealers and brokers used the *desashoi* system strategically to manipulate the uncertainties that small peasants faced. Due to the competitive speculation involved, it was common for peasants to enter into *desashoi* transactions while reporting a full *bhita kharid* to the Ganja Supervisor’s Office for fear of not finding a buyer and losing the crop to rats, insects, or bad weather or getting a worse price than what was being offered. While on paper, peasants had been paid the full price of the standing crop, the fluctuating prices in the wholesale market, especially in years of large supply from a bumper crop, determined actual household earnings. After the manufactured product was stored in warehouses between those in Rajshahi and those in the wholesaler’s home district, peasants would wait for the dealers to slowly arrange transshipment. The arrangements for transshipment of

the entire batch often took more than six months, and buyers negotiated installments that depended on prices at the time that each portion of the batch was removed. Until the state began routinely intervening to control prices, peasants lost or deferred substantial sums due to drops in wholesale prices following the first sale. Since the wholesaler hadn't already paid for the whole batch, he had little incentive to retrieve it in full when prices weren't favorable or older stocks remained to be retailed elsewhere in India. Kerr noted that it was routine for the agents of wholesalers to pay certain cultivators a low price and bribe them with extra cash advances on condition that they disclosed the low price as the going market rate in order to create a trend that pressured other cultivators to enter into *desashoi* transactions themselves.

Chakrabarti recounted how, during the manufacture of round ganja, meticulous wholesale buyers would depute their own supervisory staff—servants of their household or temporarily hired coolies from Jessore familiar with ganja manufacture—to “stay day and night in one of the huts built near the chator” to make sure workers didn't leave “woody matter” in the final product. In contrast, buyers of flat ganja, usually from the districts of Dhaka, Mymensingh, Barisal, Nadia, Murshidabad, and Jalpaiguri, were not as particular and liked dressing up in their finest clothes to tour chators and finally visit the cultivating homesteads to finalize their transactions.⁷⁹ Small peasant homesteads served as the main site of storage until 1904, when Excise Department warehouses took over all storage in Naogaon under government bond. Kerr described how bales of unpacked ganja in one Fakir Bakhsh's house “lay in a cowshed without any doors,” whereas Chhedor Mondol's homestead had wooden planks upon which the ganja stacks lay in an unsecured open area. The homestead thus complemented the chator as an additional site of commercial exchange and sociality. Delicate rituals of hospitality and the theater of bargains, debts, and obligations played out in yards facing the peasant home. To welcome and entertain visiting buyers, families bought chairs and benches (*cheyar-benchi*) and finer carpets (*shotoronchi*). This annual theater of the *kretabikreta* (buyers and sellers), Kalimohan Chakrabarti wrote, was a wonderful sight (*opurbo drishyo*) with delights such as colorful *pagris* (headwear), *lotas* (water vessels), and the newest handheld bags.

The spatiality of the social relations of production in the ganja mahal demanded regular investments in furniture, food, hospitality, temporary shelter, storage arrangements, and miscellaneous expenses that required loans at specific times of the year. Unlike the production loans analyzed in depth by Rajat Datta, these market loans were taken out to embellish the homestead as a site for staging transactions, not as investments in actual implements of production. Other small loans for religious and social festivities and events to mark births, deaths, and life events often had different calendars for interest payments. Weddings and funerals occasioned the largest feasts: Muslim smallholders shared the labor of cooking different meats (*khashi mangsho*) and sweets, bringing water

from the river, and making earthen cups (*khuri*). In their togetherness Chakrabarti saw a sense of duty (*kortobyo-kormo*). He marveled both at the industrious work in Muslim homesteads during feasts and what he considered their wasteful spending. Curd or yogurt (*dodhi*), both tart and sweetened, was the most decadent indulgence of Muslim peasants. Wealthier cultivators bought up to two hundred maunds of curd from famous cattle-raising sweet makers downriver in Balubhora, Bontekata, and sometimes even Natore. Smaller peasants spent lavishly on curd made by local dairy farmers. Sweetening the curd required fifteen maunds of sugar, and seating for guests required purchasing or renting mats in smaller homesteads and benches in larger ones. Even if interest rates were high, loans to finance such gatherings were necessary and bound large landholder-moneylenders in deeper relations of credit with small peasants.

Chakrabarti, in spotlighting the lack of seemingly rational market behavior, culturalized what was a structural problem by expressing much frustration at the financially unintelligent (*hishab-hin*) habits of ganja cultivators, both Hindu and Muslim. In years when the ganja prices rose, he complained, most peasants used the extra cash to buy more cattle without accounting for future drops in prices. Often they were ultimately forced to sell their cattle at a loss and recoup cash if debt repayments exhausted ganja earnings and left little for the household's survival. Chakrabarti took this to be a cultural problem of peasant ignorance about market fluctuations, which was patently not true. These were social relations of dependency in a production regime in which moneylenders dominated agricultural production. Chakrabarti culturalized the power of commercial capital in common tropes of Islam in eastern Bengal. He found the indulgences of Muslim peasants to be residual reiterations of aristocratic largesse rooted in precolonial political systems: "Ihara nobab-badshar jati" ("They are all descendants of Nawabs and Badshahs), he wrote. Particularly during funerals, he noted, Muslims were remarkably different than Hindus. While Hindus "wailed, beat their heads dramatically, and caused a huge hue and cry," Muslim ganja cultivators celebrated a funeral (*shomadhi*) with joy equal to a wedding and gave alms and food to those poorer than them.⁸⁰ Some Muslims, he said, chose to marry off sons during years of high prices, but in years when floods destroyed cattle and land, they married a second wife who shared domestic work and labor on the land.

Patron-client relations, petty cash advances, loans for building chators or hosting customary feasts, expenditures on improving homesteads to attract buyers, and debts for buying cattle fodder in years of poor ganja prices, all exemplified the routines of intergenerational debt that tied Naogaon together. Interest payment schedules differed in periods when ganja brought in cash incomes, especially on loans for social events like weddings. In summer months, after income from ganja sales went into rent payments and servicing debts, and when small peasants needed quick loans, interest rates soared as high as "one-half to three-fourths of an anna per rupee, upon the pledge of lands and ornaments, or on verbal contracts

only.”⁸¹ Verbal contracts, necessary because literacy among Naogaon’s peasantry was lacking, were particularly crucial in relations between peasants and the agents of the large zamindari estates of Dubalhati and Balihar. As Nundjee discovered, in the absence of accurate paper records, oral contracts and debts were key to exploitation.

British colonial rule enveloped, propelled, and governed these circuits of ganja production and circulation without intervening in the social relations of dependency directly until 1916. Successive governments of British Bengal integrated those relations into the logic of excise administration, drawing on early modern Anglo-Dutch political economic thought. While using the excise principle to levy taxes, fees, and duties on production and exchange of items deemed superfluous to social life, British officials paradoxically protected and expanded the ambit of Naogaon Ganja’s circulation. Naogaon’s fame and renown (*khyati*) thus depended on complex imperial ambitions, careful negotiations of power, and eventually, the shifting approaches of Indian anticolonial movements and elected representatives in structures of limited government introduced after 1909.

An Excise State

Further, the administration of the excise on hemp drugs is in most provinces in a backward state, and the arrangements are by no means ripe for the assumption by Government, of operations at present conducted by private enterprise, under conditions but imperfectly ascertained.

—INDIAN HEMP DRUGS COMMISSION, 1894

Without the administration of excise, Naogaon's ganja would never have become "Bengal Ganja" or the "Indian drug." Excise laws, infrastructure, and cartographic operations enfolded Naogaon's ganja products so as to systematically circulate them across the Bengal delta; in urban centers like Calcutta, Dhaka, Patna, Banaras, and Delhi; and in religious towns like Mathura, Vrindavan, and Puri. Yet, as the IHDC admitted, excise offices were barely adequate for the job in British India's provinces, and intricate business networks of ganja wholesalers and retail vendors appeared thoroughly opaque and unsuitable for government takeover. In Naogaon, this stance persisted until a momentous *de facto* peasants' strike in 1916 that birthed a monopoly cooperative model. Until that rupture, excise administration was the focal point of colonial pursuits of ganja, which drew imperial officials into complex economic relations impelled by the materiality of the plant, the agroecology of northern Rajshahi, the vacillation and hesitation among officials in Calcutta, and anxieties and fantasies around riverine smuggling. The material needs of ganja that shaped Naogaon's landscape also organized and influenced movements of prices and the anxieties of a struggling state form that aspired to manage internal contradictions and govern ganja's worlds.

Colonial pursuits of ganja began with *abkari* laws under Charles Cornwallis's sweeping changes to Bengal's colonial land and revenue administration in 1793. Referring to a tax on liquor under the erstwhile Mughal Empire, the Persian word "*abkari*" became an umbrella category for tax collection by the eighteenth-century company-state. *Abkari* included home-brewed alcohols from rice, millet, and barley and, later, fermented liquors from mahua flowers, palm and date liquors, and other spiritous liquids. In Bengal, taxes applied less to traders than to sellers

and manufacturers of liquors. Under Cornwallis, Regulation XXXIV (1793) introduced the phrase “intoxicating drugs” into abkari rules, a category that included raw opium, bhang, and ganja. A caveat in Regulation VI (1800) added that both were locally known by other names, such as subjee, the delicacy majoom, and banker (a form of opium). The British pursuit of ganja, once grouped with opium and fitted into a tax category for liquor, acquired juridical and economic form in India through excise laws, collection officials with excise sheets and registers in markets, and training manuals for official use.

Objectifying, classifying, and taxing ganja products anywhere in British India required officials to maintain lists of all possible names they went by. “Ganja” and “bhang” were often umbrella categories that included other preparations. While opium was taxed as raw opium and later complemented by market variants called *madak* and *chandu*, cannabis substances were numerous. As abkari infrastructure grew under Company rule between 1793 and 1856, so did the struggles of abkari collectors to systematically pursue each liquor and intoxicant sold in new territories. After Bengal became a Crown colony following the Indian Rebellion, new laws across all presidencies, modeled on Act XXI (1856), defined ganja and other intoxicants as excisable objects. This transition from abkari to excise was more than a matter of tax codes and categories: It was a practice of statecraft, rightly conceived as military fiscalism, that drained revenues from existing colonies to fund wars in the rest of the Indian subcontinent, leaving a severe lack of public investment to uphold the functions of state that the Company claimed in its strongholds.¹ As a result, particularly as the agrarian frontier expanded in eastern Bengal, governmental institutions of the company-state in many areas were perennially stretched thin, judicial and revenue tasks were folded together, and state power routinely depended on the roles of private actors. Excise collections in urban and rural commercial marketplaces drained capital away as intoxicants became entrenched in the ambit of colonial accumulation.

The term “excise state” conceptualizes specific effects of interactions between tax officials, cultivators, traders, and buyers of intoxicant commodities.² Specifically, in British India’s ganja economy, low-ranking collectors armed with sheets, chests, and appointments by the Board of Revenue claimed for themselves, on the basis of excise law, the right to extract revenue from various ganja transactions. Following Timothy Mitchell’s conception of the state as rightfully an effect of practices by actors claiming specific forms of modern juridical power, I argue that an excise state emerged from within the interaction between peasant producers of ganja and officials with executive mandates to extract revenue from, and maintain a market for, ganja. Conceptually, “excise state” follows Bernard Cohn’s emphasis on the Victorian state as a ritualized effect of repetitive displays of authority, with the caveat that efforts of excise officials to subject Naogaon’s people and the commercial worlds of ganja in British India to their writ clashed against and were fundamentally shaped by the limits posed by ganja’s mercuriality

and the particular facets of wholesale and retail price movements.³ Routine actions of the Board of Revenue officers who operationalized excise law also bore a history of the excise principle that had emerged with the English Civil War and the 1688 Glorious Revolution. As an organizing axiom of fiscal policy, the excise principle distinguished necessary commodities from luxuries or superfluous substances. In British India, the latter eventually included opium, liquors, and cannabis products termed “hemp drugs.” While revenue from ganja products never outpaced those from opium, liquor, or even salt, the taxes were consistently and widely used, and were a site of political contestation.

The rich historiography on liquor and opium in colonial South Asia lacks an engagement with excise in theory and with ganja in history. Excise regulations on liquors and opium were key points of friction throughout British rule. Emerging Adivasi movements against liquor and for temperance, nationalist movements against opium and drinking, new discourses of “national” health and purity, industrial manufacturing of necessary alcohols, and the squabbles over finances of Indian Princely States were all effects of, and engines that drove, the history of excise.⁴ However, the material densities and properties of ganja in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa demanded more from the colonial state than it was willing to invest in the nineteenth century. Whereas in Britain the state could levy excise taxes on private production of intoxicants deemed “superfluous,” in Indian colonies, ganja was a superfluity subject to taxes, duties, and fees at the same time that the state actively sought to ensure, protect, and even require its consumption and circulation. The excise principle that theoretically differentiated necessity from luxury underwrote the extraction of value from all categories of ganja products—round, flat, and chur—in the sphere of production and exchange under colonial rule. Forcing colonial officials to confront the plant’s history, the shaky foundations of excise regimes grew in the breach between shoring up the market for ganja and reproducing the excise principle’s constitutive objectification of Indian intoxicants.

THE EXCISE PRINCIPLE

Excise laws are best understood through the imperial history of the excise principle, which is often elided when excise is explained within nation-bound economic models wherein conventionally, a state levies an excise tax on its “own” citizens within an “inland” market. Derived from the Dutch word *excijns*, the noun “excise” literally means any tax placed on a commodity or a service, but within an ostensibly domestic or national economy. However, in imperial history, the excise was key to early modern Dutch state building. Alongside land taxes, it helped establish the political legitimacy of the Dutch Republic after 1580 within the formal boundaries of the seven provinces that rebelled against Habsburg Spain. It further complemented customs levies on revenue from colonial outposts of the Dutch East India Company and the West India Company. Excise helped pay interest on the Dutch

Republic state's extensive borrowings from maritime trading companies, banks, and large manufacturers, a trend that set it apart from other European imperial states.⁵ Customs on imported goods and excises on home products eventually became common sense in theories of public finance. This binary mirrored the convenient colony-metropole one for the Dutch Empire and was reinforced as other countries emulated Dutch models of large-scale public finance and debt in modern economic history.

Dutch republicanism and its concepts of political economy, among them the commonwealth idea and state expenditure on the poor, circulated swiftly in inter-regnum England.⁶ Amid the swirling tides of seventeenth-century popular revolts, radical movements, the expansion of parliamentary power, regicide, the spread of slavery, growing colonization in the Americas, repeated wars of conquest and counterinsurgency in Ireland, rising fiscal debt, and the transatlantic migration of colonists and religious minorities away from Britain, the institution of excise was a minor but significant blip. During the English Civil War, after brief but tense debates, excise modeled on Dutch precedents was instituted by parliamentary legislation in 1643. The writers of excise rules hoped it would help service the state's increasing debts, and it quickly became crucial to a large state dependent on a stable public tax base for successful military campaigns.⁷ One of the main proponents of excise was Josiah Child, whose thriving career helming the English East India Company was cut short after Sidi Yakut and Aurangzeb Alamgir humiliated him militarily in western India. In his 1668 pamphlet, Child argued that the English needed to emulate the Dutch in imposing excise because "the loweness of [Dutch] customs and the height of their excise" was their great asset. For him, excise was "certainly the most equal and indifferent Tax in the World, and least prejudicial to any People."⁸ Indirect taxes on commodity trade were meant to work without regard to the political legitimacy and sovereignty that underwrote state taxes on land and private estates.

In England and colonial Ireland, excise initially connoted a tax on home goods, particularly liquors and some cloths, but it was often charged on export articles as well.⁹ Even though state taxation intensified after the 1688 revolution, definitions of excise remained leaky. Lay wholesalers and manufacturers often fought back against the "excisemen" tasked with collecting it, recalling the torture of royalist commanders and exploitative private excise collectors in popular agitations.¹⁰ Samuel Johnson's 1755 *Dictionary* defined "excise" as "a hateful tax levied upon commodities and adjudged by wretches."¹¹ Nonetheless, the pressures of state borrowing gradually helped the excise office grow in capacity even though ordinary people grew to despise, evade, and sometimes violently resist the figure of the wicked exciseman.¹²

Antagonisms against excise never became a popular agenda and the excise office expanded in the eighteenth century, standardized weights and measures, and found many pro-excise polemicists to sing its virtues. Ideas of state sovereignty

and English liberty threaded with the excise eventually became significant in political economy.¹³ In the eighteenth century, English distillers and brewers gradually realized that the excise was more advantageous than low tariffs imposed by the state on imported alcohol like French and Portuguese wine. Liquors were crucial commodities in trade and embargo in interimperial relations between Britain, France, and Portugal, and higher tariffs on imported liquor would ensure domestic protectionism and monopolistic control for English distillers and victuallers.¹⁴ As a tax-dependent parliamentary state form emerged in Europe, excise taxes increased on liquors in Britain. Framed as an indirect tax that affected everyone fairly, irrespective of political loyalties to Parliament or Crown, it joined other indirect taxes in sustaining a credit-dependent state existentially tied to cycles of interest payments, military spending, and public investments.¹⁵ Unlike excises, customs taxes were volatile in that they depended on the flow of maritime trade, and tariffs were a dangerous two-edged sword in interimperial exchanges because impositions by one empire invited similar responses by others. Proponents of excise's "domestic" stability in European metropolises framed it as not too exploitative and amenable to reform from within.

By 1760 excise was often the sole indirect tax mentioned as essential to the establishment of republican political ideals and entrenching the sovereignty of a territorial state form.¹⁶ In 1789 the settler colonial constitution of the United States explicitly tied the use of excises, which had been established on liquor in the Massachusetts Bay colony, to the payment of debt and the defense of territorial sovereignty. Revenues from excise complemented those from other taxes and duties in state coffers. Years before capturing the diwani on land in eastern India in 1765, the East India Company had similarly instituted excises on salt manufacturers and tobacco sellers on its lands in Bengal. Presidency capitals in Bombay and Madras followed suit by 1820.¹⁷ Throughout this period, the basket of commodities subjected to excise across the British Empire continued shifting based on revenue needs and political priorities. Salt, meat, and sometimes particular cloths were often added to liquor, other spirits, and other intoxicating articles, depending on changing priorities.

The oft-elided excise principle underwrote the leaky boundaries of the "excisable" and the addition or subtraction of items to be taxed on an excise list. While contingencies of imperial trade did matter, the most constant presence in the category of the excisable after its introduction in British political economy was a consumable intoxicating article. This objectified comestible was legally treated as an ostensibly "finished" commodity on the vital assumption that the figure who turned a raw substance into a marketed intoxicant through fermentation, drying, or distillation was specifically liable to the social body. This liability became a tax on the sale to accommodate the value added through manufacture and the potential effects of the intoxicant on the individual and the social body.

The excise principle also rested on a second constitutive distinction. Through an implicit differentiation of the “nutritive” and “medicinal” from the “intoxicating,” it distinguished necessary and essential comestibles from others that were not. The nutritive was often a form of solid matter, and the intoxicating commonly took the form of liquid or smoke. This materialist spectrum with its convenient binary poles frequently appeared in pro-excise discourse. As early as 1647, the noted defender of Parliament against Royalists Henry Parker propagated the virtues of excise in a pamphlet that reached transatlantic Anglophone audiences in which he argued that commodities “necessary for the sustenance of man’s life” ought to be separated by excise from those that were “merely superfluous.”¹⁸ D’Maris Coffman has shown how such claims of sustenance versus superfluity were linked to other transatlantic political processes, including visions of a Hobbesian commonwealth, William Petty’s theories of compensatory taxation, and ideas of a tax state that predated Adam Smith’s work.

Historically, however, the key element of the sustenance-superfluity calculus was the spectrum’s flexibility as the bedrock for various permutations. For example, Parker recommended excise as a penalty on life’s “luxuries,” which he considered superfluous. Yet, in his view, home-brewed “small beere,” which contained low amounts of alcohol, was a necessity for sustenance. In contrast, tavern keepers and brewing victuallers deserved heavy excises because, to Parker, they were “most addicted to their private commodity.”¹⁹ Others, like Giles Grene, founder of the failed Dorchester Company and member of Parliament from Weymouth, helped to repeal the excise on meat after the Smithfield Riot in 1647 by arguing for “flesh” as necessity.²⁰

In materialist terms, this binary of sustenance and superfluity, or necessity and luxury, was the foundation for a state to place commodities on a spectrum of relations with the human body. Those that desirably and modestly affected the reproduction of the human body were contrasted against other commodities framed as gratuitous, disruptive, or simply in excess of the essential. In such calculations, the nutritive form, such as barley sold as cleaned and husked grain, remained outside the category of the “excisable,” while the same grain of barley once fermented into malt, beer, or whiskey may fall into it. Scratching below the surface of excise economics makes clear that the prescriptive brackets around commodities that were placed on such a spectrum of relations were themselves historically uneven and contingent. Besides political conflict and international trade, contradictions of bourgeois culture, working-class tastes, and other cultural paradigms decided the scope of superfluity and sustenance. Cultural notions of benign stimulation versus powerful addiction were particularly significant. Refined sugar, for instance, was rarely identified as addictive in fiscal policy even after its power to shape human taste was medically acknowledged, and different forms of tea drifted in and out of excise lists in British imperial geographies, depending on the ingredients in the final package and geopolitical agreements underlying trade.²¹ In fact, exports of

East India Company tea from India in the eighteenth century were temporarily charged excises on being retailed in London, a practice that reflected periods of tension between the Company and Parliament. Alternatively, during World War I, local cotton sales were excised by the Bombay presidency to meet revenue needs even though cotton was not a superfluous luxury.

ABKARI, EXCISE, AND GANJA IN BRITISH INDIA

In British India, *abkari* (or *abkarry*) collections most closely resembled the British excise before excise laws, rule books, and collection manuals were introduced. Under the Mughal taxation system, *abkari* was a simple market tax in the *sayer* category. British colonial officials extracted revenue on specific intoxicating substances and identified sites such as distilleries, market shops, and even palm forests (where caste groups like Pasis collected tree sap for toddy) for fiscal coercion and taxation. Early *abkari* laws like Lord Cornwallis's Regulation XXXIV (1793) in Bengal were difficult to implement because there was no identifiable manufactory, forcing Board of Revenue appointees to rely on paid informers.²² Eventually, ganja and spiritous liquors received "special rates of duty" under Regulation V (1801) when imported into Calcutta town from "the interior of the country." Previously, the Board of Revenue had used Regulation XXXIV to fix the rate at twenty percent of the selling price in Calcutta town. The stated aims of the regulation, for placing "a tax upon intoxicating liquors and drugs and for preventing the illicit manufacture and sale of them," also justified the Board in imposing heavy fines on any manufacturing or vending without a license. The Board further drew its juridical ambit from the preamble of the Cornwallis Code, which used the claim of preventing "crimes and disorders" arising from immoderate use of drugs and liquor. Regulation II (1802) and Regulation XL (1803) added the goals of augmenting public revenue and preventing perpetration of crimes in Bengal and what were then the Ceded Provinces.

Such fiscal and legislative operations expanded by 1830 as separate *abkari* officials across Bombay, Madras, and Bengal began overseeing excise collections and managing liquor and drug production. Under Lord Dalhousie (James Broun-Ramsay) as governor-general, the government in council enacted Bengal Act XXI (1856), which became the basis of successive excise laws eventually systematized by amendments suited to other regions in British India. On the supervision of liquor distilleries, important differences remained between the government of Bombay's Act V (1878) and the government of Madras's Act I (1886) on one hand and Bengal legislation on the other. On other counts, nearly all territories in British India followed annually revised rate charts, invested in warehouses, managed custom-houses, employed salaried police officials in excise departments for prevention of smuggling and tax evasion, published annual reports that helped predict rates of duty and supply controls for future years, streamlined subheadings in provincial

department budgets, and published manuals and handbooks for excise collectors to use in their tours of each district in any province. The handbooks included specifics of demography, weights and measures, geography, and even data on prior criminal cases prosecuted in relation to opium, liquor, and cannabis drugs.

Excise officers supervised opium and liquor warehouses built under the *golah* system to manage domestic sales after the First Opium War. However, by 1840, *abkari* revenue from opium and alcohol in the Lower Provinces of Bengal had fallen from Rs. 2,027,356 in 1830 to Rs. 1,567,354.²³ Correspondence between the Board of Revenue and the Board of Customs, Salt, and Opium at the time found two critical reasons—the ineffective revenue-farming system for opium and the futility of prohibiting liquor. In both Company towns with military barracks and the countryside, the production and sale of “spirits, opium, and intoxicating drugs” followed a farming system. A retailer who applied to open and run a shop for retailing these wares had to furnish the names of specific farmers who, depending on the status of their land tenure or deed, would grow opium, cannabis, wheat, or barley solely for that retailer. If that farmer’s land was *khas* land, *ryotwari* land, or a plot on a settled *zamindari* estate, it would then be classified as *abkari* land and be treated as part of an *abkari mahal*. The *abkari mahal* was an abstract spatial category for all the land used for growing raw materials needed for eventual *abkari* commodities. It was clear in 1840 that revenue farming reproduced existing indebtedness between farmers and retailers, who often doubled as moneylenders to cover the initial costs of farming or took bribes from some farmers to sell their products over those of another.²⁴

Liquor prohibition had proved similarly futile, especially in *sudder towns* (administrative centers) that also held Company barracks. Spirits were smuggled into the cantonments liberally, and Board correspondence regularly featured instances of “Native” army soldiers in Dinagepore station smuggling toddy in, and those in Madras Collectorate buying illegally imported foreign spirits.²⁵ In debates over “*gunjah* consumption” in 1821, officers in Bombay had also foreseen the failure of *ganja* prohibition, even though the criminal court magistrate opined that “intoxicating drugs and liquors effected the health and morals of the lower classes” of natives and ought to be repressed. The Board of Revenue shot down that order because taxation and price setting appeared sufficient to control any effect of intoxication on crime.²⁶ So, when revenues fell in Bengal in 1840, the Board responded only by calling for “zealous supervision.” According to the Board, more inspectors and duty collectors hired in each district to inspect unlicensed trade, an investment then estimated to be worth about Rs. 500,000, would multiply *abkari* income from Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa by eleven times, much more than the Rs. 1,500,000 collected that year. When the Board reviewed Regulation VII (1824), it asked Colonel W. Morrison, the president of the Council of India and deputy governor of Bengal at Fort William, on 26 March 1839 to standardize the rules in each

district for excise collections. Collections, the president argued, ought to be made daily by inspectors going out to shops at the end of the day to prevent the activities of smugglers and tax-evading retailers, and sudder stations ought to have industrial warehouses where spirits and intoxicating drugs could be stored. A retailer who wished to add to his shop's stock was required to extract a verified amount from the warehouse using a countersigned bond.

Beginning with such infrastructural changes after 1860, the material biography of ganja entered deeper into the ambit of colonial power, and licenses became the basis of defining illicit trade or smuggling. One crucial caveat remained: Colonial officials, especially in Bengal, never intervened in relations of debt and money-lending that structured small peasant commodity production in Naogaon and retail vending elsewhere. State officials accommodated oppressive and constricted lending practices in a system where they regulated storage and managed circulation. Formally, British administrators maintained that the company-state, and later the presidency government, was not a monopolistic revenue-earning entity in India's regional ganja markets. The implied contrast with monopoly control of Bengal opium, however, was not enough to keep temperance activists, prohibition advocates, and anti-imperial voices at bay, who took every opportunity in the nineteenth century to glom cannabis onto opium and reinforce its associations with criminal lunacy.²⁷

In the Madras presidency, the licensing regime of Act I (1886) allowed the governor to permit manufacture, sale, retail, and wholesale, along with warehousing for specific fees. District collectors could limit the number of shops, a decision the Board regularly reviewed.²⁸ Production was confined to Bapatla, a taluk in Guntur district, and Polur, a taluk in north Arcot district.²⁹ In North Arcot, ganja production was moved from the Javadi hills, where malaria outbreaks made supervision difficult, to the plains of Padavedu in Polur by 1907. Similarly, by 1911, after cases of bribery in assigning cultivation licenses in Bapatla's Duggupad area, the production zone was also moved to Santaravur even though a manufactory and warehouses existed in Guntur. Five hundred acres of Santaravur's black-soil lands, divided into blocks, with cultivation rotating between them each year to avoid soil degeneration, and each block assigned to two subinspectors each in charge of a *saradh* (range), became the basis of the Madras presidency's licit ganja economy. Harvests began in January and stalks brought to the manufactory were stripped of seeds by striking them against flat stone, dried in the sun, placed in baskets in layers separated by zinc sheets and newspaper pages for trampling by foot, and finally placed in machine presses, a procedure described in chapter 2. The ultimate layer of pressed ganja came out as "large sheets of thick felt, each cut into 30 cakes of 6" square."³⁰ The seeds were regularly confiscated by the Excise Department and given out to farmers before cultivation season. In contrast to the three grades of ganja in Bengal, Madras Ganja was not manufactured for different grades and levels of quality in the nineteenth century. Instead, the one finished item was sold in

the presidency and exported to Ceylon and the Princely States of Mysore, Hyderabad, Banganapalle, and Cochin.

In the Bombay presidency, Act V (1878) empowered the governor to severely restrict imports and exports, limit the daily volume that one could sell and carry on one's person or otherwise transport, and auction off licenses for either solely manufacturing ganja or jointly manufacturing and retailing it. Cultivation of ganja was restricted to Ahmednagar and Satara districts, where cultivators could until 1896 get permits without paying a fee. Imports of bhang from Gujarat and Palanpur, and charas from Punjab into Bombay city, were regulated by excise officers, and retail licensees farmed their enterprise out over multiple shops. Traffic between neighboring Princely States and trade in ganja from Khandesh, which was renowned for taste and potency, also occupied Bombay's officers.

In the larger Bengal presidency, where ganja tastes differed substantially between districts, the East India Company's acquisition of the Diwani in 1764 brought several disparate markets of eastern India and their constellations of taste, ingestion practices, sacral meanings, and proverbial knowledges into the ambit of colonial governance. In the early colonial period, Jessori *gol* ganja and *chur* ganja, both made from flowering tops and stalks, circulated in districts like Jessore, Rajshahi, Bogra, Dinajpur, Dacca, Pabna, Rangpur, and Mymensingh in Bengal, and Garhjati ganja produced in the Garhjats of Orissa supplied the temple towns of Puri and Cuttack in Orissa. Jessori (and later Naogaon) Ganja and Garhjat Ganja could also be found in Calcutta. Bihar had its own cultures of bhang production, and Shiva festivals in major towns attracted a number of devotees who consumed bhang. Siddhi, made from leaves or dried plant refuse, was a drink famous both in Bihar's Bhagalpur and Calcutta's wealthy homes. Across the Gangetic plains in northern, central, and eastern India, ganja and bhang were thus disparately cultivated and manufactured substances, each with different modes of manufacture, preparation, and biochemical composition that catered to specific tastes and markets. With the expansion of abkari and excise offices in the nineteenth century, however understaffed and underresourced they were, ganja became a singular commodity and Naogaon the focal point of an excise state.

EXCISE INFRASTRUCTURE IN NAOGAON

The Abkari Department of the East India Company started overseeing ganja production in Naogaon in 1830, prior to which, the Board of Revenue focused more on taxing wholesalers who bought ganja and traded it in *chowkis* and *haats* (periodic markets) across the countryside and within Calcutta's town limits. First, the Abkari Department created a rudimentary categorization of land holdings. Most peasants on *khamar* land, which had prior proprietary rights and customs of crop sharing, became subject to the abkari mahal rules whereby the state claimed ownership of the mahal and thus exercised the power to collect tax. Ganja from

specific family-owned farm plots that did not fall under a zamindari estate was liable to be taxed separately, and wholesalers needed licenses to purchase the yield. In other cases, rents would still accrue to the landlord while a reduced abkari tax was owed to the Board. As peasant homesteads began investing in clearing forested or marshy land, their new plots were classified as small ryotwari holdings by surveyors. By all accounts, surveyors took only approximate measurements and exact data were scant. New plots were also often farmed under the *adhiari* (or *adhidari*) system, a mode of sharecropping whereby peasant families halved the cost of cultivation with one another or with a largeholder in exchange for a proportion of the profits from sale.

Direct colonial oversight in Naogaon was challenging because of shifting boundaries of villages, plots, and contests over sovereignty, documentation, and patrimony between the two large zamindari estates of Dubalhati and Balihar, which were formally surveyed after the Permanent Settlement of 1793. The class power of the Dubalhati and Balihar Rajbari (household) was reinforced not just through landholding arrangements but also through displays of social and customary practices. While the term *rajbari* literally meant “royal or lordly household,” in local parlance, it also implied the extended kin of both families and their individual agents who were not filial relatives but lived in the households to help manage the estate’s everyday functions. For both families, philanthropy and conducting public deeds for the *proja* (tenants) with ceremony and festivity became an annual performance of a localized and customary form of sovereign power. For instance, Kalimohan Chakrabarti wouldn’t have settled in Naogaon without the award of a small grant to start a debt collecting, petty moneylending, and clerical proprietorship in 1878 by Krishnendra Ray, then the *raja* (head) of the Balihar estate.³¹ Public charitable deeds for ganja cultivators was also common. Sometime in the 1910s, Shyama Sundari Choudhurani, the rani of the Dubalhati zamindari estate constructed a resting room of corrugated iron and tin that ganja cultivators and workers could use to enjoy some shade during the day and that scions of the ruling family could use to briefly rest during tours of the estate.³² Such investments in public infrastructure were not out of the ordinary. Most ganja transactions took place in the open, in fields, in chators, or at the homestead, making the provision of resting places a valued symbol of lordly benevolence and a strategic show of class harmony. Since not all ganja lands lay inside either zamindari estate, and surrounding new lands were leveled over decades in the nineteenth century, public displays of charity were also shows of strength for influence. Ganja cultivation increased consistently from the 1830s. Since supervision and management pivoted on documents evidencing land ownership and use, documents that were themselves riddled with approximations and errors, the agents of both estates grew to exert arbitrary power and act as intermediaries between powerful families of large landholders, brokers, and moneylenders.

The Board of Revenue in Calcutta followed the expansion of ganja cultivation in reports from revenue administrators in Rampur Bauleah, Rajshahi district's administrative center. A special outpost of the abkari office, the Ganja Supervisor's Office, was set up in Naogaon for annual record collection in 1830 and made permanent in 1854 and placed under the Rajshahi's commissioner of revenue. The supervisor oversaw the whole ganja mahal and licensed and taxed ganja production. This first foray of the colonial state in direct oversight of Naogaon's ganja was housed in a one-room brick building staffed by one supervisor and two temporarily hired *darogahs* (watchmen), tasked with patrolling and overseeing more than four hundred acres of ganja tracts spread over more than two hundred villages with barely any metaled roads connecting them.³³ Shib Chunder Ghose, the first supervisor, left within a few years of his appointment due to low pay and frequent illness. Malaria was common in Naogaon, and the poor roads and medical services made it an undesirable posting. Ghose was succeeded by Hurreenath Nundee, who had served as an abkari darogah at Bauleah town for liquor management.³⁴

Understaffing was a prominent feature of excise administration in Bengal. The presidency's Abkari Department was overseen by the Board of Customs, Salt, and Opium, which answered to the Company's Board of Revenue in Calcutta. The thin spread of staff resources across salt, opium, liquor, and ganja reflected the relative revenue from each commodity. Ganja was lowest on the scale, and the Board was interested solely in direct taxes on sales made to wholesalers in Naogaon. Nundee frequently complained to his superiors about being handed too much work. In 1855 he protested that he had to regularly go by *palki* (a two-man palanquin) across the ganja mahal to detect unlicensed cultivation and also review the accounts of Naogaon's newly opened abkari shop, which sold country-made liquor and sometimes opium to local residents. Besides multiple responsibilities, leave was a key issue. When Nundee would go on leave, one Mohes Chunder Bhadoory acted as "Gunjah Supervisor."³⁵ In 1856, Nundee left again, and Shib Chunder Ghose had to be recalled for a short tenure.³⁶ Low pay, frequent sick leave, and high turnover among staff at the Ganja Supervisor's Office bore a recurrent mark of British colonial state formation, namely that monetary and physical investments frequently fell short of what was needed to meet legal writ and policy.³⁷

The distant extraction of excise from a debt-structured production regime only complicated the possibilities of financial predation. In 1829, the first signs of it appeared with the controversy around R. J. Sayler, then collector of Rajshahi. He was posted to Bauleah in 1825 and was the immediate superior to Naogaon's supervisor. Sayler was accused by Rajah Hurreenath Roy, the patriarch of the Dubalhati estate, of aiding moneylenders in speculating on ganja prices and extracting extra payments from visiting wholesale buyers. Sayler was in the crosshairs because he had ordered the arrest of Ramjaur Gunjawallah, a visiting wholesale buyer and trader of ganja from Bihar who visited Naogaon annually to buy cartloads of ganja products. Allegedly, Ramjaur had failed to pay "sixty-eight rupees, five pies" that

were due as abkari duties.³⁸ Few details of the case were recorded, but from the extant files it appears that Ramjaur died in custody soon after he was arrested under Saylor's orders and the correspondence between Roy, Saylor, and other local officials was forwarded up the chain to the Board of Revenue. G. Bushby, the Board's secretary, asked Saylor to "strike off Ramjaur's due balance as irrecoverable," before sternly noting that the "Board are led to believe that your precipitation occasioned the loss of arrears due from Ramjaur and that his imprisonment may have been the cause of his death." Bushby's admonishment of Saylor was sharp because this was not Saylor's first offense. He had already been reprimanded by the officiating Board secretary earlier, in January 1829, over his recordkeeping. Saylor had reported a loss of eleven rupees' worth of opium under his command in July of the previous year "due to wastage," but the Board remained suspicious of the claim.³⁹ Board officials took note of Saylor's alleged role in the "Ramjaur affair" and demanded that he "state, for the information of the board, if the defaulter gave any security, and the explanation you [Saylor] can afford for allowing so heavy a balance to accrue before any measures were taken for its liquidation." Per Board correspondence, officials had reason to hold him culpable for at least neglect of duty over time, if not the active role Roy alleged.

Saylor shifted the blame in the matter. In his letter to the Board he accused the treasurer of the Rajshahi Collectorate for failing in his duties and colluding with moneylenders in Naogaon. Saylor added that it was the treasurer who had suggested arresting and imprisoning Ramjaur. Bushby was not unaware of the limited abilities of Company officials in distant posts across eastern Bengal, having struggled to reign in privateers in the indigo and opium trade. He was ultimately "satisfied with the explanation" of Saylor's investigation and decided not to question the legality of the collector's punishment either. Instead, Bushby decreed on behalf of the Board that Saylor conduct a deeper inquiry into the treasurer's conduct.⁴⁰

The "Ramjaur affair" barely scratched the surface of price speculation and forward trading deals that many officials and moneylenders likely participated in. Speculation on prices was already a widespread practice among moneylenders in Naogaon. In January 1831, the commissioner of revenue at Rungpore's 13th Division, who was temporarily appointed to take charge of Naogaon's ganja collections, directly addressed the problem. His annual report noted that "it was extremely objectionable for government servants to be so engaged in Abkaree speculation."⁴¹ Speculative practices involved competitive price cutting and bribing. Some moneylenders and their clientele of *dalals* (brokers) and *fariahs* (agents) would pay smaller landholders at the end of January a proportion of the estimated total value of ganja to be produced on that cultivator's field by March. This arrangement was meant to ensure that the smaller landholders gave away the rights on the final product to specific *fariahs*. The system had no way of accounting for a bad crop or lower outturn in between the two months, and such risks reinforced debt dependency over time. If the ultimate sale value of the crop was lower than

estimated, and some payments had already been made on that basis, the *fariahs* demanded money back from the small farmers or simply refused to pay the whole amount. This subsequently left smaller cultivators unable to pay for other services like *parakdari*, for which they would then borrow from another lender. By 1830 things had become so tenuous that many *parakdar* men from Jessore district who used to regularly work in the *ganja mahal* stopped coming. Ultimately, Sayler was instructed to make sure they returned from Jessore as soon as possible. He eventually communicated with the Jessore Collectorate and reported that they had indeed returned by January 1831 to work on that year's yield.⁴²

Extant records from the 1830s suggest that many men appointed to collect excise and oversee *ganja* production and manufacture were susceptible to the power of large landholders and moneylenders. Business activities often blended into one another within the same kin and family networks. Often, large landholders also lent money, brokers of the *zamindari* estate worked as interest collectors for lenders, and brokers who negotiated deals between visiting wholesalers and small cultivators also invested in *ganja* farms of their own. The Board of Revenue remained solely interested in revenue extraction through levies and taxes in Naogaon to complement the rising land revenue from the rest of *Rajshahi*. It intervened locally and indirectly in moments of crisis but never made any long-term structural investments. The roles of staff on the ground remained a persistent concern. In 1863, the main excise writer for Naogaon, Gopal Lall Ghose, petitioned the Board of Revenue for an increase in his salary. He argued that "the duties of the *Abkaree* writer in *Rajshahye* in comparison with those of all the other districts of *Hindoostan* are far greater than the ordinary duties of the *Abkaree* and Income Tax Department, as there is no separate establishment whatever for the performance of the clerical works in reference to the management of the *Ganjah Mehals*."⁴³ As the primary record keeper in Naogaon overseeing a vast, shifting landscape of *ganja* fields, Ghose was woefully overworked. He complained of being tasked with writing out letters and circulars, tabulating numbers of sales in *ganja* products made to all the districts in the Bengal presidency, dividing the data by province (Lower and Upper), and reporting to Sayler and others regularly about *ganja* sales. Ghose's petition was shot down tersely by the commissioner in Calcutta. "The increase of salary does not appear to be called for," he wrote and tasked Sayler with conveying the message to Ghose.⁴⁴ By 1850, the government's vision of Naogaon's complex land tenures, debt relations, price speculation, and social relations between visiting wholesalers and cultivators running out of space to store their yields became much clearer. The work of the understaffed and overworked office continued unabated, even as the archive of their shortcomings piled up and customs officers in Calcutta discussed very briefly whether Naogaon's *ganja* tract ought to be absorbed as a state monopoly under one department.

Declining the monopoly option, in 1854 the Board passed Special *Gunjah* Rules for *Rajshahye* and *Bogra*, based on correspondence with the commissioner of

Rajshahi.⁴⁵ These rules specified requirements for the packing and sale of Naogaon's ganja products. Moothooranath Banerjee, Rajshahi's collector, who served under the commissioner, was tasked with enforcing the rule that all cultivators apply for a license to farm ganja. He was also asked to turn the Supervisory Office into a permanent establishment and leave visiting wholesale buyers to oversee packaging, with the emphasis that "care [be] taken that dealers were not inconvenienced."⁴⁶ The Board disagreed with the Rajshahi Collectorate's demand that the supervision of ganja be turned over from the existing revenue farming system, whereby the state appointed officials to collect estimated taxes, to a new system. The main alternative was the excise golah (warehouse) system, whereby the state would build a warehouse to store all the ganja products and buyers would pay for each batch they took out. This was common in the opium economy, in which factories in Ghazipur and Patna and smaller warehouses held opium once it was manufactured. However, the Board refused to take monopoly control on the storage and circulation of a crop that was far more mercurial than opium. Instead, it enforced rules in 1854 to subject Naogaon's hundreds of tons of ganja to levies based on a sack's weight. Again, unlike the opium rates, which were strictly defined by the potency or amount of intoxicating principle, ganja rates were not so defined. Even when, under the new rules, general collections per sack or exports to the North Western Provinces fell, as in 1862–63, the Board prohibited moving to differential rates based on high and low intoxicant principle.⁴⁷ Weight-based revenue continued until 1894. As jute cultivation grew in neighboring districts, gunnies (*chala*, literally "skin") made of jute became the most important material for making sacks for packing ganja. In 1880, jute sacks were supplemented by mango-wood chests for expensive round ganja that needed preservation over long distances.

For the Board in 1856, a full excise system monopoly on ganja did not make financial sense. Opium was a globally profitable commodity yielding stupendous amounts of revenue overseas, especially in China. Ganja and bhang were at best regional drugs that international markets did not have a taste for. Naogaon-made ganja was also a sensitive crop dependent on artisanal manufacturing skills. Opium production in the lower Gangetic Plain and Company factories in Ghazipur and Patna was a military-industrial affair. In 1856, as the Second Opium War began in Canton, factories in India were overseeing the poppy blossom resin as it was concentrated and packed into pots and stacked in high shelves by rows of workers.⁴⁸ Taken together, Bengal Ganja and bhang in all the districts of Bengal, Assam, Orissa, Bihar, and the North Western Provinces, along with the charas produced in Yarkand, north of Kashmir, still brought only a small fraction of opium revenues. Cannabis was hyperlocal and regional, with cultivated tastes and mercurial market outcomes that decidedly made it the opposite of opium in the mid-nineteenth century.

After Crown takeover in 1858, the Board-instituted Ganja Supervisor's Office continued to run in a one-room establishment with five *takhtposh* (low seats) on

the floor, some *kanta* (weighing scales with needles), and weights called *pathor* (stones). The room usually had only two chairs in its first two decades, one for Nundee and the other for an Englishman named Ryeson, appointed in 1865 as assistant supervisor on deputation from Bauleah.⁴⁹ Ryeson lived in a room across the field from the Supervisor's Office. He often presented his kitchen garden's cauliflowers, litchis, green jujubes (*kul*), and mangoes to his friends among Naogaon's upper classes.⁵⁰ Ryeson's tenure, Kalimohan Chakrabarti recounted, outlasted Nundee's second appointment as supervisor in 1858. Ryeson continued to assist Nundee's successor, Krishnodhon Bagchi. Keeping their distance from matters of indebtedness and local class hierarchies, both officials and their temporary staff focused solely on annual collections.

The Supervisor's Office in Naogaon predated any other form of colonial authority in the ganja mahal. The *faujdari adalat* (court) and its surrounding *munsifi* (clerical-legal) practices were instituted in the 1860s as Naogaon's administrative importance became clearer. By 1868, Ryeson, Nundee, and Bagchi, were being aided by a larger number of excise superintendents and darogahs hired to patrol the ganja tracts and monitor manufacture in chators. Mahendranath Chattopadhyay, Kalinath Chaudhuri, Girish Chandra Bhattacharya, and Mahendranath Mukhopadhyay constituted the first generation of young Brahman men with primary English education hired to assist Ryeson. In his memoir, Chakrabarti called them *nobhish koromchari*, or "novice servants," who were permanent officers supervising a staff that managed the *jama-kharach* (account registers) under Victoria's rule.

The Excise Department's search for "zealous officers" to systematically monitor and tax the production and outflow of ganja from Naogaon after 1860 was an effect of both new state-building practices and the gradual rise in demand for Naogaon-made "Rajshahye Ganjah." In fact, the three-year average revenue from ganja and bhang in 1849–52 was Rs. 217,910, which represented a substantial 113 percent rise from the Rs. 102,044 yearly average in 1838–41.⁵¹ In 1868, the Board also began suppressing ganja cultivation elsewhere in eastern India, with only two minor exceptions for districts in Bihar and Orissa, where the taste for Naogaon's products was not as defined. In Bhaugulpore in Bihar, then in the northwestern Bengal presidency, the Board oversaw small-scale cultivation of bhang, and in the hilly Garhjat forests of Orissa, it allowed Garhjat Ganja to circulate locally.

Excise inspection expanded correspondingly as newly appointed officers across districts began coordinating policing activities throughout all districts. Excise police, employed apart from the civil police departments, were regularly deployed to towns where retailers were reported to be indulging in price cutting and monopoly vending. Inspection officers began policing smuggling between Naogaon and central India by conducting regular searches of boats, trains, and ferries, especially after prominent cases like that of Gaya and Azamgarh in 1862

when a shipment of Naogaon ganja had been suspiciously “diverted” en route from Calcutta to Banaras.⁵² The case illuminated smuggling possibilities as wholesalers took ganja from Naogaon downriver and then by road to different districts. Fears of smuggling were coupled with criticisms from temperance activists about ganja smokers in India’s asylums in 1871.⁵³ After A. O. Hume, as secretary to the government of India, demanded assessments of ganja’s links to insanity from other presidencies in 1871, which produced a stream of contrasting responses, the Financial Department placed much greater emphasis on reducing ganja consumption through local management of excise duties and prices. After 1876, the government began selling annual retail licenses at auction to increase revenue and lift selling prices of ganja and bhang out of the range of poorer buyers.

By making ganja products expensive yet still affordable to some, colonial governors in Bengal acknowledged concerns about addiction and moral panics about the mental and physical health of Indian subjects while maintaining a liberal posture toward market rationality. With passage of the new excise laws in 1878, the state introduced warehouses, phased out the licensed farming system, and made state-run storage the intermediary step for keeping ganja products under bond after wholesalers provisionally bought a cultivator’s manufactured ganja. Officials began recording instances of smuggling and tax evasion, especially through the underreporting of yields by powerful ganja cultivators. Annual reports from each district, routinized across British government offices, compelled officials to explain reasons for changes in revenue, arrests and seizures, and the effects of exogenous factors like disease and inflation on the annual production and consumption of ganja. In Naogaon, industrial standard weights and measures for the accurate assessment of ganja production helped officials keep new accounts. The Excise Act enabled them to reclassify rates for round, flat, and chur ganja in different years. The Board also introduced bhang as a category once Naogaon’s cultivators began catering to the needs of vendors from central India.⁵⁴ By 1882, storage warehouses built by the Excise Department sprang up across eastern India. From the warehouse in Naogaon, wholesalers could carry their purchase and store them in others closer to intended retail markets. Wherever such dedicated warehouses were absent, existing warehouses of bottled liquor were partially reallocated for holding ganja and bhang. The first warehouses built to hold imports from Naogaon in Orissa were in the temple towns Cuttack and Puri. By 1894, the largest Excise Department warehouses for Naogaon ganja were in Dinagepore, Kamroop (Assam), Mymensingh, Dacca, Backergunge, and Hooghly districts. Wholesalers paid duties in Naogaon with the understanding that the state would store the product for them in a warehouse, from which only small portions of their purchased batches would be released as retail storefronts sold off their previously shipped stock.

Warehouse networks singularly influenced how Naogaon’s ganja competed with local variants in markets upriver in the Gangetic basin and streamlined their flows

in order to help reproduce and make the ganja economy of eastern India more pronounced and legible on paper. Excise warehouse staff regularly tabulated outflows into surrounding towns, and these statistical tables became exhaustive appendices to excise reports. In many cases, eager officials correlated their calculations with data on crime and insanity, forecast changes in subsequent year's sales, and signed off on permits for preemptively replenishing stocks. Annual Excise reports were often speculative in that official reasoning incorporated social, economic, and medical factors as drivers affecting ganja consumption. For instance, through the 1860s, religious pilgrimage in Midnapore, expanding worker settlements around railway construction sites in Deoghur, and the return of "native soldiers" to Assam after the Bhutan War were all reasons for predicting changes in ganja consumption, and thus revenue amounts, in annual Excise Department reports.⁵⁵ Alternatively, officials emphasized improvements in warehouses as factors keeping circulation predictable. For instance, in 1867, district-level excise officers were asked to take extra care to prevent diseases or rat infestations, and thus stabilize storage periods, by improving and repairing their buildings annually. By 1873 the Excise Department was tabulating cases of smuggling in and near Naogaon and recommending adequate measures for detection.⁵⁶

Excise administration, however, went far beyond laws, collection tables, and policy proposals. In 1864, excise and revenue officials began redrawing the administrative boundaries of Naogaon into a subdivision of Rajshahi district. This new cartography enfolded any ganja-growing lands, neighboring marshes, and corresponding peasants' hamlets and villages that were previously inside the Dubalhati zamindari estate along with those that weren't. The latter included villages in the bordering districts of Bogra and Dinajpur. Turning the entire ganja mahal from a fluid landscape of rotating plots and fields into a reasonably bound spatial unit, with lists of demarcated villages, that lay entirely within a single administrative unit of government exemplified the power of excise to define the practice of other modes of colonial governance. Land titles in villages like Bishnampur and Gussarah (Ghoshpara) in Dinajpur, which previously had *khas* land, owned by the government but managed by local *malguzars* (revenue farmers) who were tasked with collecting abkari from many villages, were rewritten and reallocated inside Naogaon subdivision. Villages much farther away that had ganja cultivation, like Dewanpoor and Deegha, were similarly drawn into new subdivisional limits.⁵⁷

The new subdivision's police allocation came from the Excise Department's coffers. Officials divided it into three *thanas* (police circles), each with a police force and an assistant superintendent of excise responsible for overseeing ganja cultivation. Thus, Moradpur circle under Tarini Charan Sarkar, Kirtipur circle under Kulada Prasad Sen Niyogi, and Gobindopur circle under Abani Bhushan Sen became the formally classified ganja mahal. Notably, the police were given preventive duties like regular inspections of chators between January and April.

Each of the three officials had an individual residential *bangala* (bungalow) that served as the center of his newly established power.⁵⁸

Naogaon subdivision's boundaries were redrawn by 1880 to include another twenty-one villages formerly within Bogra and Dinagepore districts. With centralized supervision, the three excise bungalows and policing circles received allocations from the Rajshahi excise superintendent to build and maintain permanent chator structures of brick and corrugated tin to replace the annually raised makeshift ones. Some chators were walled by eight-foot hedges with single designated entry and exit points to prevent any unlicensed sales at the site. Each excise bungalow began holding annual meetings with the ganja cultivators in each circle to disseminate climatological, agricultural, and financial information, discuss risks of predatory moneylending, and relay news about tax rate and sale price modifications.⁵⁹ The supervisory office was refurbished by 1885 as a permanent structure with new furniture and flanked by three industrial warehouses. With systematic growth, more subdivisional funds, and new *thanas* came new, wider but unmetalled roads from Naogaon town to Badalgachi, Nandanali, Panchupur, Raninagar, Manda, Niamatpur, and Mohadebpur.⁶⁰ Before 1880 the only major metaled road, completed in 1845, was between Naogaon and Bauleah. In 1898, road networks had directly influenced an increase in registered ganja production to 530,000 kilograms, and the preventive staff at four chators received elevated floodlights and beacons for surveillance at night.⁶¹

These cartographic, infrastructural, and personnel ambitions of excise administration in Naogaon and the spatiality of its consolidated networks across eastern and northern British India buttressed two histories: first, the history of the temporal regime of seasonal, monthly, and annual inspection and reportage and, second, that of the functional domination of extending and maintaining the lifeways of manufactured ganja products. Yet, much like other forms of state that emerged as effects of colonial modernity, the excise state nucleated in Naogaon was profoundly shot through with anxieties formed, in this case, in the gap between the objectification of ganja as a superfluous drug and its protected continuation and supply under state regulation.

EXCISE STATE, ANXIOUS STATE

If colonial officials sent from Calcutta and other parts of British India were to be believed, the excise state, nucleated in Naogaon and effectuated by underresourced yet consequential surveillance routines, was perennially leaking revenue and misinformed about the scope and scale of the economy it sought to govern. Besides annual correspondences across levels of state, in successive assessments, colonial officials like Hem Chunder Kerr (1877), David Prain (1893), G. Rainy (1904), and S. G. L. Platts (1915) expressed pervasive fears of miscalculated statistics and the smuggling of ganja out of Naogaon. Whether under cover of darkness, in the

chator, on the road to the warehouse, between local and regional warehouses, or from plots that escaped surveillance for any reason, the specter of leaking ganja invited perpetual iterations between 1882 and 1917 of an infrastructural fix: The Excise Department either proposed or attempted to hire more inspectors, pay higher wages, make permanent contracts, create an abortive Cultivators' Association that lasted from 1911 to 1916, and even form a possible subdepartment devoted to "hemp drugs."⁶² Most assessors of British India's ganja economy accepted the fact that varying degrees of smuggling would inevitably mar the system. However, when compared to similar anxieties about opium and liquor, here was an abiding refrain of inadequacy and deficiency implying that somehow no measure was good enough.

This house of cards built on wobbly statistics and anxieties about lost revenue stood on a single fissure with a century-long past, namely the resistance of the imperial state to unify, under a single department, the ganja economy of northern and eastern British India's many districts and divisions that it otherwise pursued so fervently through taxes, rates, license-fees, and duties. Before 1854, wholesalers who held a pass from the Excise Office in their district could travel to Naogaon and purchase any amount of ganja products, and upon informing the amount, get their passes signed by the Ganja Supervisor or Abkari *darogah* (constable) before leaving Naogaon. The same wholesalers could then apply for retail shopfronts or sell to other retailers, who then paid a daily rate of duty in their districts. The levy of duties changed repeatedly over the nineteenth century, sometimes even being imposed at a low rate upon consumers who bought above specified amounts. In Calcutta, right before October's Durga Puja celebrations when sales spiked and profits soared, excise officials increased both retail duties and license fees required to open retail shops.⁶³ This invited speculators, risky private borrowing by interested applicants, and fierce competition between urban networks of commerce, power, and patrimony.⁶⁴

Between different districts and divisions such as Patna, Bhagulpore, Dacca, Orissa, Burdwan, and the city of Calcutta in the presidency division, officials manipulated the rate in order to shape the market in other intoxicants like country liquor.⁶⁵ The new rules for harvest, transport, and export issued after the Ganja Supervisor's Office became a permanent structure in 1854 were never followed in toto, both due to labor shortages and because the resulting data in excise forms and registers were all estimates that cultivators reported and not measured and verified records.

Instead of making the investments necessary to fully and reliably govern ganja production, official measures reinforced perfunctory approximations.⁶⁶ In 1877, the new licensing system whereby cultivators applied for authorization to use plots the following year was not complemented by inspection of excess cultivation. The supervisory staff continued estimating the total outturn without thorough measurement until 1894, when the Excise Department, following the IHDC, mandated

that assistant supervisors verify, in at least 10 percent of cases, that licensees indeed cultivated the exact plot size they had received licenses for. To fulfill this requirement, the staff either gave out licenses for plot dimensions divisible by five or ten or simply chose the most easily measurable quadrangular plots using rope lengths, something Joint Magistrate G. Rainy found entirely understandable in his 1904 investigation that lasted seven weeks.⁶⁷ In 1896, the government of Bengal enforced the requirement that ganja be weighed twice, once after manufacture at the chator and again when brought to the newly built central public warehouse in Naogaon town. This rule yielded new data sets, and in 1903 assistant supervisors were asked to improve measurements in their 10 percent verification exercise by using Gunter's chains and optical right angles. The subdivisional officer was commanded to independently check at least 20 percent of the measurements thus taken and to correct them if necessary. In 1904, before Rainy's scrutiny of the system, the government ended private storage in homes and required all ganja products to be brought to Naogaon town for storing in a single warehouse—an idea first proposed by Kerr in 1877. This exposed the system further as the staff packed about fifteen maunds of bags into spaces meant for ten maunds, piling the ganja up to the ceiling, even using part of the older storage house for purchased ganja, and inconveniencing cultivators whose bags were at the bottom and needed to be pulled out for interested wholesale buyers. Rainy was compelled to suggest that the state sanction a second warehouse, reiterating that the state's approach in effecting a "gradual increase in control" of the ganja economy had a "logical conclusion [of] the purchase of the plant from the cultivators and the manufacture of the drug by Government itself."⁶⁸ He concluded that the government and the cultivators, especially the large landholders, were "partners in an enormously valuable monopoly," and cultivators ought to be prevented from migrating to sugarcane and jute.

The rhetoric of monopoly never involved formally restructuring debt or production relations, as officials in the governments of India and Bengal sought simply to prevent loss of revenue from smuggling. State anxieties around illicit ganja were a direct effect of the plant's materiality and the historical development of regulation and pricing. Naogaon's chators produced multiple types of ganja products, broadly classified as round (*gol*), flat (*chyapta*, both large and small), or chur (*gol* and *chyapta*) from stalks. In practice, after the stalks were massaged bottom to top, the top became round or flat and large, the middle became flat and small, and the bottom became chur with the shed dust of the other two. Biochemically, the top with the flowers and the bottom stalk had substantial resinous content and intoxicating potency, while the middle contained mostly twigs that officials classified as "inert woody matter." The wholesale and retail vendors who had to pay duties on the weight in various districts therefore primarily sought to maximize the proportion of "narcotic matter" to "inert matter" in each sack, especially for areas where customers preferred flat ganja, and maximize earnings between high-duty

districts and others. This practice reinforced the matter of the plant's body as the nub of the problem of revenue loss and the solution imagined as a monopoly.

For a crop already mercurial and sensitive to pollination, moisture, heat, and cultivation method, the historical development of colonial taxes, duties, and fees over the nineteenth century led to a near-total disaggregation of movement between wholesale and retail prices. As Rainy found out with the bumper crop in 1904, changes in wholesale prices did not produce similar directions in retail ones, because, irrespective of the wholesale rate per sack paid to Naogaon's cultivators, the retail price in each division of Bengal depended on the price at which retailers won retail shopfront auctions and the license fees imposed by the deputy collector of excise, which ranged between 2 annas per tola in Dacca division and 11 pices per tola in Patna division.⁶⁹ On one hand, wholesalers with networks across districts constantly tailored prices to local retail needs. On the other, while a strong wholesale price could sufficiently remunerate cultivators, its value was also unstable, because in years of large harvests, prices fell in the middle of the manufacturing season (between mid-January and early April) as the bulk of the crop hit the market. The independence of retail prices meant that increased supply from a bumper crop didn't invite an assured change in demand across the region, even though in Naogaon prices would drop sharply.

In years of large harvests, the number of days it took to transform green ganja from the field to manufactured products in the chator were critical. If prices were falling, cultivators had clear incentives to discreetly sell off, at a fixed rate, as much as possible to an unlicensed wholesale buyer, or even to licensed ones at rates negotiated under the table or by drawing on unrecorded extra quantities of ganja. Other buyers included smugglers who could transport the bales from fields down the Jamuna River to areas outside the subdivision and manufacture it discreetly. Despite their relative infrequency, arrests of smugglers in the neighboring districts of Bogra, Dinajpur, and Rajshahi constantly provoked excise officials to make arbitrary calculations of possible losses in revenue to faceless smugglers. Since the most viable point of smuggling was the chator, especially after each batch was manufactured, all antismuggling efforts converged on the ganja mahal between 15 January and 1 April every year. The number of chaters declined from 1,585 in 1877 to 169 in 1904, and to help revenue, police, and excise officers stopping smuggling at chaters, Excise Department officers also considered ways to disincentivize farmers and to exercise more aggressive policing.

Amid the cacophony of antismuggling solutions, in 1901, the government of India imposed maximum limits on the total area of cultivation. In Bengal, the number was 976 acres in 1904 and 1,026 acres in 1915.⁷⁰ In addition, the Excise Manual was amended to allow district officers to deny cultivation licenses to any peasant suspected of smuggling, with the codicil that smuggling was considered likely if a cultivator's volume of manufactured ganja was, without justifiable reason, "considerably less than the general average of the ganja mahal." Previously,

licenses were issued to every applicant, and the state concerned itself only with duties, fees, and excise taxes. With this imposition, Naogaon's team of four permanent officers (one subdivisional officer and three circle officers) had to select applicants, stay under the maximum limit, and calculate a stable general average—using both historical data and forecast yields—in December, before the harvest and manufacture began. Then, with temporary staff employed for detection during manufacturing season, they would have to attentively weigh sacks and bales at chators and the warehouses for inconsistencies. All this while the subdivisional officer also handled treasury balances, estimated at more than Rs. 1,600,000 a year, of Naogaon and the supervisor tried petty criminal cases and oversaw the police station in Naogaon town.

Predictably, the Rajshahi Collectorate in 1902 found “enormous variations” between amounts manufactured at chators and those brought to central storage by both large and small cultivators. Regarding prior data, as Rainy put it, “before 1894, there was neither progress, nor accuracy.” Previous data were useful solely for understanding general proportions of growth and revenue. Rainy suggested using Nundjee's settlement report for Dubalhati estate, which was the closest example of measured land records, and training amins with rope, plane tables, Gunter's chains, optical triangles, and older cadastral survey *khasras* (measurement records) reproduced through photozincography, so they could begin accurate plot measurements. He further recommended that the appointment date for temporary officers in manufacturing months be advanced to 15 January so, before beginning inspections, they could verify whether the *khatiani* (application) register's data on plots matched actual plot usage. To physically prevent smuggling, Rainy recommended alerting the North Bengal and Eastern Bengal Railway Police during manufacturing months to look for bags that smelt of ganja, establishing four railway lookouts (at Saraghat, Parbatipur, Santahar, and Bogra), issuing directives to market-site chowkidars (officials) for closer inspection, and surveilling known or suspected smugglers and visiting them unannounced in the middle of the night if necessary. Green ganja's strong smell was a material deterrent in its own right, which Rainy considered a complement to other antismuggling measures, including license revocation, the eventual enforcement of a “doctrine of corporate responsibility” among ganja farmers, and heavy fines. Ultimately, excise administration was a roving pursuit: As the movement of the plant's products were imagined, fantasies of constant surveillance and the human sensorium were called into service as hypothetical measures to obstruct the wily smuggler haunting the excise state.

Colonial realities, however, moved at the pace of a superior's vacillating pen. None of Rainy's suggestions materialized immediately, as the Financial Department estimated that costs outweighed any guaranteed gains from plugged leakages. Fundamentally, different officers had different data on exactly how much value leaked out of British India's ganja economy. Increasing surveillance, tasking too many officers with inspecting plots and chators, and introducing wider paper

regimes of forms, passes, licenses, and slips risked a possible “ganja famine” in which no one grew ganja in Naogaon, a place which by 1910 had become a political unit bounded into a subdivision solely because of ganja.⁷¹ Of Rainy’s recommendations, two found favor in the Financial Department: the correction of land records, and the use of chur as a baseline to make equivalences between ganja products. Since chur ganja had few twigs and was a subcomponent present in the round and flat products, a “chur equivalent” became a baseline for calculating excise rates on more or less potent ganja in the market. Correspondingly, by 1909, the Financial Department appointed Saratchandra Bose as surveyor of the ganja mahal’s land records and new surveys.

After the rise of Swadeshi political movements, peasant disaffection was a particularly powerful current in claims that Indian officials made within the new provincial government of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Saratchandra Bose, on his appointment as assistant supervisor of the ganja mahal, immediately prioritized the “interests of raiyats” and the effects of any changes in land use on “the family budget of the ordinary cultivator” to Major W. M. Kennedy, the excise and salt commissioner of Eastern Bengal and Assam.⁷² Before Bose began operations, rumors that the imperial government was seizing the ganja mahal as *khas* land spurred hostilities and forced him to reassure peasants that standardized land measurements would save them from the annual routines of crop verifications. To reluctant peasants, he was forced to threaten them with fines for noncompliance. Finally, with fourteen trained amins (surveyors), Bose surveyed 9,078.48 acres using scanty cadastral survey maps reproduced from the original cloth onto bank-post paper. In the process, he discovered that the circles of Muradpur, Kirtipur, and Gobindopur had different patterns of land tenure and land use, which further changed depending on when ganja lands were kept fallow or used for other crops. For instance, betel nut and mango cultivation entailed different land-leveling practices than required for small-scale rice cultivation, and thus might have necessitated more earth if the plot were to be reallocated for ganja. Since the clearance and leveling of forest lands in the early nineteenth century was undertaken in waves, the landscape was simultaneously quite open, substantially uneven, and in misshaped plots. Bose and Superintendent Jagadish Chandra Sen even toyed with the idea of concentrating cultivation in nine single blocks, each with two thousand bighas of ganja plots (*bhita* or *bhiti*) and six chators, and a rotational system of any three blocks receiving licenses in successive years, which would make supervision easier and reduce the risk of disease contagion.⁷³

Land for ganja cultivation followed rules wholly set by the needs of the sensitive plant. Cultivators used spare land between plots for sapling nurseries, bolstered the fertility of each raised plot with cow dung, oil cakes, household sweepings, and fresh earth dug up from lower ditches nearby, and they altered irrigation channels in case a section of the plot was pollinated mid-season.⁷⁴ Bose understood this challenge to boundaries, and upon reviewing the history of price fluctuations,

considered smuggling to be more pervasive than previous estimates by Kerr, Prain, Nandjee, or Rainy.⁷⁵ With Bose's prior experience in settlement operations elsewhere, the team narrowed the tract to 76 square miles and settled on the average plot size of 0.31 acre (18 *cottah*, 8 *chitak*) so as to finally eliminate the need for the previous 10 percent verification check and the selective allocation of plots with dimensions divisible by five. While the calculation of an average yield, against which smuggling might be suspected, still posed challenges, Bose hoped that future supervisors, aided by designated chators with hedges and fences, would be able to account for factors like pestilence, climate, and shrinkage to better refine their suspicions.

With no structural intervention in debt relations and price movements, the ensuing "closed chator" system of fences, passes, and weighment collapsed as if on cue. Many cultivator-brokers with larger harvests, especially in the three years after wholesale prices recovered in 1912, were caught twenty times on average per year in cases of either smuggling off their green ganja, cultivating more than licensed amounts, or selling and possessing illegal amounts.⁷⁶ S. G. L. Platts, in an alarmed report to Bengal's excise commissioner in 1915, argued that since the retail prices of ganja across districts made it worth seven-eighths of its weight in silver, the ganja yield of 1909–14 was worth £437,610 (Rs. 6,564,160) in duties. Against the "meagre establishment of temporary 2 and a 1/2 month appointments" that oversaw the manufacturing season, Platt urged the state to emulate opium's history and construct a permanent factory, surround it with prickly pear and barbed-wire, add a moat, install only two gates, emulate the guard staff of tea and indigo plantations, reduce the number of chators to twenty, hire construction coolies and house them in temporary lines to erect such infrastructure, subsume the whole system under the superintendent of excise and salt, make licensing stricter, and ensure that productive ganja land stayed productive.⁷⁷

Platt's 1915 memo, perhaps the most ambitious iteration yet of the fantasy of creating a full state monopoly to both produce ganja and tax it, couldn't ease the anxieties inherent in the excise state nucleated around Naogaon. There was no structural barrier to disincentivize cultivators from selling off ganja at a good price to whomever, straight from the field or the chator, earlier in the manufacturing season when the outturn was high and wholesale prices unstable. Alternatively, when outturn was low and cultivators commanded higher prices and negotiated the relative proportions of products (round, flat, and chur) they would manufacture for interested dealers, the attractive prices increased the number of applicants in the following year. "Violent price fluctuations" and the little effect on retail prices from such annual readjustments in wholesale prices meant that even if wholesale prices dropped to zero, it was likely that "the consumer wouldn't get his ganja any cheaper."⁷⁸ On the retail end, since 1894, weight-based rates were augmented with differentiation by product type (based on "narcotic principle") and new rates of duty based on the IHDC's recommendation in order to account

for decline in the intoxicating principle in any product over time. This shelf-life was estimated at two to three years from manufacture, which left ganja dry and barely stimulating. Effectively, newer ganja was retailed at higher prices than older stocks, and rates of projected revenue and corresponding modifications in fresh ganja released from Naogaon were aimed at combatting any smuggled ganja selling below the government price. If older ganja in state warehouses, repriced below the most recent batches, was released to retailers on demand, at prices to compete with any illicit ganja, officials hoped buyers from poorer classes would be encouraged to remain customers of the state.

Platt's vision was never realized. Instead, two years later, in 1917, the government announced the formation of the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators' Co-operative Society. As chapter 6 shows, the society was a unique combination of an executive award of monopoly rights and a bottom-up reconstitution of production relations in Naogaon that capitalized on its intimate history with the colonial state to earn tremendous profits and incur the ire of nationalists. Anticolonial mobilization in the early years of World War I had forced the British Empire to expand electoral representation in India. The dyarchic form of government introduced by the Government of India Act (1919) brought many Indian elites into legislatures across the subcontinent to debate and shape policies such as excise. With the rise of prohibitionism and moral campaigns against drugs and liquor from the ranks of the Indian National Congress into government offices, excise administration became an even more political site of contestation.⁷⁹ In the first major debate in the Bengal Legislative Council on whether to allow elected local councils to reject excise retail shops in their jurisdictions and thus institute prohibitionist policies, the role of excise revenue shone through the faultlines of modern colonial governance.

In September 1921, forced to respond to demands for prohibition of ganja and liquor, Nawab Saiyid Nawab Ali Chaudhuri, the minister of agriculture and industries in Bengal, defended the state's policy of excise licensing boards, increases in retail prices, and gradual reduction of the total number of shops. He made three sweeping claims: first, that excise revenue amounted to twenty million rupees—one-fifth of the Bengal government's revenue—and it largely funded expected expenditure on sanitation, education, and industries; second, that prohibition in the United States was necessary only because a bulk of its population were drinkers who were, after prohibition, driven to bootleggers; and third, that "the nation of Bengalis" didn't drink or smoke and Hindus and Muslims had together made it the world's "most dry nation" but since Bengal housed impoverished or culturally different groups who didn't abstain, immediate prohibition would make Bengal intolerant, illiberal, and majoritarian.⁸⁰ Chaudhuri used the emergent language of nations in the interwar period to articulate a respectable liberal Indian figure, critical of the West's shallow morals and worthy of modern self-government.

Unbeknownst to him, his comments echoed a much older set of powerful discursive associations made between bhang and ganja on one hand and, on the other, poverty, Muslim sovereigns, and racial proclivity to violence in British India that preceded the passage of the 1858 Government of India Act. Before returning to Naogaon, the following chapter explores the colonial constitution of bhang as a preface to irrational violence and Indian dereliction through military dispatches that circulated globally during the pivotal Indian Rebellion of 1857–59.

An Insurgent Body

No Hindoostanee ever attacks Europeans without having primed himself with bhang. The manufacture of bhang can be controlled by the government. Why should it not for the future be absolutely suppressed and the manufacture made as penal as active rebellion? No other drug will supply its place, because no other possesses at once invigorating and stupefying qualities. It produces little or no revenue and is utterly abhorred by the respectable classes of the community.

—“A HINT,” *BELFAST NEWS-LETTER*, 20 FEBRUARY 1858

This short letter to the editor greeted readers of the *Belfast News-Letter* in Ireland on a cold February morning in 1858. It was reproduced from Calcutta’s popular periodical the *Friend of India*, which served Europeans stationed across colonial Bengal. Titled “A Hint,” it had made its way to colonial Ireland through the webbed networks of printed periodical culture. In this global and imperial Anglophone world, editors and publishers of periodicals stitched together parts of the British Empire with the rest of the world by populating pages with the exchange of news items, republications of extracts and letters, abridged quotations, and syndicated opinion columns. Snippets of news, missives from elsewhere, and letters to editors were often republished, even if anonymously, based on the relevance of their content to local audiences. As a genre of publication, the periodical, in Isabel Hofmeyr’s words, “convened a miniature empire on every page.”¹ Together with daily newspapers and pamphlets, but also unlike them, periodicals became crucial in shaping relations between metropolitan audiences in Britain and colonial territories in British India, especially around the Indian Rebellion.

Like many others, this editorial brought the empire’s excesses home. Published successively in Calcutta, London, and Belfast at the height of the bloody British counterinsurgency against Indian rebels in 1858, it made vivid the figure of a Hindustani rebel driven to violence after using bhang as a primer. The Indian Rebellion began in 1857 and lasted until 1859 in some parts of British India. Rural militancy, democratic experiments, rumors of millenarian deliverance and liberation,

histories of Indo-Persianate sovereignty, the shared political identity of Hindustan, and Adivasi uprisings were crucial aspects in the growth of the Rebellion after the initial insurgent mutinies.² The counterinsurgency produced spectacular violence, deportations to island penal colonies around the world, and looting and theft of valuables by British soldiers and spurred new genres of historical and poetic writing in South Asia around devastation, nostalgia, and the remaking of a potentially national self.³ The global and local aspects of the crisis posed by the Indian Rebellion have been studied at length. Exploitation by the East India Company, the diverse methods of insurgency in regional polities, and the ultimate seizure of Company territories in India and their placement within the formal ambit of the British Crown and Parliament make up the metanarrative of scholarship. Extensive analysis has been done of the offensive cartridges greased with cow or pig lard, the political role of rumors, the low pay and forced overseas deployment of Indian sepoys, high agricultural taxes, the insult caused by the annexation of Awadh in 1856, popular discourses of Hindustani Islam, the embers of the Anglo-Sikh War of 1849, and the delegitimation of Indian sovereignty through the doctrine of lapse enforced by Lord Dalhousie.⁴ Scholars agree that the Rebellion was a dispersed and disaggregated, yet mutually reinforcing set of insurgent events across the heart of the South Asian subcontinent. Rebels took up arms, rumors flared, information crises emerged, Indian kings and soldiers asserted their sovereignty, Adivasi communities upheld their own justice, and the horizon of possibilities for Indian polities momentarily expanded in powerful ways.⁵ Together, these events co-constituted a disruptive reckoning for empire and briefly enabled radical democratic possibilities.

This metanarrative has a crucial, hitherto overlooked footnote: Imperial discourses about Indian rebels directly hinged on their use of bhang as *the* primer for violence. The five short sentences in “A Hint” emblemized this assertion in four succinct claims. First, it put bhang production on par with treasonous rebellion by demanding equivalent penalties for both. Second, it declared bhang consumption ubiquitous and agentive in producing violence against European power. Third, it captured the dilemma of explaining bhang’s perceived dichotomous role as a stimulant and a calmativ, even as the author enclosed bhang as a unique exceptional substance. And, finally, it highlighted the double-edged position of bhang as a potential but failing object of excise revenue as well as an item of moral disdain among Indian elites. These four claims about bhang were the crux of reportage and representation in British imperial culture during and after the Indian Rebellion. Anglophone periodicals and colonial correspondence from different parts of the empire framed the substance bhang as an issue of anti-British violence that was irrational, vengeful, and motivated by the habits of the poor and “nonrespectable” classes in the colonies. This letter illuminated a specific moment of consolidation around such ideas when it cast bhang as effectively equal to violent rebellion against European rule. By calling bhang the primer, it firmly situated

in the reader's imagination the specter of an Indian insurgent body consuming bhang as the preface to anti-European violence. Bhang became something that added capacity, ability, and masculinity to the Indian rebel as he prepared himself to attack European colonial authority. For this and other writers around the world, such imperial anxieties surrounding anticolonial rebellion became entangled with fears of bhang and ganja and played out on the bodies of insurgent rebels.

The discursive body of the rebel lay on fundamentally material practices and signs. In Hindustani and Bengali, "bhanga" as a noun was used interchangeably, depending on the context, to refer to both cannabis leaves and the many intoxicating confectionaries and drinks made by boiling them. Colloquially among its consumers, "bhanga" referred to the drink, "ganja" referred to the flowers that were smoked, and edible sweetmeats containing the leaves had longer names like *bhanga masala*, or *pakoda* when fried, or *bhanga laddoo* when mixed with dried milk and sugar in round balls. Among those who did not use bhang or were uninterested in specifics, the noun was commonly interchanged with "ganja." Bhang's shifting status as plant part and plant preparation, some of both but fully neither, made it a particularly significant form of cannabis plant matter. For our analysis here, whether a Hindustani rebel, a Muslim king, a captive witness, or a Hindu woman facing the violence of sati actually ingested bhang or not, and by what mode, was immaterial. There is no such objective truth out there, even though bhang was an ordinary drink prepared by friends, spouses, and siblings for one another across the Gangetic heartland.⁶ There is, however, the insurgent body as an object and a "site of inscription" constituted through discourses of bhang as a force animating the rebel's violence.⁷

Writers, soldiers, editors, scientists, and reporters blaming bhang for anticolonial violence in an imperial public sphere evacuated the politics of the Indian Rebellion and rendered it an unreasonable frenzy of aggrieved treacherous Muslim fanatics. These discourses later shaped pivotal legal trials like the Great Wahhabi Case in the 1860s.⁸ Delegitimizing the political bases of resistance was routine among British colonial men anxious about imperial supremacy in India and elsewhere. Empire was always on shaky ground, standing exposed during mass uprisings and insurgencies as well as in periods of ordinary everyday dissent and resistance.⁹ The Afghan wars, Britain's suppression of the 1848 rebellion in Ireland, Thomas Meagher's incarceration in Australia in 1848, the Opium Wars, and the Anglo-Zulu wars were some notable examples among the constant moments of setback for empire, episodes euphemized in mid-century imperial culture as "campaigns," "disturbances," and "troubles."

Extended and extenuated imperial periodical culture granted longevity and global reach to bhang as an agent of crisis. As each period of intense violence unfolded during the Rebellion, readers around the world found out weeks or months later as ships carried periodicals from the largest ports to the smallest dockside towns. Although telegraph lines and for-fee wire transfers proliferated by 1870, periodicals and newspapers remained central to imperial culture, with

ships taking bundles of publications across seas.¹⁰ Anticolonial networks, print cultures, and nationalist intellectual projects all drew on the temporality of maritime networks that shaped readers' ideas in the nineteenth century. Paralleling the ways French colonial expansion in North Africa after 1852 racialized and demedicalized hashish, English-language periodical publications propagated even wider global and imperial representations of cannabis-induced madness and violence.¹¹ As news of the Indian Rebellion broke and slowly traveled around the world, narratives of bhang charted geographies spanning the smallest towns in England, Ireland, and Canada and the mutinous battlefields of the Indian countryside. Periodicals from British India's metropolises like the *Delhi Gazette*, *Friend of India*, and the *Statesman*, were regularly syndicated across Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada. Their reports reappeared in the columns of the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Times* in the United States. As these circuits brought the empire to the ports and hinterlands of the British Isles and sent Victorian ideas of race and gender into colonial contexts, bhang acquired greater valence as a potentiating force.

The impact and longevity of the Rebellion generated later histories of the insurgent body and sedimented new ideas about bhang for people in British India, other British colonies, and Anglophone regions like the United States.¹² So dispersed were such ideas of bhang-induced violence after 1857 that Denzil Ibbetson struggled to locate their origins in his proverb collection from 1893, which conveyed the opposite. Ibbetson wasn't alone. In the 1870s, British physicians in newly built asylums regularly attributed bouts of irrational violence and the tendency to manslaughter and homicide on the use of ganja and bhang. As James Mills has shown, asylum officials also relied on this attribution, based on racialized discourses and without salient evidentiary bases.¹³ While these practices paralleled similar racialized trajectories in the late nineteenth century, especially in colonial Algeria, that were mobilized by French writers, and ones in Mexico popularized by sensational news and political reportage, they also carried specific histories of white military masculinity, Indian sovereignty, everyday intoxication, and ideas about addiction.¹⁴

The endurance of Indian bhang's violent potentialities centered on one particular genre, the military dispatch. As a genre and form, the dispatch was crucial to the interlocked two-way traffic of home and empire. Dispatches were usually written as authentic "eyewitness" accounts straight from a battlefield and sent to editors of newspapers and periodicals. Depending on content and editorial intention, they were republished and syndicated by other periodicals. Bhang frequently appeared in supposedly authentic dispatches from the front. Some of them, written by British soldiers or reporters posted across India, were also translated into French and Welsh as broadsheets like *Baner* in Denbigh, Wales, also carried news from India. In this global history of empire, while bhang as plant matter physically animated Indian rebels, its potentialities added an affective surcharge to racist

imperial logics with deep pasts. Colonial writing before 1857 on individual agency, domestic labor, sovereign justice, and addictive devotion in British India had spatialized bhang as ubiquitous across its geography and laid the ground for the way different rebel leaders and kings were represented in relation to bhang during the Rebellion. Drawing on older accounts that framed bhang as always already present, known, and used anywhere from village squares to royal courts, the disruptive potential of Indian bodies and the Rebellion's interruptive power turned in part on bhang. After 1860, military dispatches and war reports from the rebellion became the fodder for "mutiny fiction" as a body of Victorian literature that then stretched bhang's supposed itineraries further in time and reinforced notions of irrationality and bloodlust as the Victorian state in British India dug its roots in.

This global moment has been overlooked by scholars because madness and insanity have been confined to histories of medicine and psychiatry in India. James Mills focused on colonial discourses of lunacy and concerns about its roots in the "abuse of hemp" after 1872, when a survey of officials in British India revealed how generalized this assertion was.¹⁵ The survey showed that officials in newly built asylums routinely thought, largely by assumption, that ganja and bhang consumption was the cause of madness among Indians. In the absence of critical analysis of health, poverty, and colonial rule, such assertions became medical truths. European missionaries also equated cannabis with opium to produce a flat equivalence that helped temperance politics grow by leaps and bounds. By the 1890s, the panic around cannabis and lunacy in British India fed into wider campaigns and antiopium campaigners took up the cudgels against Indian cannabis as well.

Moving the lens away from niche medical debates in asylums illuminates the popularity enjoyed by newspapers and other periodicals since the 1840s and stretches back in time the sedimentation of the idea that cannabis ignited violence specifically within Indian bodies. Periodicals, newspapers, and works of fiction were, in fact, far more influential than opinions of asylum officials and doctors, which, as Mills has shown, were published only in select medical journals. Indian uses of cannabis and excessive acts of violence were entwined in imperial culture before asylum officials arrived at their conclusions. This fact alone invites us to take Indian cannabis out of the archive of British medicine peopled by doctors and the observational practices of laboratory science and resituate it in raced and gendered discourses of addiction, insurgency, and violence in imperial culture. Newspapers and other periodicals constitute an archive of empire that captured cannabis not through scales of chemical composition but through a constellation of associated meanings derived from routine realities of empire like military campaigns, anticolonial rebellions, and ethnographic observation.

Race, violence, and masculinity were keys to understanding how the wide range of associations, uses, and references to bhang shaped the insurgent body. As the insurgent rebel's body circulated in global periodicals, it became the pivot in the discursive trajectory of bhang under empire. Whereas before the Rebellion,

bhang was described as a ubiquitous banal substance in the life of the ruled, during and after the Rebellion, its violent potentiality made it a decisive threat to the ruler. The Rebellion's history is incomplete without first assessing how bhang was seen as ubiquitous and exemplified civilizational lack and poverty among Indian subjects well before the first sparks of insurgency took hold.

UBIQUITOUS HISTORIES OF BHANG

In news reports, travel accounts, and chronicles of India before 1857, bhang was a minor element that was, nonetheless, seemingly everywhere. Without any precise provenance, it appeared commonly at hand in fictional and biographical accounts written in English. Most authors who mentioned bhang did so in passing, never bothering with details as to whether it grew openly in villages or was sold in markets or was simply passed around as a gift. It appeared ordinarily everywhere. With no contextual information, readers overseas encountered bhang in India as a racial proclivity that was easily accessible and could be called onto the scene when needed. Stories of bhang intoxication came from Orientalists, travelers, missionaries, soldier-scribes, and doctors across British India. When taken together, bhang appeared to be fully socially embedded in regions that became colonial political units, such as Bengal, Oudh, Punjab, Bombay, Madras, Mysore, and Sind.

Missionary society journals and small literary publications where authors claimed to provide an authentic view of Indian customs and life served as the most common stage on which bhang appeared.¹⁶ Since the 1830s, the number of such accounts making their way to British ports, and subsequently to Edinburgh and New York, had risen quickly. Written either as travel narratives, orientalist histories, or ethnographic observations, European authors performed the figure of a keen chronicler who, by dint of acute observation of class, nobility, status, poverty, and custom, had gleaned deeper meanings in Indian social life. Here, bhang was often a marker of Indian superstition and lack of reason and a source of religious excess. In this mode, it appeared most prominently after the judicial decision in Bengal to uphold the abolition of sati in 1829. Among European audiences, customary widow femicide and its outlawing had been a major fulcrum for representations of Indian civilizational backwardness and barbarity. By the 1820s, juridical debates among Brahmanical, reformist, and European men in Calcutta captured conflicts over what could rightfully be called tradition while scaffolding binaries of the sati widow figure's victimhood and heroism.¹⁷ Feminist scholars have thoroughly interrogated narratives in which the sati woman was forced into, or willingly embraced, or was dissuaded from the funeral pyre of her dead husband. However, accounts involving bhang trod slightly different ground. Bhang use introduced the sati in a state of being intoxicated in which agency, reason, selfhood, and desire remained in ambiguous tension.¹⁸ In such accounts, prominent in

the 1830s, bhang appeared as a readily available medium of communal manipulation that inhibited reasonable action or left the question of the widow's subjectivity in limbo.

The Baptist missionary John Statham's well-known account of a sati ritual that occurred four miles from Alipur in Calcutta, which he published in 1832, was a much-cited example. In it, he describes how he decided to intervene on learning that a young widow was going to be burnt on the pyre. Arriving at the scene, he finds the young woman "naked from the waist upwards, having taken the cloth from her shoulders and spread it over the face of her husband." After entreating her to stop, Statham was shocked to find that "her mind was most fully bent on undergoing the fiery ordeal." He intervened thrice, even dragging her sons along with him, but her mind remained made up. "I am a suttee, I have no children," she reportedly told him, her rejection of motherhood further shocking his civilizing Christian sensibilities. His final hopes of reasoning with her were completely dashed after he realized that she had been given bhang to drink the night before and was in no state to deliberate on her actions.¹⁹

The *perwannah* for the cremation had taken two days to be signed by a magistrate, and while the woman's resolve was constant throughout that time, Statham hoped she would relent on the final night. But bhang was the impediment. The "disheveled Hecate," Statham recounted, went into the pyre and "a cry of horrible anguish and an entreaty of liberation" was the last thing he heard. If only bhang hadn't been in the equation, Statham argued, the nameless woman might have sought out his domain of reason and not the superstitions of Brahmanism that valorized or legitimated social femicide. The white missionary appeared confounded by the yawning chasm between his understanding of agency and the decisions, shaped by bhang, of the woman he wanted to save. Bhang's power to impede the user's will and agency highlighted how Indian cannabis animated gendered civilizational thought as a persistent obstacle with slim definition but ubiquitous presence.

The administration of bhang by others on someone in order to produce the suspension of agency and the loss of an authoritative self had roots in seventeenth-century imperial narratives that also enjoyed a parallel resurgence in the 1830s. The decade marked a crucial conjuncture as literary and historical writing on British India expanded in scope and scale by reusing and revising accounts from the early modern period.²⁰ For instance, in a widely read and much cited chronicle of travels in India between 1672 and 1681, John Fryer had described a peculiar form of justice meted out to members of royal or chiefly families found guilty of high treason and attempted usurpation of the throne. Arriving at Machilipatnam ("Mechlapatan" in Fryer's travelogue) from the English factory at Fort St. George, Fryer described the world of the Golconda Sultanate at the mouth of the River Krishna. Peopled by Armenians, traders from northern Mughal towns, Parsis ("Persians"), other Muslims ("moors"), Dutch ("Hollanders"), Portuguese ("Portugals"), the French East

India Company, Telugu-speaking Hindus (“gentues”), and Tamil Brahmin devotees of Perumal (“Perimel, one of their prophets”), this rich Deccan commercial landscape was ruled by the Qutb Shahi kings, who practiced a form of justice that, Fryer noted, was “not in force in our Western Empires.” When found guilty, assassins and usurpers, among others, were sent by the king’s orders to a “Master of the *Post*,” who administered to them a “drink, which at first they refuse, made of *Bang* (the Juice of the intoxicating sort of Hemp).”²¹ According to Fryer, this drink also contained “dutry,” which he equated to “solanum or nightshade,” and after a week of consuming it, the convicts began to crave it so much that they became nauseated and “foolishly mad.” Afterward, they were sent to “Inner Lodgings of the House,” where the palace’s animals—“apes, cats, dogs, and monkeys”—became their interlocutors and they remained imprisoned at the “King’s Pleasure” until a cure was decreed, or not.

Among the litany of Fryer’s possible errors lies the fact that the word “post” referred to opium, not bhang. Nonetheless, the use of bhang as a juice to produce the loss of reason and derangement gathered its own colorful afterlife in Orientalist writing after a period of fleeting references in the eighteenth century when soldier-scribes and officials of the Company took up residence in different parts of the subcontinent. By the 1830s, Fryer’s accounts reappeared in several volumes published within years of one another. Two key examples are the *Historical and Descriptive Account of British India*, compiled by Hugh Murray and others for sale in Edinburgh and London in 1832 and 1836, respectively, and the second edition of James Forbes’s *Oriental Memoirs* in 1834.²² In a remarkably telling moment in his narrative, Forbes, who was a British resident of Gujarat at Dabhoi (“Dubhoy”) and Bharuch (“Bharoche”), described escaping an ambush by Girasiya horsemen (“Gracias”). To amplify the nature of the threat he faced, he definitively asserted that punishment by bhang was the hallmark of all “Asiatic despots,” including the Girasiya Rajputs, and the method originated in the “House of Timur.” Using Fryer’s description of Golconda, he described how “victims of imperial jealousy or revenge” would face the “agents of royal murderers” who sent them down the road of “imbecility to idiotism” using bhang.²³ In the first edition of *Oriental Memoirs*, Forbes described bhang as the cause of “phrenzy” among Moplah Muslims of the southern Malabar Coast in India.²⁴ Generalizing the administration of bhang as a trait not of specific Indian sovereigns but of all Indian Muslims, Forbes racialized bhang in a specific mold of colonial sectarianism and underscored bhang’s ubiquity in the political landscapes of Hindustani and Deccan Islamic sovereignty while homogenizing both equally.

Representations of bhang as a pathway to unreason and an impediment to agency were soon complemented by others, in which bhang was the recourse of lazy and poor Indian men unable to break their own habits. Framing such figures as being diseased of will reshaped the way bhang’s addictive powers were understood in imperial culture. A prominent example appeared in 1849 in a three-column

account titled “Indian Bhang” carried by *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal*. Though unsigned, the article was likely written by a British man in India and narrated the author’s ethnographic observation of “an old favourite servant as he sat over the orgies of the bhang.”²⁵ The journal had recently carried reports on Egyptian hashish, prompting this view from India, which readily echoed associations of excess with bhang intoxication and argued for similarities between “the Egyptian and the Hindoo.”²⁶ In the United States, the *Gazette of the Union* carried “Indian Bhang” five weeks later, in March, handing New York City’s streets their first encounter with the servant Peerun.²⁷ A “ganja khore and bhang bibber” in India, the author wrote, were to be identified by “[their] rags and hungry look,” and Peerun was offered as an example.

In this account, Peerun carried his “bundle of bhang” everywhere and, with fellow servants, prepared a cupful for everyone at midday. In a “thornwood mortar and pestle,” Peerun would “pulverize the leaves” with water, strain it through a muslin cloth, and add sugar, ginger, and pepper to “make it palatable.”²⁸ After Peerun consumed this bhang drink with his friends, “his eyes became bloodshot, his speech thick, his mind confused,” following which he slept for three hours. Yet, the writer noted, Peerun was not a debilitated addict but a “faithful and trustworthy servant.” This argument hinged on a second layer of associations between colonial employment and Indian poverty. The writer noted that Peerun, under European employment, was not impoverished and could afford good food as a result. Thus, he was better off than the “poor debauchee” who could become an addict through his own devices. Bhang “costs the Bengalee as much as our Souchong costs us,” the article averred, before adding that, by proportion, the poor Indian nonetheless spent more on bhang than the Englishman did on souchong tea. In accounts of social and ethnographic observation that were common across English periodicals, poverty was the fundamental marker of Indian life. Bhang thus appeared ordinary and a choice drug among the poor, as ubiquitous and mundane as poverty appeared to be in India. To European readers, such accounts would gesture to similarities between intoxicants like tea and wine only to then frame them as contradictions. Tea was, for instance, enervating for the Englishman, while South Asian intoxicants were stupefying to the Indian body.

The notion of the poor Indian male, whether or not in the employ of the Company, who was an ordinary bhang addict was widespread among colonial medical officers. In Madras, J. Laurance, a surgeon in the Madras army, called it the “very general practice with the male population of India,” after finding exactly two cases of bhang-related ill health in 1844. Laurance compiled Madras Medical Board’s records for 1840, together with his own ethnographic observations, to determine three different recipes and preparations of bhang. The first involved mixing moistened bhang and tobacco and then smoking it, and the second was called “subzee, an infusion where three drachms of bhang are infused for an hour with eight ounces of boiling water and then strained; cloves, cardamom seeds,

nutmeg, and mace of each a drachm and a half finely powdered, with an ounce and a half of sugar." Before explaining details of the two cases, Laurance, then noted the third form of common market-sold confections, which he called "lageum" and claimed to consist of "an ounce and a half of bhang, cloves, nutmeg, mace, cardamom seeds, sugar six ounces, ghee two ounces, water, milk," and notably, "opium of each three drachms."²⁹ While the first two methods were common among regular users of bhang, others commonly consumed the latter.

In Sindh, Richard F. Burton, then a rising lieutenant in the Bombay army, found bhang to be pervasive. Burton's account of Sindh's history, published right before his illustrious journey on the hajj that launched his Victorian career and status as an imperial celebrity, added the region to an already wide spatial imaginary of bhang's ubiquity that stretched from Bengal and Awadh to Madras and Bombay.³⁰ In *Sindh*, published in 1851, Burton described how in the homes of elite Sindhis, bhang was a routine offering to all guests but, since "more civilized Orientals seldom touched" bhang in another's home, it was not safe for strangers to accept when they visited Sindhis.³¹ All Sindhis, save for the most religious ones, were attracted to drinking, and when they "determined to indulge in deep carousal," they prefaced drinking spirits with a preliminary round of consuming bhang. Evidencing the power of the proverbial, Burton substantiated this claim with a proverb. The "Persian poet says," he wrote, "first drink bhang, and then wine, beautifully flows the stream over the verdure." Translating the Persian word *sabzeh* as "verdure," Burton drew on the proverbial knowledges of Sindh to gloss his descriptions of how wealthy landholders and "hardy and industrious" peoples like the fishing and boat-owning Mohana of the Indus River delta similarly indulged in bhang intoxication. While this prevalence of addiction struck Burton as uncivilized, he took extra care to note that "Sindh is sufficiently civilized to possess fixed places where intoxicating preparations were consumed."³² These were the *daira*, or walled gardens planted with bhang, where women were barred from entering. Each had an *otak*, a hall for bhang drinkers to gather at dusk and "wash, press, and rub the plant" before drinking it in "solemn silence" and subsequently engaging in conversations, singing, or sleeping. Among its regular clientele were "Jelali Fakirs," implying members of the Jalali Sufi order, and some notable Sayyids and Munshis.³³

By the 1840s, narratives like Burton's had spatialized bhang, piece by piece, across the topography of the entire Indian subcontinent. Bhang appeared so well known that it needed no qualification. It seeped through ordinary life, across class and caste divisions, and with but a few minor exceptions, was never referred to in spectacular terms. Intoxicating experiences brought on by bhang were illustrated through niche examples that neither conveyed the spectacle of large masses nor grew to grab transnational attention. This pattern began shifting as more accounts of Charak Pooja in Bengal appeared in Great Britain. Charak Pooja was a hook-swinging festival celebrating the deity Shiva in the last month of spring. The

central attraction of Charak gatherings was a feat of the will: A performer swirled centrifugally from a pole while suspended on a cord hooked to the body. The hook passed through the top layer of muscle over the shoulder blade bones.³⁴ The practice of hook-swinging was common in Bengal's rural fairs, and its merits were debated by social reformers, missionaries, and colonial judges.³⁵ These representations indexed various forms of colonial affect. For example, the missionary John Statham had also observed Charak in 1832, describing hook-swingers as superstitious Hindus driven "by trouble or affliction" and the festival itself as one of two "most famous annual festivals of the Hindoos."³⁶ In 1843 George William Johnson, in *The Stranger in India*, recounted a tour of Calcutta's Kalighat ("Kallee Ghaut") where "every neighbour Hindoo rajah had a churruck-post erected within his compound" for hook-swingers to swing from.³⁷ This "infernal machine" sat at the center of brutality and torture, and he hoped that the rites were on their way out with "English example and instruction." Besides noting that bhang, among other intoxicants, was consumed by the performers, he described new developments like the use of supportive cloth bands across the performer's body for the hooks to go into, and in 1842, the laudable decision by "high class natives of Calcutta" to not "erect churruck-posts," because the cash reward paid to stunt performers by "wealthy members of the Hindoo community" usually overrode devotion as their reason for inflicting pain on their bodies. Johnson's views, partly owing to his role as advocate at the Supreme Court in Calcutta and fellow of the new Agri-Horticultural Society of India, were echoed by others in colonial Bengal's judicial administration.

In the 1850s, British judges tended to negotiate custom and religion in India with extreme caution.³⁸ By 1853 British administrators in Bengal mandated that magistrates report all cases of Charak Pooja in which "cruelty" was recorded to their superintendents of police. The colonial government sought to make participation in the ritual a matter of consent. The 1853 order emphasized not social hierarchies at the festival or the consumption of bhang but only those instances when hook-swinging "was enforced without the free consent of the parties submitting to it."³⁹ Leaving matters in the realm of liberal ideas of agency and the age and form of consent put a comfortable distance between the company-state and on-the-ground realities of caste relations, religious meanings, and social forces that shaped popular festivity in Bengal. Correspondingly, bhang consumption at Charak festivals attracted relatively little attention.

That is until James Holms intervened. On 19 April 1856, just a few months before the Indian Rebellion began in 1857, someone signing as James Holms wrote to the editor of the *London Times* from Calcutta describing his observation of a Charak Puja festival in Bengal. He claimed to have traveled to the outskirts of Calcutta to witness it, recounting it veritably aghast. His sensational narrative described the festival as having been enjoyed by "only the lowest class of the natives" in the country and vividly recounted bhang as the central pivot of mass devotional practice in

British Bengal. For him, Charak was a “tragic scene” and a “degrading spectacle” held together by the glue of bhang. Bhang was everywhere. The “crowds of Indians of every age,” he reported, “were more or less excited” with the drink. The main performer, a man with a “wild expression of countenance and glaring eyes,” was also “infatuated” with bhang. Bhang was what the performer “had consumed great quantities of during the three previous days to deaden the pain.” In Holms’s words, the scene was “frightful,” and the whole festival was in urgent need of abolition. “Men who undergo the swinging seldom survive it,” he added, but cited no evidence, anecdotal or otherwise. Holms ended by demanding Parliament wade into the muddy waters of popular religion in Bengal to abolish Charak altogether.

Within weeks of its initial publication, Holms’s article breezed through global networks of English-language media. By 14 June 1856, “Swinging Festivals of India” had been syndicated across Anglophone press networks from London to every major newspaper in Britain, including Lancashire’s *Preston Chronicle*, the *Belfast News-Letter*, Reading’s *Berkshire Chronicle*, Yorkshire’s *Leeds Times*, Bangor’s *North Wales Chronicle*, and the Scottish *Paisley Herald and Renfrewshire Advertiser*. Devon’s *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post* carried it the following week, and publications in Canada and the United States followed suit. Only the editors of the London digest of overland mail, the *Indian News and Chronicle of Eastern Affairs*, remained skeptical of Holms’s account, noting that the writer might have “imagined a good deal” beyond what he saw or have uncritically reproduced stories from “his native cicerone.”⁴⁰ The editors reminded readers that Reginald Heber, the Anglican bishop of Calcutta in the 1820s, among many others, had cast doubt on whether any torture was involved in Charak festivals, and the parliamentary abolition that Holms shrilly desired might better suit prize-fighting in London’s streets first.

However, Holms’s short letter, its sensational alarmism, and its timing with the height of Dalhousie’s reign in Bengal all contributed to making his focus on bhang among Charak gatherers stand out. The letter reached far more people than previous accounts, spanning Britain’s biggest port cities and provincial towns along with cities across the Atlantic. The letter’s republication catapulted colonial debates on bhang and Charak into metropolitan consciousness and imperial culture and powerfully embedded the relationship between mass consumption of bhang in public gatherings and discourses of wildness, infatuation, superstition, and the numbing of pain. Unlike prior discussions on the subject inside colonial offices and among literate societies, Holms’s narrative sensationally popularized bhang among lay readers around the world as the predilection of both single individuals and attendant crowds in India. On the cusp of the Indian Rebellion, readers were drawn into narratives according to which bhang was ubiquitous in India, Hindus and Muslims used it liberally to indulge their superstitions and laziness, and in mass festivals like Charak where devotees performed dangerous feats of physical prowess, bhang was the key substance mediating the individual devotee’s

superstitious extension toward death and the collective gathering's excitement into devotional attachment.

Twelve months from this moment of heightened alarmism around bhang, the Indian Rebellion became a spark in a tinderbox of homogenized and racialized associations where bhang's ubiquity in the imagined geography of British India had traversed niche haunts, rural spaces, and elite households to emerge as the primary intoxicant of mass festivity, wildness, superstition, and devotion. The Rebellion ignited and subsequently reinforced an array of spectacular histories of violence echoed in the missive to the *Belfast News-Letter* that opens this chapter.

SPECTACULAR HISTORIES OF BHANG

On 15 July 1857, the second page of the *Manchester Guardian* greeted its readers with a sensational account syndicated from Agra.⁴¹ It promised "a detailed account" of the "fearful massacre in Delhi" from the "pen of an eye-witness." According to this writer, Indian soldiers of the 3rd Light Cavalry had arrived in Delhi from Meerut on the morning of 11 May "prepared to perpetuate the most awful crimes as they were fully armed and apparently wild with rage and excitement." For many readers in England, this piece set off a period of several months when periodicals regularly published such accounts of the ongoing rebellion against the British East India Company in South Asia. Historians of the Rebellion have dwelt at length on the mutiny in the Meerut barracks and the gradual outbreak of rebellious aspirations among other Indian sepoys and diverse segments of colonial Indian society following that fateful march of the mutineers to Delhi.⁴² Delhi was a major turning point in the course of the Rebellion because it housed the last reigning Mughal emperor, whose imperial authority and lived memory in Hindustan could potentially mobilize Indians against the Company's military. More important, it became a critical signpost of events in that the victory of the mutineers was followed by the public execution of British soldiers and officials who had managed to survive the battle outside Delhi. This specter of violence in the historic imperial capital of Delhi quickly animated rumors of British downfall that spread across northern India's garrison towns like Aligarh and Lucknow.

By all accounts, the figure of the Indian rebel had burst into the imperial imagination wild with rage. Wild and spectacular violence was the nub of the reportage in the English press in Delhi, Agra, and London. The *Manchester Guardian's* "eye-witness" report noted both that the mutineers entered Delhi without resistance from the city police and that when the locally stationed British soldiers of the 54th Regiment fought back, their Indian soldiers deserted them and were later thanked by the mutinying troopers "for their forbearance." In other words, Indians in the employ of the Company chose their communal bonds over military discipline and their employment under the English. According to the report, the infantrymen who had marched all night from Meerut were still in full British uniform

and wearing their medals. But underneath that demeanor lurked the wild rebel. “The countenances of the troopers wore the expression of maniacs,” the writer remarked. One among them particularly stood out. He was “a mere youth, rushing about flourishing his sword, displaying all the fury of a man under the influence of bhang,” the writer emphasized.⁴³ This particular description of the fountainhead of the marching Indian mutineers was republished in tens of periodicals, including the *North Wales Chronicle*, *Leicestershire Mercury*, *York Herald*, *Birmingham Gazette*, and *John O’Groat Journal* (published in Wick, Scotland).

Months before bhang’s role in the seizure of Delhi captivated readers elsewhere, its association with irrational mutinous violence had already begun to brew. Bhang briefly figured in the trial of Mangal Pandey. Pandey had led a powerful moment of insubordination and mutiny in the garrison at Barrackpore, attacking his superiors on 29 March 1857, after which he was executed, on 8 April. Allegedly, he claimed to have mutinied under the influence of bhang. Internal reports by officers like Major General Sir John Hearsey, who commanded the 34th Bengal Native Infantry, concluded that other soldiers had not stopped “Mungul Pandey from behaving in a murderous manner,” because “he had taken bhang to excess.”⁴⁴ These claims gathered steam across battlefields once the rebellion and the simultaneous coverage of its unfolding began to circulate globally. Bhang became the substance that tethered an Indian insurgent body to discursive constructions of wild, armed, and enraged rebellious men rejecting colonial domination—the very foundations of imperial anxieties.

In the early nineteenth century, reports of bhang-induced violence were rare but notable. In some ways, the *Manchester Guardian*’s description of rebels wearing the “expression of maniacs” or seeming furious as if “under the influence of bhang” did faintly echo earlier English wars of conquest. In these instances, madness was often coded through the figure of an irrational Indian subject who did not know when to give up. For example, in 1839, when London’s *Morning Post* carried a report on Man Singh’s surrender of Jodhpur to the East India Company’s 22nd Regiment, its metropolitan readers encountered two Indian figures—Man Singh, a defeated Indian king, and another soldier described as a “mad old fool.”⁴⁵ Reportedly, Man Singh, the last dynast of Marwar before British conquest, had seen the writing on the wall when the Company’s armies laid siege to his fortress. Although his armies were ready and gunpowder bags were lined up for a confrontation on 21 September, Singh decided to surrender the gate of Jodhpur fort. The Company’s regiments marched in and took possession of the fortress. However, the report noted, just as the victorious Captains Ludlow and Smith were “enjoying the beautiful view of the country and of the troops ascending the winding pathway,” they were attacked by a lone old soldier. One captain dodged a bullet from the soldier’s gun, and the other took some swipes from the attacker before overpowering and killing him. “Of course,” wrote the correspondent, “he was mad, either with drink or bhang.” If the Indian king’s surrender was meant to be

a tame matter in the narrative of British dominion, this mad subaltern who never accepted his subjugation kept it from being so. The report captured the insurgent power of Indian soldiers and paved the way for readers to imagine such figures as mad beings given to irrational single-handed violence even when others had given up and surrendered.

In other reportage immediately prior to the Rebellion, it was common for writers to justify British dominion in India by framing Indian sovereigns as despotic rulers incapacitated by bhang. For example, Wajid Ali Shah, the last king of Awadh, was historically represented as either too weak or too distracted to maintain military sovereignty. In the days leading up to the swift annexation of Awadh by the Company in 1856, newspapers dwelt on Shah's reputation as a Muslim king unable to maintain peace between his Hindu and Muslim subjects. This approach capitalized on colonial methods of deploying sectarian modes of religious differentiation to classify Indians and Indian history in order to then justify British rule as impartial and necessary. So, in 1855, when reports of religious conflict emerged from Faizabad, the Company's garrison at Lucknow was quick to respond to the opportunity. When the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* reported on the event, it claimed that the violence had not been prolonged because of the threat of complete British annexation that compelled Hindus and Muslims to avoid sectarian violence. The report declared that Shah could not control Muslim "fanatics" and, in the deliberations over peacekeeping, he was "in a continual state of stupefaction from opium or bhang." Apparently, this left his prime minister and "the English Resident and his assistants, as the real masters of the situation."⁴⁶ This report wasn't limited to Sheffield or London but circulated widely across England, from Yorkshire to Dorset, where the *Sherborne Mercury* carried it on 30 October 1855.

Associating Muslim kings with bhang and sometimes opium evacuated the power of Hindustani sovereignty and conveniently reinforced tropes of despotic rule. Even when, at the height of the rebellion, the colonial armies and English reporters were forced to acknowledge the power of Indian kings, writers put such stereotypes to use. For instance, in 1858, when Company troops were scrambling to retake territory lost to the rebels across northern India, they faced one of the last holdouts in the revolutionary government of Bareilly. Elites in the city of Bareilly had selected Khan Bahadur Khan as its head.⁴⁷ Even the *Friend of India* acknowledged the provisional gains of Khan's government in setting up a stable monetary and fiscal system in the city. British commentators from India begrudgingly hailed his achievements. One even wrote to the *London Times* praising his efforts to bridge religious divisions. "He has, in the Mohamedan city of Bareilly," noted the writer, "forbidden the killing of cows and buried four amulets in each corner of the city with rites strictly Hindu to assure his followers of success." Further, the commentator wrote, "the cowardly assassin [Khan], who never yet has headed troops in the field, exhibits fertility of resources and power of combination beyond any of the leaders of the insurrection." But even if Khan was good at balancing

religious divisions and had surpassed other Indian rulers in his military engagements with British troops, he was nonetheless beatable. According to the writer, Khan's claim to sovereignty was always already compromised and augured success for the British counterinsurgency because bhang assured his ignominy: "Khan is fast losing the little intellect and influence that bhang and opium had left him, and he's falling into second childhood." Khan might have been resourceful, but "it [was] beyond his power to resist the force which will be brought against his troops."⁴⁸ Syndication of this letter extended across Britain, assuring readers far and wide that Khan Bahadur Khan was not a serious threat. Khan was eventually hanged in 1860. Defaming the sovereignty of Indian kings using bhang consumption laid the groundwork for justifying such actions to Britons and relieving the fears of global and European audiences by implying that the decline of Indian sovereignty was already fated. Bhang became the alibi deployed to purge the insurgency of its political content.

In military dispatches and other war reports between May 1857 and June 1859, bhang use by Indian Muslims seemed to animate nearly every theater of battle and echoed bhang's framing as ubiquitous in India for decades prior. Once the mutiny spread, many local newspapers in Britain, like the *Cheltenham Looker-On* and the *Bucks Herald* of Aylesbury, began attributing events that preceded the first battle in Delhi to the actions of Muslim soldiers. One report described Muslim Indian soldiers as an "infuriated crew, thirsting for the blood of the infidel, and frenzied with bhang."⁴⁹ Mutiny dispatches quickly became an identifiable genre of English-language reportage, and among the rising numbers of eyewitness accounts that poured in, Muslim soldiers were repeatedly described as fanatics who consumed bhang out of religious persuasion.

In September 1857, Major Alexander Cobbe wrote to the *Hertford Mercury and Reformer* describing a battle in Delhi in which he witnessed rebels drinking bhang, following which they became "consequently more courageous than usual" and could charge the British forces fearlessly.⁵⁰ Every dramatic account like this one added emphasis to the role of bhang in intoxicating the rebel into a fearless enemy. "By all accounts, they were perfectly mad from churrus or bhang and fought more boldly than they ever did before," read another report on a skirmish at Delhi that was published by the *Hereford Times* and syndicated by *Reynolds' Newspaper* in London the next day.⁵¹ In another dispatch from the special correspondent of *The London Times* in Bombay, readers learned how a "fanatic Mahomedan of the 1st Bombay Lancers, maddened by bhang, appeared on the lines of his regiment and by his furious and inflammatory gestures and addresses, excited a considerable commotion" on 10 August in the cantonment at Neemuch.⁵² This report, republished in the *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* the same day, emphasized how it was "only one madman at fault" who had fired at Brigadier Macan's head but missed and was subdued quickly. When *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* syndicated this report again in London, it editorialized the event as ominous evidence

that the mutiny had spread westward and was “defiling” the Bombay presidency.⁵³ Meanwhile, in eastern India, newspapers continued to keep a close eye on events in Barrackpore and Calcutta as instances of sepoys attacking adjutants under the influence of bhang arrived intermittently.⁵⁴

Besides embellished accounts of events, the genre of military and war dispatches provided lay readers a window into Indian life. Most of them were written by white soldiers in the British army who were stationed in northern Indian towns and cities. Some writers included details about themselves to evidence the authenticity of their views, while others inserted snippets of everyday military life to provide an air of dramatic detail. On the rare occasion that such details became visibly important to editors, they stood out among the reports on the Rebellion. In a special column titled “Race and Religion in India,” published by the *London Observer* in April 1858, the author considered dispatches themselves as a genre. Dispatches “do not profess to give ‘news,’” admitted the editorial, “but the details they contain of the native character and manners throw some light on the causes of the insurrection.”⁵⁵ Editorial opinions like this one usually included evidence that suggested to readers the reasons for which the editors published the dispatches they did. A military officer’s record of service was a common form of evidence to establish the authority of some accounts of the mutiny and its causes to British readers. This editorial in the *Observer* quoted a dispatch by one Captain T. to the newspaper, noting his “eighteen years in the company’s service and fifteen on the staff and civil employment.” The captain declared that “no native mutineer or rebel has as yet given any reason for his conduct. The Mohammedans got up the plot to wrest the empire from us; the Wahabee Mussulman sectarians of Islam being the chief conspirators.”⁵⁶ Since the 1840s, the Wahhabi movement in northern and central India had directly confronted the East India Company’s officials and armies. Wahhabi leaders regularly attempted to gain the support of Indian sepoys employed by European armies, causing British agencies to scramble for intelligence and proceed on charges of treason and sedition.⁵⁷ In the 1870s, after the Rebellion was suppressed, the colonial government of India added Section 124A, the clause against sedition, to the Indian Penal Code explicitly to curb the activities of Wahhabi groups.⁵⁸

Britons regularly cast organized Wahhabi opposition as sectarian and scheming. References to Wahhabi activity also homogenized other Islamic movements, such as those among Sufi sects, that also contributed to the Rebellion. For writers like Captain T., Wahhabis were cunning enemies, and their activities only fueled the primitivism and irrational fatalism that defined Asians. “Fatalism is the great mover in the disposition of the native. He runs mad, being naturally excited, adds bhang and other drugs to work up the system, and then says it is all fate that did it,” he wrote. In his account, the insurgent body was not simply racialized as inherently weak and lacking masculine will; it was also too susceptible to the lures of Wahhabi Islam’s anti-British propaganda. While the Wahhabi movement had

“cleverly set the ball rolling” with the mutiny, the captain continued, “the whole ran amuck as Asians only can do. It is an Asiatic disease like cholera, equally incurable and equally puzzling to sober Europeans.”⁵⁹ Captain T. saw his role as demystifying such conditions for his apparently puzzled readers, and the *Observer’s* editorial duly obliged. It noted that Captain T.’s record of “actively hunting out the rebels” and asking them their reasons “before hanging them” was admirable. This supposed generosity was meant to add an air of authority to his otherwise heady account of Islam, cannabis, and weak-willed fatalism.

The phrase “running amuck” had its own racist transnational itinerary in the archive of imperial warfare. Derived from a Malay word meaning a furious charge at an enemy, “amok” had since the late eighteenth century been used by Englishmen across Indian Ocean outposts to identify a fixed cultural trait and an event of homicidal violence.⁶⁰ European medical officials and later psychiatrists began counting and analyzing instances of “amok” in the early nineteenth century, some of the first of which were recorded among Malay Muslims and then by indigenous groups across Indian Ocean archipelagos. “Running amok,” correspondingly, became a mutating phrase used to capture culturally coded behaviors of irrational violence.⁶¹ By the mid-nineteenth century, the phrase was a shorthand descriptor for acts of violent rebellion that Europeans either could not comprehend or simply found lacking in strategy and rationality.

By July 1857, imperial Britons had encountered their most treacherous public enemy yet in the figure of Nana Sahib. The name was an adopted moniker of Dhondu Pant, a Maratha prince dispossessed of his inheritance by the East India Company. At Kanpur, Nana Sahib’s siege of the British army had forced them to surrender. However, after having guaranteed safe passage to surrendered British residents in the town, he reportedly reneged and ordered their execution at Bibighar. Scholars have noted how the subsequent public vilification that swirled around Nana Sahib’s name and his family depended extensively on “Anglo-Indian rumor and self-promoting military dispatches.”⁶² The genre of military dispatches could create monsters out of Indian kings. As more “eyewitness” accounts of Nana Sahib were published in periodicals, the genre transformed his persona into a repository of the worst evils. From playhouses to literary clubs, the figure of Nana Sahib became a currency among writers for symbolizing multiple forms of “native” excess such as treachery, rape, and bloodlust.⁶³

During the Rebellion, Nana Sahib dodged the British counterattack on Kanpur and fled north into the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal. This only exacerbated the layers of mystery that writers added to their subsequent representations of him. Bhang appeared pivotal in these depictions, which operated at the intersection of race and blackness in Victorian popular consciousness. Authors of “mutiny novels” used ideas from dispatches to frame India as a site less of adventure than of domesticity. That maneuver required India’s domestication within the fold of the empire.⁶⁴ For instance, Jonathan Small in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four*

(1890), a character that exemplified the centrality of the Kanpur massacre to the genre of the mutiny novel, reminded readers that the soldiers who revolted in Kanpur, whom Small describes as “black fiends” in British uniform, were actually “drunk with opium and bang.”⁶⁵ Repeated references to bang and blackness produced an image of Indian subjects who, after their fiendish acts in the Rebellion had exposed their civilizational backwardness, needed domestication. This theme continued with references to Nana Sahib’s family. After Nana Sahib escaped, the *London Journal* carried a two-column piece that excoriated the British police for allowing it to happen. Signed by one “Indian,” the column blamed the lack of useful intelligence regarding Nana Sahib’s whereabouts entirely on the police. But before closing, the author noted a definite probability that Nana Sahib was alive and well because his widow, a “rather black creature,” had apparently failed to mourn him according to custom.⁶⁶

Besides such obviously racialized depictions, the association between bang and Nana Sahib endured for years to produce subtler narratives that emphasized cunning and unreliability more than bestial bloodlust. For example, in 1874, news of Nana Sahib’s capture at the hands of the Scindiahs lit up the Anglophone press across the empire and the United States. However, disappointment quickly followed. Dr. John Tressider, who had been the civil surgeon at Kanpur during the siege and had once performed surgery on Nana Sahib’s foot, was called to identify the captive and eventually denounced him as an impostor. The “real Nana” was still at large, but bang continued to animate this imperial drama. For the *Times* correspondent in India whose report was later syndicated in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the man was impersonating a dreaded enemy in the British imperial imagination for one reason only, namely, “the effects of bang.” Reportedly, the prisoner’s confession had actually been made under the influence of bang. The reporter reminded readers, in case they had forgotten, that it was the “the native drug answering to rum or whisky in England, but with the effect of opium.” The reporter further claimed he had once “fired every chamber of a six-chambered Colt” over a “man drunk with bang, and could not wake him.”⁶⁷ Rehearsing bang and opium as vaguely equivalent only conflated the two in public perceptions and reinforced racialized ideas about opium in Victorian Britain.⁶⁸

Most periodicals that reported on the impostor at length suggested that Dr. Tressider’s testimony and the role of cannabis in the impostor’s life had together saved British intelligence from further embarrassment. The possibility of the case going to trial and a possible judicial rebuke of the police were never going to be appealing in a case as sensationalized as Nana Sahib’s. For the *Times*, the impostor, whether or not he was the “real Nana,” had taken the “convenient plea of bang as a set-off against a crime.” Editors at other periodicals, such as the *Saturday Review*, blamed the capture of the impostor and the subsequent drama on the Scindiah family’s efforts to curry favor with the British Crown. The resulting British relationship with the Scindiahs would have been more

complicated, the paper suggested, and concluded that the impostor had inadvertently “relieved the British Government from a painful and embarrassing responsibility.”⁶⁹ Here, the influence of bhang reproduced tropes of Indian opportunism and unreliability and indexed how Indian kingdoms were desired and yet mistrusted by imperial power.⁷⁰ This impostor’s case simultaneously recalled debates regarding Mangal Pandey’s admission, apparently made before his execution at Barrackpore, that he was also under the influence of bhang and, therefore, unaware of his actions that later instigated mutinies across garrisons. Bhang could thus exemplify the bloodlust of Nana Sahib, the fabrication of the truth by his impersonator, and the unreliability of the rebellious Pandey, altogether situating the drug as a motor of perpetual duplicity among Indians, royals and rebels alike.⁷¹

Over the course of British counterinsurgent violence from July 1857, other perceived attributes of bhang complemented existing associations of unreliability, irrationality, bloodthirst, and wildness. Most notably, bhang was deployed to explain the continuing resolve of the rebels as they held their ground against growing troop reinforcements. In November 1857, during the siege to take Delhi back, another slate of military dispatches made their way around the world. One, published in the *Leeds Times*, recounted how the rebels were “losing what little organization and discipline they had left.” However, it continued, “their obstinate defence is wonderful and can only be attributed to bhang.”⁷² Other witnesses of the counterinsurgency used bhang in their reports to vividly describe how the rebel soldiers fell gradually into disarray and slowly lost the ground they had gained a few months earlier. One of the longest and most striking accounts that made their way across broadsheets, with a day-by-day breakdown of events, was written by a “young subaltern officer in the East India Company’s service” who was involved in the attack on Lucknow. His narrative was first printed in London’s *Daily News*. At a critical point in his story, he recounted being the sole officer alongside twenty Indian soldiers left in his quarters when a group of rebels attacked them from a mosque nearby. The “wretched fighting from room to room, one corridor to another” spilled over from the quarters into the garden after the soldiers “shot and bayoneted no less than eight in one small room,” regrouped overnight, and eventually took back the building. “The men,” he wrote, gave him “very much the idea of being intoxicated with bhang, for they seemed to come on without any definite design, rushed madly about, apparently unconscious where they were going to.”⁷³ Here again, bhang exemplified contrasting perceptions, both of the rebels’ resolve and of the supposed lack of any design, discipline, or strategy.

Colonial masculinity was unquestionably at stake in military dispatches wherein thematic elements centered heavily on disarray among the rebels while drawing sharp contrasts to the Company’s organized forces bearing down on them.⁷⁴ The facts of battle aside, the singular feature of such narratives was a contrast between a generally low-ranking white soldier, fighting against all odds, in a landscape peopled by derelict buildings and unfathomable foes. Few dispatches

illustrated this narrative strategy better than the one “A.C.” sent to his father, which was subsequently carried by London’s *Morning Post* and the *Norfolk Chronicle* on 23 January 1858. It was republished across two columns in many newspapers in the following weeks. In this letter, written in the trenches outside Kanpur on 26 November 1857, “A.C.,” of the 60th Rifles, was emotionally charged up. In his words, he was in a small mud fort with thirty men and “surrounded by 3000 of the ‘beauties’ all about.”⁷⁵ Referring to Indian rebels as “beauties” rendered them effeminate and likened them to animals being hunted for their coveted skin and leather. Anyone who read this letter, printed in full in the morning news, might have been thoroughly taken by the soldier’s bravado. He described himself wishing that the “beauties” would attack from the other side of the bridge that faced him so that he “could make a few of them [into] food for jackals.” If there was scrimmage, he planned to stand at one end of the bridge and “walk [straight] into the n—s until a force comes down from the fort.”⁷⁶ Explicit racial hatred, antiblackness, and misogyny translated the Indian rebel into a figure at once black, womanly, and beastly for a global readership. Complementing earlier racist characterizations of blackness that colored discussions of Nana Sahib and his family, such iterations of racialized affect recall what Alexander Weheliye has termed the “nimble mutability of racial taxonomies.”⁷⁷

As he went on, “A.C.” tapped into several racialized tropes related to bhang. When the attack did take place, he described himself coming to find that his spies were wrong and that the number of rebels was actually closer to twenty-five thousand. These highly unequal odds paved the way for what followed. “I never expected to get back to camp alive,” he wrote, adding, “I cannot think how we escaped.” As if miraculously, the white heroic figure survived to fight another day. However, the next day, when they fought again, he was sure that “the sepoy in the adjacent ruins had done themselves up with bhang yesterday” and, thus, when “the brutes rushed at us with their swords, it was a dreadful sight to see the poor officers being cut up.” A lone white man in a sea of red blood and brown bodies, and yet, he claimed, “they were all around me but by the greatest mercy, I was not touched.”⁷⁸ Gaudy accounts of combat followed by such miraculous escapes before more gallant attacks by British men gave his narrative a cyclical arc of continuous overcoming. During one such moment, A.C. claimed he “blew the brains out” of a captured Indian spy. Acts of crude slaughter that reinforced the white soldier’s masculinity were an effect of the nearly unbeatable odds presented by an Indian rebel intoxicated with bhang. All such vituperative descriptions of the rebel animalized him as a “brute” vitiated by bhang at a time when counterinsurgent violence focused on retaking Awadh raged relentlessly, thus justifying the hypermasculine violence of the white soldier, shoring up imperial manhood, and making empire appear reasonable.

By March 1858, as Lucknow and Jhansi were seized and put back into the fold of the Company’s armies, the gendered body of the white soldier had become

a fundamental orientation device for ordinary Britons to apprehend the scope of the empire they claimed and sought to retain. Military dispatches from India could take more than a month to reach England, and newspaper and other periodical publishers and editors maintained regular contact with the families of soldiers posted in India. A *Morning Post* editorial argued that publishing such weekly or fortnightly letters sent by soldiers to their family members was crucial because they provided intelligence and news to civilian Britons about their “great dependency of India.”⁷⁹ It was precisely due to such letters that Britain had become “acquainted with [its] power and the means of using it, [and] the dispositions, temper, and feelings of the Hindu and Mahomedan populations.” Thus, the *Post* argued, there was no reason to be so unprepared against a similar mutiny by Indians in the future. Military dispatches had not just rallied support for the war and exposed bhang’s troubling role but also shed light on the colony’s social and cultural aspects for metropolitan British publics. The *Post* further hailed Britain’s use of artillery regiments as the way to cut the losses of infantrymen during ongoing engagements on India’s battlefields. Augmented numbers of British troops, under the leadership of Commander-in-Chief Colin Campbell, appeared to be taking India back. The *Post* sounded extremely hopeful. Using “his overpowering artillery,” the same editorial read, “Sir Colin Campbell will play on these refuse and sweepings of degraded Asiatic human nature, the mere quisquilia of human devilry excited by bhang and opium.”⁸⁰ Twelve months into the Rebellion, bhang continued to catalyze claims of civilizational superiority and channel imperial English desires for military supremacy in the colonies.

Such desires found fulfillment in the figure of Colin Campbell and his helmeted leadership of British troops. Periodicals often discussed events like Campbell’s military triumph at Lucknow in March 1858 in conjunction with his biography. The son of a poor Scottish carpenter, he had assumed his mother’s surname and fought for the Crown in the War of 1812 against the United States and risen through the ranks while serving in British Guiana, Ireland, Punjab, Spain, Hong Kong, and Crimea. His heroism, a feature of decades spent repressing rebellions mounted by enslaved and indigenous peoples, was augmented by his reputation for cautious military strategy that prioritized minimizing troop casualties in battle. He was the strategic choice of Prime Minister Lord Palmerston as the commander to complete the counterinsurgency operations in India. In most of the reportage, Campbell’s highly touted ability to exercise caution became a necessary vehicle for establishing the peace. Imperial careerism, long established as a means of negotiating class, masculinity, and status in the British Empire, especially for individuals of Scottish and Irish heritage, underwrote Campbell’s location in imperial culture.⁸¹ Public commentators framed his life of service to the Crown in particular contrast to Indian kings and peoples and their shared proclivity, bhang. Campbell’s cautious and responsible persona became the counterfoil for unreliability and fanaticism as well as ideas of bhang as a remedy for the weak-willed and a vitiating substance

that impelled Indian delinquency. Campbell's persona brought further into relief the ways *bhāng* was cast as an extraordinary enemy in imperial narratives of colonial conquest.

One of the most illustrative examples came from the *Leeds Times*. In a report that dwelt on Indian sectarianism and that relied on the religious identity of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs to do the work of explaining to Anglophone readers how Indian subjects think, the newspaper praised Campbell for his judicious approach to summary executions. He had reportedly tried to limit the mass executions of Indian rebels by white soldiers and civil officers after each battle. This recalibration of Campbell's reputation sought to undo the damage from the news of the Company's armies punishing Indian rebels by blowing them to smithereens by cannon, of which the most emotive example came from Mardan in Peshawar.⁸² In September 1857, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* in New York had published an artist's rendition of death by cannon that attracted further attention and subsequently invited some criticism of the British army's actions.⁸³ Campbell's role at this moment was a clear corrective. As the *Leeds Times* noted, Campbell had worked with Hindus against the fanatical Muslims. For instance, at Jalalabad, the newspaper reported, "the Hindoos politely offered to assist him in killing all the Mahomedans" exactly one day before he was attacked by "a party of Ghazees, intoxicated with *bhāng*," who were seeking "only to fulfill a vow of self-immolation."⁸⁴ The accommodating Hindu subject versus the figure of a Muslim Ghazi driven by sectarian hatred and *bhāng* quickly became a staple binary in accounts of Campbell's victories and subsequent mutiny histories written in English.

After Campbell retired in England following this ultimate appointment of his imperial career and wrote his own account, he reinforced the tropes further. His *Narrative of the Indian Revolt* included nearly two hundred illustrations alongside prose closely resembling the blow-by-blow accounts of military dispatches that had circulated since May 1857. "Mahometans," Campbell wrote, "throughout were most cruel, ferocious, and bloodthirsty; those of the artillery and cavalry were the worst of the lot . . . excited with *bhāng*, they galloped about like fiends, intent only on bloodshed and murder."⁸⁵ He contrasted Muslims against the figure of the Hindu sepoy, whom he described as "true to his salt" because sepoys had enabled the escape of British officers several times and thus honored the gift of employment that the Company had given them. Campbell's Muslim foes were seemingly always delirious with *bhāng* and ready to rush into a skirmish to kill or be killed. His writings indexed how, especially in later battles waged to fully suppress the Rebellion in central India, sectarian favor and approach toward Hindu soldiers helped legitimate imperial violence. The counterfoil of the flexible and loyal Hindu soldier in imperial narratives was critical: Many Indian ruling elites had tried to bridge different religious communities in the early days of the insurgencies to unite political sentiments across northern India in opposition to the Christian religion, foreign goods, high taxation, white rule, and British violations of princely

dignity and deprivation of courtly treasuries.⁸⁶ Redefining historical differences of caste and religion in northern Indian communities as sectarian divisions among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs not only reproduced the schemas of Orientalist rewriting of South Asian history; it also recast Indian identities as innately antagonistic and perpetually and fixedly oppositional.

Campbell's public persona as a judicious man from a humble background who appealed to Britons across lines of social class and national origin brought the rhetoric of innately divided Indian subjects further into relief. In perhaps the most revealing account of Campbell's capture of Bareilly, which was reported in the *Times* weeks before he returned to England and then circulated across the Atlantic from Dundee, his men were attacked again by "Ghazees, or fanatical Mussulmans, furious with bhang." These men, the report continued, "like the Roman Decii, devote their lives with solemn oaths to their country and faith."⁸⁷ Like the famed Roman plebeian family devoted to its soldiers and the republic, Campbell's Muslim foes were described as loyal only to Islam and Hindustan. They were, in other words, unmovable enemies, rigid in their predetermined opposition to the Crown and Christianity. "Uttering loud cries," the report declared, "one hundred and thirty of these fanatics rushed out . . . with bodies bent and heads low, waving their tulwars with a circular motion in the air, they came on with astonishing rapidity." Incidentally, Campbell's forces had recently been joined by Sikh soldiers. Sikhs had been recruited by the Company's military since the early nineteenth century for their classified status as a martial race, and after facing defeat in the Anglo-Sikh wars, many Sikhs had joined the imperial military for employment.⁸⁸ But when the "fanatical Muslims" attacked, "they were mistaken for the Sikhs" by English soldiers. Disarray and chaos ensued as white soldiers failed in the melee to distinguish friend from foe, Sikh from Muslim. Disaster was averted thanks to Campbell. "Fortunately, Sir Colin Campbell was close up . . . his keen quick eye detected the case at once," following which he "closed the ranks" and led the bayonet charge that killed all 130 Muslim men.

Reports of spectacular violence in 1858 reinforced the power of retribution in Victorian culture. Tying rebels to mouths of cannons before firing them and shipping arrested and convicted mutineers to penal colonies to serve as convict labor alongside indentured workers were the most vividly described forms of punishment.⁸⁹ Celebrations of punishment and retributive violence in English periodicals also anticipated British victory over bhang. For instance, in July 1858 the *Bombay Telegraph* published an editorial celebrating the English East India Company's victory at Plassey in 1757, a hundred years prior. At the time, Robert Clive's forces had seized Calcutta and Hooghly after defeating the Nawab Siraj ud Daulah. Tracing a century-long arc all the way to 1857, the editorial described how England had "girded up her loins and prepared herself for the struggle" to retake India after the Rebellion. The rebellious, it announced, "have been blown from guns, hanged, transported, and imprisoned," and the English were now "a thousand times more

dominant race.” Readers in Essex, Nottingham, or London who read syndicated versions of this editorial may not have been familiar with the history of Plassey, but their investments in empire had been forged and reinforced through the recent stream of military dispatches. When the editorial further claimed that “the prestige of our arms has everywhere been maintained and even bhang and fanaticism have recoiled before the British bayonet,” it appealed to sentiments of racial supremacy that were by now commonplace among readers across towns and cities in Britain and the world.⁹⁰ According to the article, instead of losing, the dominant white race had “muzzled the rebels in the jungles like tigers in their den.” Hence, it concluded, “the disappearance of something white will, we imagine, be their own winding-sheets.”

Victorian Britons who devoured narratives of bloody cannabis-induced spectacles during the Rebellion also consumed tea, cotton, jute, and indigo from Indian territories. For many across the English-speaking world, sensational and racist reportage of the Rebellion might have been the first vivid, literal description of the empire in India beyond just a site of origin for imperial commodities. In a letter to the editor of the *London Standard*, one reader confronted this dilemma to reflect on bhang, violence, and imperial politics. Signing off as “Orion,” the letter writer described the paucity of knowledge about India before mutiny dispatches became popular. “So absolute was the ignorance or indifference on Indian subjects,” they wrote, “that the majority of educated classes would have been at a loss to tell whether Aurungzebe was a Mussulman or a Hindoo.” Yet this ignorance about the Mughal emperor Alamgir had now become dated because “the horrors of the rebellion [have] given a melancholy familiarity” with cities, kings, and the topography of India to all Britons, educated or otherwise. Dispatches had alerted people across the empire to the “arrogance and obstinacy” of British administrators in India whose “lust of annexation had caused the great rival sects [Hindus and Muslims] to merge their mutual animosities.” Sounding like a conscientious dissenter who valued justice over the craven fancies of their compatriots, Orion continued at length about how readers were alarmed about the East India Company’s policies and practices, not just in England but across the British Empire as well. “Are we,” Orion asked rhetorically, “to punish only the miserable tools of this conspiracy, to slaughter the wretches whose crimes, hideous as they are, have been perhaps committed in the madness of fanaticism or the frenzy of bhang . . . and to pass without censure or remark the misdeeds and negligence of those in authority, whether in Calcutta or Canning-Row?”⁹¹ The question was loaded with meaning. If the actions of Indian rebels resulted from bhang and a conspiracy hatched by a few, it did not take away from the veritable “misdeeds and negligence” of the Company’s offices in London and Calcutta. This equivalence and the audacious tone of the letter indicated a wider political shift against the East India Company.

Some hoped the mutiny was an aberration that deserved to be made an example of. The *Leeds Times* glossed parliamentary debates about the Rebellion by

describing bhang as “a spirit more maddening than any known in Europe.” Former British general George De Lacy Evans “denounced the ferocity and inhumanity of the sepoys who had been treated with the greatest kindness.” He argued that the mutiny was a misadventure, “to be traced to the habit Indians had of taking bhang, when they were under excitement.”⁹² Yet he pleaded for military expansion in India and severe punishment of the mutineers to reduce the odds of rebellion in the future.⁹³ After 1858, the inclusion of India within a more formal state structure enlarged the ambit of claims that British campaigners, particularly missionaries, could make on behalf of the colony and its peoples. Many missionary societies had long considered the Company’s profits from the Opium Wars to be immoral and extended the same associations to bhang. In 1859, in a church a few miles south of Liverpool, Reverend A. O’Neale of Birmingham reminded his audience that the East India Company had in fact held monopoly control of the narcotics produced from Indian hemp. Referring to Coleridge’s experiments with the opiate laudanum, O’Neale loosely equated Indian cannabis and opium, associating the effects of opium with Turkish “mischief” and cannabis with Indian “desperation.” Citing bhang as a desperate plea, he noted that the “good Bishop Wilson had said that the judgement of God would come down upon the English for their growth of opium in Bengal, and how fearfully that had been verified in the mutiny.”⁹⁴ In other words, the mutiny was divine punishment for England’s failure to detach itself from opium’s evil. Other missionary discourses peddled in ideas of helpless attractions to suicidal behavior. When a man named Thomas Reynolds told Reverends C. Elven and A. Tyler at a mission gathering in Bury that “thousands of our fellow-subjects in India are oppressed” by the opium and bhang trade, he insisted that the latter caused the “poor sepoys,” many of whom were Muslims, to “throw themselves upon the British bayonets.”⁹⁵ In Reynolds’s account, Indians and Britons were fellow subjects, and bhang had unfortunately produced suicidal behavior among otherwise amiable peoples. Reynolds also cited Coleridge’s writings before attacking the violations of treaties the British had committed by investing in the opium trade. He ended by reminding his audience to sign a petition to Parliament asking for the prohibition of opium production in the empire.

Missionary discourses captured the growing moral consciousness of temperance immediately after the suppression of the Indian Rebellion. They took Orientalist typologies around the figure of an opium eater and bound them up with bhang and ganja as if they were equivalent drugs. Instead of profiting from them, many missionaries argued, the state should work with missions to reduce the pervasive sway that drugs held in the life of the colonies. The Government of India Act, passed in August 1858 after months of fierce parliamentary debate on the colonization and rule of India, finally transferred the colony to the Crown and Parliament.⁹⁶ Queen Victoria’s November 1858 proclamation formally took over the company-state’s territories, and she decreed noninterference in internal matters of Indian religion and granted clemency to rebels not accused of the murder

of British subjects. This measure of “colonial secularity” came on the heels of important shifts in Parliament and the relation between the Crown and evangelical members of the cabinet.⁹⁷ Guerilla warfare and counterinsurgency continued in central India into May 1859, and the memoirs, chronicles, and histories of the Rebellion shored it up as an epochal event in the Victorian imaginary.⁹⁸ Repetitions and rehearsals of mutiny stories continued to sweep up the powerful and global notoriety that bhang had acquired. As the prime fuel to the spectacular violence that drove Britain’s worst enemies, bhang’s place in Victorian consciousness and global discourses of Indian social life shaped subsequent ideas of bhang and madness in the Victorian era.

THE INSURGENT AS ADDICT

In new asylums built in British India after the passage of the Indian Lunatic Asylums Act (1858), British physicians routinely cited cannabis consumption as a cause of madness.⁹⁹ In his study of the rise in such diagnoses in the 1870s, James Mills argued that the increase occurred because low-ranking staff at “Native-Only” asylums acted on prejudice, presumption, mistrust, and “administrative expedience.”¹⁰⁰ As the preceding sections show, a different explanation is in order. Since the 1830s bhang, both physically as a substance and through its representational excesses, had tethered Indian bodies to laziness, violence, rigid devotion, unsound decisions, Muslimness, and irrational bloodlust in a global Anglophone context. This set of shifts, while reflected in the flaws of the disciplinary apparatus of asylums and colonial medicine, in fact owed its roots to the cultural politics of addiction in a colonial world stitched together by English-language periodicals.

As Rebecca Lemon argues, early modern English ideas of addiction were strongly rooted in meanings of religious devotion. The devotional valences of addiction included the ability to announce or utter one’s commitment, whether to a deity or to a cause, as well as to articulate one’s vulnerability, pursue a form of dedicated and hard labor, and demonstrate courage as a virtue. Popular in English culture, theater, and literature, the addict was a figure “worthy of admiration as much as censure.”¹⁰¹ Before it was cast as a debility and an abuse of the self through practices like excessive drink, and the category of will was considered diseased, addiction referred to a spectrum of affective attachments and had a deeper history of debt bondage, as evidenced in Latin texts.¹⁰² Rehearsals of bhang in widely read Indian chronicles echoed these older modes of understanding addiction as a form of committed practices that revealed one’s unassailable attachment to a king, land, or deity. This understanding turned bhang and its Indian users, from the fictive widow and the Charak performer to the lone rebel and the mutinous masses, into committed and formidable foes with compelling affective attachments.

In colonial conditions where the East India Company faced its own anxieties and setbacks, British ideas of addiction and the addict took on new racial

characteristics. Devotion, beyond the self and to a deity, turned into a fixed trait that connoted disloyalty to empire and vengeance aimed at white European rule. Narrative plots with miraculous escapes and heroic victories against the fury of bhang impelled the insurgent addict's power as both a foe and a funnel for imperial racism. If for some the addict produced antipathy toward Muslim subjects and sovereigns, for others like missionaries and Christian temperance activists, it was a site of reform. The mutiny of soldiers also produced an enduring crisis of military loyalty. East India Company rule needed Indian bodies in military ranks to succeed. Campbell's tenure as commander-in-chief in India prefaced the tension that arose between the necessary military recruitment of Indians and the desires for increasing the number of white British troops in India to potentially offset fears of disloyal Indians influenced by the Rebellion's affective power. The figure of an unreliable Indian soldier who could turn into a rebel produced further imperial anxieties also because colonial armies were the largest single employers in India.

Flattening bhang's history and framing it as a conduit for anti-European violence and religious excess exposed the duplicity of English disregard for devotional meanings of ganja even though devotion, intoxication, and divine possession were common themes in British histories of addiction. Besides magistrates in Indian districts especially where Shiva festivals were prominent, who contextualized such histories in more detail, most Anglophone writing reduced bhang's complexity to rebellion. As fluid meanings of addiction became concentrated in the body of the rebel, the relationship between bhang, ganja, and violence became the dominant colonial mode of describing the relation between self and intoxicant. After the Rebellion was suppressed, these ideas framed the body of the lunatic in the newly built asylums as inevitably habituated to ganja and bhang.

But ganja inhabited subaltern worlds of Indian subjects at the same time that it was being written into colonial medicine as the primary cause of insanity among Indians. As the following chapter shows, such worlds were often indifferent to empire, though they were made possible by print culture, routines of colonial life, and intersections of devotion and the marketplace.

A Subaltern Deity

In this district, a god named Trinath (Trinity) is worshipped by lower classes of people, who is, par excellence, the god of ganja. Smoking of ganja is a sine qua non of the worship.

—NANDAKRISHNA BOSE, OFFICIATING MAGISTRATE AND COLLECTOR,
DISTRICT OF NOAKHALI

Trinath arrived on earth in an act of profound impatience. Although his incarnated form, Hari, was occupied with providing salvation to earthly mortals, and his other forms, Shiva and Vishnu, enjoyed ample renown, Trinath was apprehensive about humanity's rapid fall into sin. In an anxious state (*utkonthito*), he rushed to his devotees to offer humanity relief and a path to deliverance. Before he arrived, however, the three deities subsumed within him consulted among themselves about devotional offerings and the merits of an ideal devotee. The four-headed creator Brahma (*choturmukh srishtikor*), Vishnu (*mohabishnu*), and Shiva (*moheshwar*) concurred that receiving devotional offerings as a three-in-one body was most convenient, that an ideal devotee was one who earned their blessings (*doya*) through prayer, and that an ideal offering was one that both king (*raja*) and commoner (*proja*) could afford with equal means. Such an offering must include ganja, a substance (*drobyo*) that alone pleased Trinath and delighted everyone else (*sorbojon*).

This short scene constituted a rhythmic prelude that echoed among thousands of devotees in the 1870s who read, heard, and witnessed the loud recitation of the *Trinather Pancali* among congregations in open yards of weekly market-places, inside elite homes, around makeshift shrine-plinths in towns, and under the shade of colossal trees lining dirt roads that wound through the countryside of Bengal, Orissa, and Assam. Having begun in Tangail, by the 1890s, forms of Trinath worship called Trinath Puja, Tinnath Puja, Tinnath Bhakti, Trinather Mela, Trinath Seba, or Tinlokh Piri sank deep roots in markets and homes in Mymensingh, Dacca, Faridpur, Backergunge, Noakhali, Tippera, Chittagong, Bogra, Sylhet, and the Serajgunj side of Pabna district. In Orissa and Assam,

Trinath Puja remained widespread into the late twentieth century, moving into small built temples in some districts and receding from public consciousness in others.

The prelude welcomed audiences to the *Trinather Pancali*, a narrative poem around which other rites of worship pivoted. The *pancali* is a genre of narrative poetry in Bengali composed of colloquial speech intended to make devotional practice and collective recitation more accessible across differences of caste, literacy, dialect, and educational background. The seated recitation, or *pancali paath*, brought the congregation together into a sonic and aural experience in which the more-than-human Trinath and his motivations toward the poor, the sinner, and the disabled among humans could settle in the minds of devotees through versified, rhythmic, and memorable story lines. Indeed, in 1883, Dacca's renowned English doctor James Wise wrote that "crowds of uneducated and credulous Chandals, Kaibarttas, and Tiyars throughout eastern Bengal" were worshipping Trinath and attending performances by "professional musicians with bela and sarangi." Wise likened the instruments to "varieties of the violin" and suggested that Trinath's popularity attracted more than just the percussive "mirdang and kartal" players who commonly performed for gatherings of the poor in urban squares and market sites. The three castes Wise mentioned were predominantly fisherfolk or agricultural field laborers and were deemed untouchable by Brahmans and other dominant caste groups. He didn't mention Mehtars, a caste of predominantly manual scavengers of human waste, who also rapidly took to Trinath worship. Having described "this fantastic worship of modern date" as particularly "impious," Wise concluded that one couldn't "account for such a creed unless we believe that the Brahmanical hold on the people is relaxing and that the masses blindly accept any worship which recognises the equality and brotherhood of all classes of mankind."¹

There are, of course, other ways to account for the creed of Trinath. The crowds Wise saw were not merely signs of ebbing Brahmanism under modern colonialism. They signaled the ways people across marginalized caste backgrounds were acting together to transform ganja into a sacral substance that animated utopian desires and moored different bodies to one another. Embedded firmly in cosmological relations of deities, Trinath worship legitimized in religious terms what was otherwise an ordinary practice of sociality, spirituality, and leisure among laboring castes in rural India. Trinath grew on grounds fissured by conflict with Vaishnava orthodoxy as worshippers effectively sought to render ganja legitimate in subaltern devotion.

Trinath, both the deity and the practices of worship, exemplified a subalternity defined by an elastic pliability such that its customs contracted and dilated in contingent ways to both serve limited individual desires and encompass a vast spectrum of other heterodox influences. The performative traditions of the *Pancali* insisted on the agency of Trinath to act on, and yet never through, his devotees. Thus, a human couldn't claim to speak or act in the name or under

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৩ ত্রিনাথের পাঁচালি।

ঢাকা বাঙ্গলাযন্ত্রালয়ে
দ্বিতীয়বার মুদ্রিত।

১৮৭২। ২৫শে এপ্রিল।

১২৭৯। ১৪ই বৈশাখ।

এই পুস্তক ঢাকা বাবুর বাজার বাঙ্গলা
যন্ত্রালয়ে অথবা ধামরাই, কাইলাই পাড়া
বা পং আটীরার অন্তর্গত চামারির লগ্ন
গ্রাম ফতেপুর পাওয়া যাইবে।

মুদ্রা ১৫ দিন পরসী নাজ।

প্রিন্টার শ্রীলক্ষ্মন বসাক।

FIGURE 10. The first folio of the second edition of *Trinather Pancali*. The Bengali text identifies no author but names Laxman Basak as the printer and Dhaka, Dhamrai, and Fatehpur as places where the book was distributed from. British Library Vernacular Tracts Collection. Photograph by author.

orders of the god. Trinath granted only boons or wishes and had no desire for temple homes. This elastic cosmology could retain the focus on wish fulfillment and boon seeking (*manasik puja*) and rely on one text (the *Pancali*) and three crucial substances—oil, ganja, and betel leaf. None of those remained fixed as offerings transformed over time and across regions and the *Pancali* was recomposed. As a practice that attracted predominantly marginalized and untouchable caste groups with little or no legibility in colonial structures in Bengal and Orissa, subalternity was Trinath's hallmark.² However, beyond organizing the desires of disenfranchised bodies, sanctifying the intoxicant of the poor, and leaving ample room for devotees across sects and traditions to partake of Trinath's *doya*, Trinath devotees rarely sought respectability and recognition from the colonial state or privileged castes. Remaining not quite respectable and yet not unpopular, Trinath traditions were a "revolt of the spirit" that absorbed both upper-caste condescension and growing subaltern traction.³ Trinath worship in the nineteenth century appropriated existing practices of Vaishnavism, Sahajiya sects, and Pir traditions while resisting Brahmanical influence and maintaining its distinction from other heterodoxies by not isolating the body as a site of appropriation in its critique of Shastric injunction or Brahmanical power.⁴ Indeed, echoing Partha Chatterjee, Trinath devotion closely resembled a subaltern practice of community premised neither on hierarchy nor on bourgeois equality.⁵

The subalternity of Trinath was further marked by his ability to do no more than fulfill a wish and linger no longer than the last lamp. Set in individualist terms, shorn of collective potentialities that otherwise animated the subalternity of peasant rebellions or Adivasi and Dalit organizations, Trinath devotees inhabited a recurrent, yet fleeting temporality. The tradition invited (but did not impose) collective ganja consumption so as to shape the material passage of ganja between shop, pipe, and body in a cosmology that drew on Hindu and Islamic forms, and yet succumbed to neither. Trinath devotees, in conventional terms, would not constitute subjects on the path to citizenship, democracy, or even socialism—a factor that, Dipesh Chakrabarty has suggested, limited Ranajit Guha from apprehending the intractability of subaltern pasts.⁶ Granting that Trinath indeed exerted a more-than-human force on the lives of his devotees might more carefully capture the subalternity of Trinath's pasts. Trinath traditions revealed an irreducible form of transient mutuality whereby devotees congregated along rhythms of commercial markets and partook in devotional rites stimulated by print culture and colonial commodification of ganja, but did not seek to access power or representation under colonial rule, let alone claim a putative form of the nation. Being neither respectable nor unpopular, Trinath traditions were atypical in their combination of an indifference to colonial power with the salience of anti-Vaishnavism. With neither apologetics nor instructions to discipline devotees, Trinath's catholicity toward subaltern backgrounds across eastern Bengal, Orissa,

and Assam rejected any sameness by decree in favor of a culture of adoption through dissimilitude.

TRINATH, THE DEITY

In the 1870s, Trinath entered a world of devotional traditions in colonial Bengal that scholars have often considered syncretic, fluid, and more dynamic than dominant Hindu and orthodox Islamic practices.⁷ Since the medieval period, religious cultures in rural Bengal have included inventive figureheads, prodigious thinkers, ascetic teachers, poets, musicians, and devotees who assimilated folkloric aesthetics, demotic notions of human-nonhuman relationality, matters of death, incarnation, and birth, and biophysical forces like storms and floods into elements of devotional practice.⁸ By the eighteenth century, as the heterodox emphasis on worship through mass congregation, *kirtan* (collective song), and *bhava* (embodied emotion, disposition, or ecstasy) in Chaitanya's Vaishnavism receded against the pressures of dominant Brahman clans, several alternative heterodox traditions emerged among the agrarian poor and historically oppressed caste groups.⁹ Drawing on the emphasis of sameness between high and low and the simplicity of human essence in Sahajiya traditions, devotional communities like the Kartabhaja, Shahebhdhani, Balakdashi, Balahadi, and Matua grew into large sects by the late nineteenth century. Their proliferation cohered around the figure of a spiritual master, a corpus of poetry and song, cosmologies of the world's origins and futures, a critique of caste, and practices of worship, love, secrecy, or eroticism that embodied the principles of each sect.¹⁰ A spiritual teacher, whether called a *pir*, *fakir*, *gossain*, or *guru*, attracted gatherings of Hindu and Muslim families for their teachings. Broadly, the sects combined discourses on householder norms, an emphasis on (or limits of) sexual discipline, criticisms of Nabadwip Brahmans who claimed Vaishnavite orthodoxy, and pilgrimages to the sites of their origin where each sect's practices were celebrated periodically.

Besides esotericism, the semiotics of ecstasy, the notion of a marketplace, and feminized forms of power, all of which were major elements in Bengali devotionism, other more-than-human deities emerged in response to popular needs.¹¹ Bonbibi and Dakshin Rai protected the Sunderbans in the Bengal delta from royal Bengal tigers, and Ola-Bibi emerged in the suburbs of Calcutta to protect its poor from cholera after the first outbreak in 1817. The more-than-human was often purely ethereal and affective, less a figure than a state of mind, for followers in the Lalonshahi and Baul communities, among whom master-disciple relations and intimacy between self and god, as *moner manush*, straddled new musical formulations.¹² Cosmologies of some sects were particularly shaped by colonial missionaries, commercial capitalism, and print technology. For instance, the Kartabhaja sect drew on ideas of ecstasy, *satyadhama*, and god as *moner manush* by rejecting the Vedas and "upholding the equality of all living beings" using a set of ten key rules

and confessional practices on Fridays, both of which were a response to Christian missionary activity among the poor.¹³

As Willem van Schendel's framework of Bengal as a "region of multiple frontiers" suggests, a spiritual unity formed over centuries enfolded the world of subaltern devotional heterodoxy in colonial Bengal even as creative reinterpretation of existing practices, periodic congregations, and print culture produced new heterodoxies.¹⁴ Over the long nineteenth century, heterodox traditions nonetheless faced onslaughts from Vaishnava elites and Islamic movements like the Wahabism of Haji Shariatullah and the reformism of the Faraizi movement.¹⁵ On one hand, the Islamic "reformist-Puritan" goals of Faraizi leaders aimed to solidify Muslim peasant interests in relation to zamindars and the British state through a stable undifferentiated Muslim identity. On the other, upper-caste Vaishnavas enforced greater caste discipline in everyday life through the use of Sanskritized and "purified" Bengali as opposed to colloquial language.¹⁶ The relationship between Vaishnava groups and dissident heterodox movements remained complex, often indexed by their approaches to remembering Chaitanya. In Calcutta, for instance, powerful *bhadralok* families that owned capital, had access to English education, and subscribed to new ideas of elite culture, status, and distinction came to desire a singular swadeshi Chaitanya, often agonized over the possible loss of Chaitanya's message, and deliberately erased Chaitanya's "middleness" and ambivalences by claiming a single authentic birthplace for him and denouncing "degenerate" poor Vaishnavas.¹⁷ Low-caste groups like the Hadis left Vaishnavism for newer identities like Balarami, often negating dharmic principles using the very tools of dharmic injunction afforded by Brahmanism.¹⁸

Trinath, both the deity and the devotional tradition, borrowed and yet stood apart from this world of heterodoxy in several ways. Trinath worship welcomed followers from other heterodox traditions opposed to Vaishnava gurus to eventually produce musical forms akin to those of the Kartabhajas and *jat-vaishnavas* (heterodox Vishnu-worshipping low-caste groups).¹⁹ Poets in the Trinath Melas consistently kept their antagonisms focused on upper-caste Vaishnavism and the spiritual master of extensive kin networks, the *kula-guru*. Trinath gatherings further eschewed doctrinal practices in favor of devotional congregations that included and invited Muslims, subsequently reproducing Trinath as a Muslim itinerant saint called Tinklakh Pir. While many heterodox traditions that departed from Vaishnavism emerged nonetheless in the shadow of Chaitanya's fame and history in the district of Nadia, Trinath did not. The Trinath movement grew out of the spiritually eclectic world of rural fairs in Tangail, a town in Mymensingh district. Notably, the name Trinath was an appropriation of both the number three, often a reference to the *lokya* (heaven, hell, and earthly worlds), and the word *natha*, meaning lord and itself a different tradition of devotion to Shiva. When K. K. Ray wrote his history of Mymensingh in 1932, he described how, in the Alapsingh pargana, Muslim families prayed to "Tinnath Pir" for the recovery of

lost cattle and protection from severe illness. One devotee offered the pir three, five or seven *kolkis* (pipes) of ganja for a boon, and subsequently gave the same quantity, or its equivalent in cash, to a ganja smoker to organize a Tinnath Pir worship rite.²⁰ Asim Roy, echoing Sukumar Sen, explained this offering as derivative of the genealogy of Natha cults in Bengal, but Trinath devotees invoked the Natha tradition only in name.²¹ In meaning, however, the suffix *-nath* in Trinath texts simply meant “lord” and not an instance of the other Natha trinity—Adinatha (a form of Shiva), Mina-Nath (Vishnu as celestial fish), and Gorakshanatha (protector of cattle).²²

More important, Trinath worship required no spiritual master and rejected student-disciple relations entirely. The tradition had no unique orally transmitted corpus of songs as the Kartabhajas did, and no initiation rites or secret rituals of esoteric or erotic practices. While it drew on Bhakti traditions and the importance of *gaan* (song), it eschewed addressing either caste-based occupations or the preoccupations of running rural households, both of which preoccupied other Sahajiya movements. Trinath traditions emphasized worship only for the fulfillment of one’s desires and wishes (*manasik puja*) and articulated the deity Trinath as the source of deliverance from poverty, immiseration, ill health, and disability. While other heterodox sects had to emphasize the ability of women becoming spiritual masters and being equal to men, the emphasis on *manasik puja* in Trinath worship spontaneously attracted large numbers of women from oppressed caste groups, whether Vaishnavite or not, and without concerted effort. Finally, Trinath congregations happened in public after sunset, either at the site of a commercial marketplace or outside a large homestead, and otherwise could be undertaken anywhere, without regard to either the auspiciousness of specific days in the lunar calendar or the holiness of an identified site.

Market sites in colonial Bengal, whether weekly or not, were spaces where petty traders encountered large bodies of rural consumers, commercial fortunes collided with predictions of almanac calendars, and theatrical and musical performers captured people’s attention. Spatially, market organization in colonial Bengal was dynamically layered: Besides the *haat* (recurrent rural market), *ganj* (wholesale grain market), and *bazar* or *katra* (established market site), smaller markets, especially in the eighteenth century, grew depending on local need to sell surplus produce, on individual charters by ruling figures such as nazims, on religious endowments from powerful families to establish markets around temple sites or Sufi shrines, and on the occurrence of fairs and festivals on auspicious days.²³ The management of commercial exchange, including establishing markets and imposing assorted taxes, helped fortify rank and status among rural classes and reproduce specific relations of production and exchange. Commonly, in haats, sellers of intoxicants—particularly local brews and cannabis preparations—lined up alongside or nearby sellers of low-value consumer items like utensils, wax, and lanterns. In smaller markets, ganja could be found with the *mudi*, or petty grocer.

By the end of the nineteenth century, as the total number of markets declined across Bengal, signifying the devastating effects of colonial extraction on everyday commerce, the corresponding supervision of markets by *chaukidars*, *darogahs*, and local officers became more systematic. In Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, retail vendors licensed by the Department of Excise sold Naogaon's ganja in small portions, which they retrieved from state warehouses where wholesale buyers had registered and stored their purchases after transferring it out of Naogaon.

The physical site of the marketplace and the figure of the *mudi* or *dokani*, a petty grocer or shopkeeper at the market, figured prominently in the *Trinather Pancali*. In 1872, when the first *Pancali* was published, 5,354 shops across Bengal sold state-licensed ganja. That year, the excise revenue from ganja alone was Rs. 1,140,329, well over the five-year average of about Rs. 970,000 between 1865 and 1870. The passage of the Excise Act (Act VII, 1878) brought further changes: ganja *golahs* (warehouses) were built next to Sudder (central) distilleries wherever possible and were inspected regularly by subdivisional officers. By 1882, revenue from ganja in Bengal presidency rose to Rs. 1,713,791, the largest single source of revenue after country spirits in the entire annual collection of more than Rs. 9,300,000.

Finally, unlike the muted presence of intoxicant consumption in some sects, Trinath worship embraced intoxication frontally, especially at dusk at sites where a rural market ran by day.²⁴ While other Vaishnava sects had often breached sanctions against commensality between higher and lower castes by making people eat while seated next to one another, Trinath worship insisted on taking it further: The same smoking pipe, filled in turn with each person's contribution of ganja, had to be passed around in the congregation for everyone to touch and draw on. This, coupled with the subsumption of Vishnu into the body of Trinath, antagonized Brahman castes the most. Vaishnavism centered on the god Vishnu as the divine source of all cosmic and earthly life. Its saintly figurehead was Sri Chaitanya, said to have been born in Nabadwip in Nadia district in the fifteenth century. His life and teachings challenged caste hierarchies and set forth a dynamic history of spiritual syncretism and devotionalism. However, historians have argued that after the Kheturi council of all Vaishnava groups in the late sixteenth century, the introduction of caste orthodoxies and the institutionalization of Brahman prejudices regarding notions of high and low, purity and impurity, and legitimacy and illegitimacy changed the course of Vaishnavism. Stricter Brahmanical rules, doctrines, and rituals came to influence Vaishnava communities.²⁵ Hierarchies instituted by Brahman spiritual masters or clan teachers venerated by extensive kin networks, often called *gossain* and *goswami*, helped establish Brahmanical dominance in periodical and ritual practices of guiding and interpreting the belief of devotees. By the eighteenth century, the figure of the *kula-guru*, who was usually an orthodox Brahman teacher, came to play the role of an initiator, proselytizer, and spiritual guide to other Vaishnavas. In the nineteenth century, upper-caste Gaudiya Vaishnavas separated themselves from *jat-vaishnavas* by imposing new

practices of bodily marking and touch along with caste sanctions around sexuality and widow remarriage. Trinath worship's particularly unapologetic combination of bodily contact, sacralized objects, nightly congregation, collective intoxication among marginalized and oppressed castes, and the fluid traffic with Islamic practices signaled a remarkable confluence of subalternity. Such tensions and contestations that marked the rise of Trinath are evident in the biography of its focal text, the *Pancali*. Not only did the text index many elements homologous to other sects, but its biography of transformations is itself an archive of caste critique and the power of print culture under colonial rule.

THE TRADITION AND THE TEXT

The first edition of the *Trinather Pancali* was twelve pages long, was printed in small letters on cheap thin paper, listed no author either on the cover or inside, and contained only one reference to the poet "Sri Ananda." The original run of a thousand copies, printed on 3 February 1872, sold out by April, necessitating another run of a thousand copies on 25 April 1872. Another two thousand were then printed on 22 December 1872. In Dhaka's emerging print market, four thousand copies in one year surpassed arguably all other books. In the hands of itinerant traders, traveling theater troupes, and devotional performers, each copy traveled far across the riverine plains of eastern Bengal, animating popular gatherings without resembling any kind of institutionalized religiosity.

Trinath worship registered its impact on the colonial government only in 1893, when Babu Abhilas Chandra Mukerjee, the second inspector of excise in Bengal, took on a special deputation to report on it to the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission and earned the commendation of K. G. Gupta, then Bengal's excise commissioner.²⁶ The commission, in a chapter titled "Social and Religious Customs," summarized Mukerjee's findings and reflections from other testifiers. "The special form of worship by the followers of Siva, called the Trinath or Tinnath mela, in which the use of ganja is considered to be essential is mentioned by many witnesses and deserves more than a passing notice," it began. It noted that the "rite sprang up first in Eastern Bengal, appears to be of recent date, about the year 1867," and is "observed at all times and at all seasons by Hindus and Muhammadans alike, the latter calling it Tinklakh Pir." The report continued: "When an object of special desire is fulfilled, or when a person recovers from illness or when a son is born, or a marriage or other ceremony is performed, the god Trinath, representing in one the Hindu trinity, is worshipped." If "originally one pice worth of ganja, one pice worth of oil, and one pice worth of betel-nut" were offerings, "now ganja—it may be in large quantities—is proffered, and during the incantations and performance of the ritual, it is incumbent on all present to smoke." While concluding that Trinath worship had "spread extensively" in eastern Bengal, Assam's Surma Valley, and Orissa, the report nonetheless acknowledged that a few witnesses

had also noted that it was “gradually dying out.”²⁷ Such contradictory perceptions of the Trinath tradition in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, from mentions of large crowds, fervor spreading like “wild fire,” and hopes for its demise, signaled the extent to which the pliability of the Trinath tradition eluded precise assessments.

The Trinath tradition began in 1867 in the Tangail subdivision of Mymensingh, a district historically known for assertive low-caste mobilization, popular annual fairs and carnivals, and a number of towns with important spiritual associations with famous pirs, fakirs, and ascetic sadhus. Around Tangail, the mutual echo, cross-pollination, and fusion of Hindu and Islamic practices flourished historically. The most likely author of the tradition’s central text, Ananda Chandra Kali, was the son-in-law of a wealthy man in Fatehpur village and lived in his spouse’s family home. Socially considered a *ghor jamai*, a man dependent on his wife’s family, Kali likely spent time moving between the towns of Fatehpur, Tangail, and Atia. Atia was the center of the pargana and site of the renowned seventeenth-century mosque built in Persianate style using the terracotta bricks made in Bengal that also lined Hindu temples.

Kali’s scant biography is thoroughly marked by associations with heterodox religion. He was born in Dhamrai, seventy kilometers south of Tangail, in Dacca district. Dhamrai was renowned for religious festivals, fairs, and annual events that marked auspicious days in the lunar calendar. For many believers, it was a node in local pilgrimage routes. Dhamrai’s annual *rath* (chariot) festival, honoring the local deity Madhab Thakur, drew thousands of devotees, merchants, traders, and craftsmen, spurring a vibrant print market for cheap small books containing devotional literature.²⁸ It was also reputed to be a place where the famous Sufi Hazrat Shah Jalal had visited. Kali, reportedly a ganja smoker from childhood in Dhamrai, never met Mukerjee, his pursuer. Mukerjee did meet Ananda’s brother, Dr. Chandra Shekhar Kali, and spoke to other “respectable persons” in Dacca, Chittagong, and Rajshahi divisions to discover that Kali was born in an elite Barendra Brahman household, graduated from the Dacca Normal School, taught in a new English-language school, and briefly worked in Dhaka’s Police Department. Growing disillusioned over time, Ananda quit his job and, according to Mukerjee’s gloss, wanted to “be able to save the ganja-smokers from disrepute, as then ganja could be consumed in the name of a god and under colour of doing a religious or pious act.”²⁹

For Mukerjee, a Brahman official with English-language education, the perceived impurity and ill reputation of *antyaja* castes, considered low in status and socially confined to specific familial occupations and trades in Bengal, colored his description of Kali and his popular audience. According to Mukerjee’s account, at Kali’s in-laws’ house, his “reputation of being a versifier” grew and his poetry attracted many people in Tangail. Kali initiated the first Trinath gathering when he was thirty-three and smoked two pice worth of ganja every day. Mukerjee

described the young man's motivations as the worship of "a common god, who might be worshipped by all classes, rich and poor, Brahman and Chandal, and by all creeds, Saktas, Baishnavas, and Shaivas." Mukerjee added, "The idea occurred to him of having the present worship at which ordinary and inexpensive things, such as ganja, oil, and betel-leaf were alone to be used." Trinath worship quickly turned into regular events called Trinath Melas. Melas were periodic fairs that coincided with religious festivals or market days in rural Bengal. Though acknowledging that Trinath Melas spread "like wild-fire" outward from Fattehpur village, Mukerjee dismissed them as gatherings of "a few ganja-smokers" along with those "that were not in the habit of consuming ganja [who] also followed their [ganja smokers'] example."³⁰

Mukerjee identified precisely, however, the most powerful and compelling factors shaping the tradition's prominence. First, he acknowledged that "caste does not stand in the way, and it may be performed almost every day and in every season." Second, he observed that the ritual was inexpensive—costing three pice per head, thus allowing the lowest classes to mix with upper castes and landlords in the same space and temporarily to share the same ganja. Finally, he argued, the tradition's singular emphasis on *manasik puja* for the fulfilment of a vow or desire and a utopian message of deliverance from sin and disability had turned public ganja use into a practice that "cannot be looked down upon." This rapid sacralization of public ganja consumption reflected the everyday legitimacy that ganja enjoyed among subaltern groups.

Ganja's sacral power stemmed from the text of the *Trinather Pancali* and its critique of caste sanctions. Mukerjee noted that, following the original *Pancali*, "one pice worth ganja, one pice worth oil and one pice worth betelnuts were required for the puja." However, "now, 3, 5, 7, 9, 101, 108 pice worth of ganja is offered to the god Trinath and they are filled in 3 to 108 chillums and smoked," he worried. Mukerjee further detailed his own observations of Trinath practices: "Fire is put on the chillums of ganja and kept for some time," he wrote, after which "the first chillum is taken by the priest who pulls first and passes it on to the next man."³¹ A *chilim* was a pipe longer and thinner than the kolki. Inhaling from the pipe compelled participants to touch surfaces that had been touched by, and been in contact with fluids of, people from other castes and genders. "Pan, betel-nut, and sweets," Mukerjee noted, "are also offered to the god and they are afterwards distributed among the persons present. All the persons present must each take the chillum and bow to it." Prostrating the body before the pipe exemplified its sacral, holy, and magical powers. The symbolism of the pipe (kolki or chilim) was significantly pronounced in Trinath Melas. Unlike ganja that people smoked, betel nut that they discarded or chewed, and oil spent in keeping candles lit, the pipe was the only physical, tangible receptacle that continued in use and that channeled the virtues of Trinath's preferred ganja into the devotee's body.

The other physical object in repeated use was the printed copy of the *Trinather Pancali* itself. Beginning with a dramatic prelude that announced the deity's arrival, the text sustained the god's larger cosmology. As the tradition spread, it became a site of struggle as writers with different visions for Trinath devotionism composed and recomposed their own versions of the *Pancali*. The twelve-page first edition of the *Trinather Pancali*, containing a single reference to the poet Sri Ananda, was published by Sheikh Maulabaksh Printers of Baburbajar, owned by Munshi Maula Buksh, one of the most renowned printers of Dhaka. The composer, instead of naming himself, inserted their name as interlocutor in the text to aestheticize the relationship between author, performer, reader, and listener of the text.³² The two printing presses in Dhaka town were Bangla Jantralaya and Girish Jantra, both of which published the 1872 editions of the *Pancali* in April and December, totaling four thousand copies.³³ By 1877, the newspaper *Dacca Prakash* asserted that "20,000 copies of verses" about the "Tin Nather Mela" had sold.³⁴

Both presses strongly influenced literary culture in eastern Bengal. Bangla Jantralaya, founded in 1860, published the *Dacca Prakash*, the mouthpiece of the Brahmo Samaj reformist movement in Dacca. Girish Jantra, founded in 1869 by Girish Chandra Roy, was known for publishing periodicals like *Mitra Prakash* before it was bought by Kali Prosonno Ghosh in 1874. Ghosh's own prestigious and widely read periodical, *Bandhab*, made Girish Jantra (or Girish Press) the most profitable publisher in Dhaka. Ghosh himself was a famous writer and orator, having learnt English at the Barisal Government School and Dacca Collegiate School. His orthodox Hindu father had forced him to learn Persian in a *maktab* (school) as a child, and despite his command of English, he turned later in life to giving speeches solely in Bengali. His multilingualism and critique of English-language instruction buttressed the press's regional reputation.

Ghosh's literary disposition toward formal Bengali writing, purist lexicon, and Sanskritized syntax and grammar decisively shaped the life of the first *Trinather Pancali*. He vehemently opposed publishing satires and farces and publicly pilloried "coarse" Bengali, especially among elite bhadrak writers.³⁵ In *Bhrantibinod* (1881), published by Girish Press, Ghosh castigated Hindus for indulging in vices like drinking alcohol and laziness, finding in them the roots of impurity and vice. Among Ghosh's readers, the *Calcutta Review* praised his earnestness and stern hatred of moral sham and impurity and hailed how he exposed the "follies, vices, weaknesses, and harmful conventionalities of modern civilisation and modern man."³⁶ His popularity as a man of letters helped him land the manager's job on the Bhawal zamindari estate in 1877, where his tenure was reported as high-handed and arbitrary, resulting in a lawsuit against him for financial misappropriation in the 1890s.³⁷ Ghosh's influence indexed how publishing enterprises and the owners of printing presses could decide the possible fates of authors and texts. Indeed, the Girish Press eventually stopped its run of the *Trinather Pancali*. Meanwhile, the *Pancali*'s ganja-fueled anti-Vaishnavism and praise of ganja likely did not grate

against the Bangla Jantralaya, which decidedly continued printing between 1872 and 1874.

However, the *Pancali*'s splendid success was not lost on the Girish Press, which commissioned a new, competing edition, written by Bharatachandra Kaviraj, under the patronage and guidance of Jagannath Ray, who likely promoted the edition among Dacca's ruling classes.³⁸ Ghosh's takeover of the Girish Press coincided with the public promotion of Kaviraj's new *Pancali*, which was a longer and highly Sanskritized poem imitating the stylistics of *sadhu bhasha*, then popular across the Padma among Calcutta's notable literati. Writers in this tradition selected Sanskrit-derived Bengali nouns, used formal syntax, privileged erudition over demotic colloquiality, and reproduced modernist aspirations initiated by Ishvar Chandra Vidyasagar via his 1855 Bengali instructional primer for formal schooling, the *Barnaparichay*. Sanskritizing aspirations led Kaviraj to embellish the *Trinather Pancali* with characters like Narada, Vishnu, Shiva, and Jagannath from various Hindu traditions. Kaviraj's *Pancali* was published on 14 May 1874, its costs partly covered by Maulabaksh Printers, the same year that Ghosh took over all operations of the Girish Press.

On the other hand, Bangla Jantralaya continued to offer the original 1872 edition with Ananda Kali's signature. By 1877, Laxman Basak Printers invested in the republication of Kali's version. Subsequent reprints and editions indicate that the Ananda Kali *Pancali*, reprinted in 1874 and 1877 by Bangla Jantralaya, far outsold Kaviraj's Sanskritized edition. This performance was particularly impressive and telling because the first three print runs of Kali's *Pancali* were sold at fifteen paise a copy, before the price was reduced to three paise to compete with Kaviraj's edition. Presumably, Kali's edition circulated in greater numbers despite the higher price in the initial years of the text's public life. The spread of the Trinath tradition quickly attracted devotional poets to write and publish yet other versions of the *Pancali* or render it as a *bratakatha*, a different genre of Bengali prose poetry that guided devotees through the economy of vows and desires (*brata*), disciplines of fasting and diet, rites of worship, methods of chanting, ideal virtues, and the biographies of deities. In Calcutta's more prominent market of print materials and deities, Trinath appeared with Gopalchandra Manna's *Trinather Pancali* in 1875.³⁹ By 1882, over the span of a decade, the *Pancali* had traveled from Dhaka to towns across the Bengal Delta, announcing Trinath's impatient decision to do the work of deliverance himself.

THE POETS AND THE TALE

The first five editions of the *Trinather Pancali*, all attributable to Kali, had largely the same story line, meant for performances in public congregations with musical accompaniment and pauses for songs and the elocutionists' commentary. Eight couplets of the *kotharombho* (prelude) set the stage for Trinath's arrival. To establish the deity's superior status as a god for the poor and those affected by the

sins of the corrupt, the poet used established deities as counterfoils. The inefficacy of Vishnu and Shiva necessitated Trinath's arrival:

In the name of Hari, the incarnation Gour,
Delivered sinners among us.
Dissatisfied, however, the Lord was impatient,
Incarnated himself, soon among us.⁴⁰

Gour, here meaning the sixteenth-century saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, was the figurehead of both orthodox Gaudiya Vaishnavism and Vaishnava heterodoxy. He was widely considered the incarnation of Vishnu on earth, and his teachings shaped modern Hindu middle-class identity in Bengal in the nineteenth century.⁴¹ In emphasizing Chaitanya's shortcoming, the poem begins with a powerful salvo against both Chaitanya and the Brahman castes instrumental in Gaudiya Vaishnavism's orthodoxy and caste prejudice. In the following verse, the poet makes another decisive inclusionary move by asserting that Hari (Vishnu) is one among a *trinity that is* Trinath, the lord of heaven, earth, and hell, thus folding Vishnu into Trinath's body. Drawing on Vaishnava belief and superseding it through a gesture of including and folding Vishnu unto itself set Trinath's subsequent biography apart from other heterodox figureheads in the spiritual milieu of colonial Bengal.

Thereafter, the *Pancali* reproduced an established poetical tradition, using sections like a well-paced *tripadi* and *pojar* before ending with a *gita* (song) composed for a *khemta* performance. The *tripadi*, a tripartite prosodic form, was lyrical and intended to complement the more narrative-driven lines of the *pojar*, a series of fourteen-syllable couplets. The *tripadi* developed from the fifteenth century, remaining popular in the *pancali* tradition in compositions meant to be recited, sung, or read aloud rhythmically at *kirtana*, *puja*, and other devotional rites. Thibaut d'Hubert has thus called the *pancali* itself an "open-ended poetic form" that lent itself to multiple performative genres.⁴² *Khemta*, a meter common to northern Indian percussion, was similarly open-ended and was often reinvented in colonial Bengal as street performers used *khemta* to accompany dancers in open markets and festivals. *Khemta* as a percussion format also remains alive in regions like Trinidad, where Indian indentured migrants produced new cultural forms.⁴³

Most poetic forms in Bengali were transmitted through oral tradition. Manuscripts were rare and printed texts became popular only after the 1860s.⁴⁴ The Trinath tradition spread through oral performances of the *Pancali*. Elocutionists (the *kothok*) and reciters (the *pathok*) accompanied by the *gayen* (singer) and *bayen* (percussionist or instrumentalist) traveled in troupes with the text, having fully memorized it or possessing single copies.⁴⁵ Singers and elocutionists usually were not authors but might claim to speak in the name of the deities who had communicated messages to them. Claims of otherworldly communication usually

invoked dreams. Deities, the performers claimed, appeared in their dreams, and the dialogue of heaven and earth involved in this magical exchange legitimized the comments that performers added to the text during or after their recitation. Queries from devotees and onlookers in the audience were common, and poets anticipated them when they composed verses. Sometimes, poets even authorized elocutionists to add to or embellish the text in anticipation of a specific query from an audience member. A complex dialogic, textual, and paratextual relation between author and performer marked all *Pancali* traditions. The physical theatrical setting—the actual village square, market site, or yard of a large home—provided the text and its performers with “ornamentation” that, in turn, made the performance of the text, and not the text itself, the main site of engagement.⁴⁶ The shorter length of the first *Trinather Pancali* editions also left room for performers to insert other songs, poems, and embellishments.

Having established the Hindu trinity as singularly superior to any one individual god, the first tripadi of the original *Pancali* established a radical relationship between devotee and deity based on the former’s *shadhyo* (means). Besides wealth and income, the word also implied status and caste:

Here, I reason with thee,
The puja, that both subject and king
Can perform with equal means.⁴⁷

Trinath explicitly desired rites that king and subject, or lord and tenant, could perform with equal means. He had, the *Pancali* explained, grown tired of lavish gifts (*nana upohaar*) and henceforth could feel satisfied only if people across hierarchies worshipped him with offerings that they *all* could afford. For that purpose, the poem announced *tin drobyo* (three substances) bought in equally priced quantities. These were ganja, oil, and betel leaf—exactly one pice worth of each. The poem reasoned that ganja, the most adept (*nipun*) at pleasing Trinath, could be bought in any market or from any village grocer. If excise shops or licensed petty vendors were unavailable, devotees could offer ganja grown on their homesteads. The tripadi subsequently became didactic and explained how the ganja was to be lit and then consumed with *bhokti* (devotion) in one’s heart. The oil was for keeping a lit lamp, and the *sabha* (gathering) was to continue until the flame spent all the offered oil. The text instructed the gathering to collectively read aloud the *Pancali*.

The subsequent section, the first poyar, shifted to a more narrative form. Here, performers recited the story of Trinath’s persistent motivations toward equality between high and low status:

Doridrer doridrota korite mochon
hoilen obotirno trilok karon
jotha totha choto boro nahik bichar
shomo bhabey shob sthaney holen prochar

To erase the poverty of the poor,
 God descended from the three worlds,
 He doesn't distinguish high from low, or here from there
 In identical form, he emerged, everywhere.

The poyar concerned a poor Brahman who loses his cow and calf at dusk. Trinath's divine voice tells him to look for three paisa hidden at the roots of a tree under which the Brahman was crying and instructs him to go to the haat (village market) to buy ganja, oil, and betel leaf for one paisa each. The mudi sells him the ganja and *paan* (betel leaf) but, the poet writes, the *olpomoti* (dull-witted) Brahman didn't have a *patro* (bowl) for the oil. The Brahman pleads with Trinath again, who tells him to use his waistcloth to collect the oil. Though incredulous, the brahman asks the vendor to pour the oil in his *kapor* or *anchol* (waistcloth). The vendor thinks the Brahman has lost his mind and decides to trick him by telling him that after he poured a *chonga's* (a small container) worth of oil in the cloth, it simply filtered through. To reinforce this lie, the grocer then smears the cloth with a smidgen of oil to leave a blotch. Miraculously, however, as he estimates a small cupful, the measuring cup does not fill up and he eventually exhausts all his oil. This terrifies the vendor, who then implores the Brahman for his true identity. The Brahman replies that he is merely a servant of Trinath. As the Brahman returns to the tree to conduct a *manasik puja* for his cattle, the grocer realizes his folly and announces Trinath's glory to the whole market.⁴⁸

Thereafter, the *Pancali* reciter directly addresses the *shobhajon*, the present gathering, confirming to them Trinath's mastery over Vaishnava orthodoxy. The next story describes how Trinath returns the cow and calf to the poor Brahman, after which the man proceeds home to begin a regular ritual honoring Trinath. He installs this puja site at the base of a divine *kalpataru* (wish-fulfilling) tree outside his dwelling. When the Brahman family is absorbed in meditation, they don't notice their *kula-guru* (priest and teacher to the extended clan) arriving with a servant in tow. The Brahman man fails to respond to the elder's queries about the new ritual, and in anger, the teacher violently breaks the installed *ghot* (holy vessel of water) and *kolki* (pipe for smoking ganja) with a kick. Unbeknownst to the teacher, at that precise moment, tragedy strikes his own home elsewhere. The priest's family dies at that instant—his wife and son collapse the moment he kicks Trinath's pipe. The teacher doesn't discover these deaths until returning home. Facing the cold corpses, the teacher exclaims to his manservant that his home has earned the wrath of the god of death, Yama.

Next, the *Pancali* contains an intercession for a *lachari loghu*, a short song of despair. The priest wails until his *bilap* (anguished plea) is finally answered by Trinath's booming voice, which tells him why his family died. The grief-stricken teacher returns to his student's house to find the poor Brahman man contemplating how to fix the broken *kolki*. The teacher immediately begs him for forgiveness, and the reciter concludes with the teacher, an elderly Vaishnava and Brahman,

giving himself over to Trinath and renouncing his older beliefs. The poem describes this Vaishnava *kula-guru* as an “*obodh brahmon*,” a formerly unenlightened Brahman who finds wisdom after taking the ash of the ganja from the kolki he had previously broken, making a paste with it, and smearing it on the bodies of his dead family back home. In that moment, as his family returns to life, this newly enlightened man starts a regular Trinath Puja that, the poem announces, eventually helped bring wealth and prosperity to the family.

In its last episode the narrative incorporates disability and the body. The newly converted priest invites *protibeshigon* (townsfolk) to a Trinath Mela so the word and deeds of Trinath might proliferate. The villagers arrive to loud celebratory music. On the way, an old visually impaired man asks one of the invitees the reason for the noise. On learning more, the man finds *trinath-bhokti* (devotion for Trinath) in his heart. He then undertakes a *dhula-mokkhon* whereby he smears dust from the ground on his eyes. Miraculously, he gets half his vision back that instant, allowing him to get up and walk toward the *mela*. The same man then meets a beggar with a physical disability (*ponggu*) who also wishes to go to the *mela* but is impeded by his impairment. The man hoists the beggar on his shoulders and begins walking, but halfway there, the beggar miraculously finds himself able to walk again. The last song, set to *khemta taal*, closes by hailing Trinath’s power to cure all disease (*rog-baron*) and emphasizing that worshipping this deity needs neither the sanction of doctrinal texts nor the recitation of mantras (hymns and incantations), whether in Sanskrit or in “pure” Bengali.

*Tantro mantrō nai pujaṅ guṅ,
gaane hoye nibedon*

Neither tantra nor mantra are elements of worship
Song alone is enough to plead [to Trinath].⁴⁹

The printed *Pancali*’s most crucial paratextual element appears on the last page. The poet’s final authorial touch addressed not the audience but the future reciter-elocutionist. This paratextual addition captured the dialogic relationship of poet and performer through the textual liberties the former invited the latter to take. Composed in *taal oi*, a lesser-known rhythm, the reciter gives advice to the audience about customs for honoring Trinath. Here again, the *Pancali* prefers the minimal and the routine and includes a parenthesized phrase for others surrounding the reciter, who could interject with the compliment “*shadhu!*” to convey what was excellent, virtuous, or best.

*Din gele Trinather naam lauo
(Shadhu re bhai)
Saradin kori o bhai griho basher kaam
Shondhya kale lauo ekbar trinather naam.*

At dusk, take Trinath's name
 (That is best, brother!)
 Finish your day's work, what the home requires,
 At dusk, take Trinath's name, just once.

Subsequent editions of the *Pancali* printed by Laxman Basak at the Bangla Jantralaya followed the same narrative albeit with minor changes. The April 1872 edition was identical to the first with the exception that it altered *ganjika*, the feminized noun for ganja stalk, with *siddhi* in the poem. In Bengali, *siddhi* commonly referred to a drink made with ganja leaves, but here the poet curiously implied *siddhi* was to be smoked instead.⁵⁰ The author of the same edition also added couplets with other minor details. The most important of these appears as another crucial paratextual addition at the very end:

*Bhokti te pancali jodi ghorey deo sthaan
 Oisshorjo baribe taar boro hobe maan.*

With devotion, should one keep this *pancali* at home
 One shall earn both prosperity and respect.⁵¹

Maan, or respect, reinforced *shomo shadhyo* (equal means) and complemented the desire for wealth and prosperity. It indexed caste and class, bridging social status with poverty in the embodied relationship between self, text, deity, and the practice of collective intoxication. Turning the *Pancali* into a material object to be possessed and kept at home as a heritable tangible carrier of such relationships further reinforced Trinath's presence. Dignity and respect were important touchstones of assertion against Brahmanism in popular devotional culture. Transforming the printed copy into a potent object in the subaltern home turned Trinath worship into a devotional community united by a periodic temporality and a centerpiece object. The stapled, printed, flimsy paper edition, priced at three paise, became a thread binding the homes of devotees after they left the site of congregation and an invitation to return, often on a subsequent market day.

Until 1874, the three thousand copies previously published had carried only minor corrections and changes.⁵² In the final reprint of the original *Pancali*, the author changed all the *taal* structures to *khemta*, presumably to standardize the parts of accompanying instrumentalists. On 25 January 1874, the fourth reprint carried another minor alteration, including the words *gonjika* and *siddhi* both in the same line, instead of one noun only. It also did not contain the final musical episode.⁵³ On 6 January 1877, Laxman Basak Printers reissued the last run of its *Pancali*, in which the author reverted to the 1872 edition, published this time on heavier paper with a larger typeface.⁵⁴

The five editions, likely authored by Ananda Chandra Kali, were distributed from three cities, Dacca, Mymensingh, and Faridpur, each of which was the

administrative center of a presidency district. The other point of sale was the famous village Dhamrai in Dacca district, where Kali was born. The interplay between musical richness, dramatic episodes, colloquially understandable composition, and anti-Vaishnava substance in Kali's *Pancali* quickly attracted Brahmanical appropriation and backlash from elite Hindus. Girish Press's edition of the *Trinather Pancali* by Bharatachandra Kaviraj was a direct challenge: Except for the rudimentary plot sequence, it bore little resemblance to Kali's composition. Kaviraj retained the offering of ganja, betel leaf, and oil but recrafted them for a wealthy-, middling-, or upper-class, more literate audience attuned to Sanskritized Bengali. His rewriting signaled that upper-caste groups were either increasingly fascinated by Trinath or could become a viable audience in the future. In colonial Bengal, such audiences were often composed of men disillusioned with modern office routines and householder norms. Commonly, they belonged to homes where ganja had been an object of conspicuous consumption at music recitals and thus were likely attracted to the sanctification and legitimacy offered by Trinath.

Kaviraj began his *Pancali* with a *dirghotripadi*, a long tripadi full of poetic pieties describing Vishnu that challenged earlier depictions of Trinath as a supradeity. Kaviraj elegiacally paid obeisance to Vishnu, the mother goddess Durga, and the goddess of knowledge Saraswati (who in Bengal was considered to be like a daughter to Durga), before ending with praise for Shiva. As the plot progresses, Narada, the saint and messenger of Hindu gods, travels (in the second poyar) to meet Shiva, who tells him that it is Hari (Vishnu) who is indeed "Trinather Nath," or the lord greater than Trinath himself, who can give deliverance to sinners and degenerates. After Kali's version had displaced Vishnu, Kaviraj's effort to blatantly reinsert him as *the* singular godhead in Hindu cosmology reflected social anxieties among Dhaka's reformist upper-caste elites about subaltern devotional anti-Vaishnavism. Casting especially Shiva as the one conceding Vishnu's superiority to Trinath reveals an intension to deliberately pacify the challenge posed by Kali's narrative.

Shiva then mentions *siddhi* but refers not to the concocted drink but the whole ganja plant. His monologue announces that *siddhi* was brought to earth as seed by the *sadhugon* (Hindu sages). With a clever play on *siddha*, meaning "fulfilment" or "attainment," Shiva's monologue in Kaviraj's text connected the phonemic vowel endings of *siddha* and *siddhi*. *Siddha* in Vaishnavism connoted the fulfilment of desires, the attainment of higher powers, and *siddha-rishi* was a devotee (*bhakta*) who attained release in the course of their life on earth.⁵⁵ While *siddhi* could mean attainment or prosperity, it was also a noun for a confection of cannabis leaf.

Shiddho rishi shadhugone shiddhi'r karon
Bharotey korilo shiddhi bijer bopon
Shadhugone shuddho mone tahare aaniye
Ishto shiddhi kore tara shei siddhi kheyeye

Enlightened sages and ascetics are the reason
 Siddhi took root from seed in Bharata.
 Ascetics who brought it, with purity of heart,
 Fulfill their desires by consuming it.⁵⁶

Besides the substitution of *gonjika*, a colloquial noun, with *siddhi*, a noun associated with Hindu rites, Kaviraj's anxieties about the Trinath tradition's anti-Brahmanical potency pervades the invocation of *rishi-sadhugon*, Hindu figures of veneration, instantiating cannabis and *shuddho-mon*, an abstract notion of purity to be acquired from a prior state of impure (*oshuddho*) heart.

Kaviraj also replaced the minimal emphasis on means of worship in Kali's *Pancali* that reflected materialist associations of class and caste backgrounds of poor devotees, with a more pronounced focus on aspirational upper-class aesthetics. His instructions included one for the ideal kolki (pipe), now to be made of gold, and another for the water used to make a paste of the ganja, now necessarily to be sourced from the Ganga, the holiest river for believing Hindus. To encode sophistication, Sanskrit nouns and new offerings appeared, as *paan* (betel leaf) became *tambul*, and *korpur* (camphor) from Vaishnava rites became crucial. His expanded schema of rites included new ones from Vaishnava customary stipulations for puja to a revaluation of *siddhi* itself. He postulated that while anyone could buy one pice of it, *siddhi*'s true value was not bodily but intangible and connected to intellect. Insisting that *siddhi* especially affects the enlightened *sadhugon*, he defined its role as augments of intellect so as to redirect its semiotics from the physicality of working bodies to the conjectural value of sagacity.⁵⁷

Kaviraj's unusually precise instructions also included Trinath worship every Friday, especially for birthing sons and increasing wealth. To attract and gratify potential subscribers among mercantile castes like Baniks and Chandras, he attested to Trinath's ability to bring back wealth stolen by *dasyu* (robbers). In his narrative sections, there was no poor Brahman with a cow. Instead, his *Pancali* described Virupaksa, the king of Simhala (Ceylon), once as wealthy as Kubera, the Hindu god of wealth and gold. The other central character was the wealthy merchant Jaisena, who was born to a Brahman *sadhu* but, instead of ceremonial priestly labor, had taken to trading overseas. Jaisena the *banik* (merchant) embodied Brahman and Vaisya identities, consolidating the upper-caste positioning of Trinath's lore. Jaisena yearns for a son, a wish that, Narada suggests, Trinath would grant. In one episode, Jaisena's wife becomes pregnant in a dramatic sequence in which Kaviraj describes her prodromal and natal pain in detail. News of the benevolent Trinath's miracle, and the *niyom poddhoti* (ritual procedures) for worship, travels with a maidservant to Virupaksa's queen. Kaviraj describes elaborately the queen's absolute devotion for a son, which eventually leads to the birth of Benidhar, the young prince. Virupaksa exuberantly gives the people gifts and pays Brahmans to teach his young son and someday find him a bride. Subsequently, the ideal bride, Binodini, a daughter of Prabhakar, the king of Binodnagar,

enters the story, triggering a tragic turn. On the wedding day, King Virupaksa ignores his queen's plea to conduct a Trinath Puja because he didn't know Trinath had given him his son. Suddenly, Prince Benidhar loses consciousness, whereupon another long tripadi melodramatically recounts the royals' pain and the humbled king vows to worship Trinath till his death. Kaviraj's decision to erase agrarian and pastoral themes and substitute them with motifs and preoccupations of mercantile wealth, feudal royalty, and patriarchy reflected the concerns of zamindars, new *bhadralok* elites, and old wealth in Bengal. Kaviraj ended with an additional twelve rites, described objects for those rites as being made of gold and silver, and insisted that Trinath was a guarantor of wealth and male bloodlines.

In the last tripadi and poyar episodes, Kaviraj lay bare his ambition to place Trinath in an expanded Vaishnava sacred geography stretching south from eastern Bengal to Orissa, which he occasionally also called Bharata. *Bharatavarsha*, for many Bengali Brahman pandits in the Victorian era, became a foundational geographical category in claims they made against British colonial mapping and knowledge of India. One must not be like Somasena, the king of Kalinga (Orissa), Kaviraj wrote, because he spoke ill of Trinath and thus lost everything. Then, Kaviraj claimed that Jagannatha, Orissa's most idolized deity, was also an incarnation of Trinath.⁵⁸ Likely either referencing Trinath's actual slow spread into Orissa or wishing the incarnation into being, Kaviraj's composition aspired to cement the new tradition within a regional Vaishnava auspice.

Just a few months after Kaviraj's *Pancali* was published in Dhaka, Gopalchandra Manna in Calcutta revised the text for that city's audiences. Manna's 1875 edition was closer to Kali's narrative of the poor Brahman. It included the grocer (whom Manna called both *mudi* and *dokani*), many scenes set in the market, the two men with disabilities, and the Brahman *kula-guru* who learns his lesson after wrongly disrupting his disciple's Trinath worship. Manna's work was nonetheless unique in that he eschewed all poetic style and layers of complexity. His *Pancali* was written as a single poyar with couplets that rhymed well but were shorn of wit, word-play, or intricacy. Manna echoed *pancali* texts, written for other deities, suited to faster recitation and immediate understanding, that lined the bustling spiritual marketplace of Calcutta. Like Kaviraj, he described Trinath as Vishnu's embodiment, calling him by epithets such as Sri Gouranga and Narayana, both names for Vishnu's incarnations. In a familiar move, he also contextualized his narrative among the urban audience of Calcutta, using the popular and powerful Kaliyuga motif of an age of prevalent vice and moral disorder that necessitated Trinath's emergence. Manna insisted Trinath would deliver devotees from *daridro* (poverty), *paap* (sin), *rog* (disease), and *jiber durgoti* (the misfortunes of living beings). For his part, however, Manna maintained the emphasis on equal offerings available to subject and king, poor and wealthy alike, and left possible embellishments like flowers, sandalwood, and sweets as optional complements to the power of the ganja ash from Trinath's kolki.

Kali, Kaviraj, and Manna were the first three contending poets in what was an elastic and evolving subaltern devotional tradition. Kali's first *Pancali* editions circulated in all the colonial districts in the Bengal delta, while Manna's attracted devotees west of Calcutta and southward. By 1894, when the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission toured Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, officials from Mymensingh, Dacca, Faridpur, Backergunge, Noakhali, Tippera, Chittagong, Bogra, Sylhet, the Serajgunj side of Pabna, and Cuttack reported on Trinath in varying degrees. The tradition's rejection of caste taboos and emphasis on affordable offerings had done away with the usual costly fare of milk, butter, sweets, flowers, and leaf garlands that poor peasants couldn't afford. Betel leaves and nuts were more available anyway. Its ability to absorb other heterodox practices and aesthetics blended history and myth into the political economy of devotional life in unpredictable ways. Congregations on days of periodic markets attracted people across classes and castes and became avenues where traveling troupes of Vaishnava performers could earn alms, find admirers, and entertain devotees. Without hard-and-fast rules regarding rites, public ganja consumption provided its own fleeting thrill and sense of enchantment in the face of stifling strictures of Brahmanical and householder respectability. The resultant subaltern geography of Trinath registered in the archive through the anxious antagonisms of colonial officials in the 1890s and new iterations of the *Trinather Pancali* in Orissa in the twentieth century.

GEOGRAPHIES OF SUBALTERNITY

By the 1890s, many writers concurred, often contemptuously, with James Wise about the Trinath tradition's egalitarian appeal and legitimation of public ganja smoking. As this chapter's epigraph by N. K. Bose, officiating magistrate and collector for Noakhali district, illustrates, ganja consumption by subaltern castes became the unmistakable hallmark of Trinath traditions. In Noakhali, deep in the southern Bengal delta, Hindu and Muslim day laborers were the second-largest population of ganja consumers. According to Bose, "travelling bairagis," itinerant religious mendicants who lived off alms and donations in exchange for spiritual guidance, were the largest single group. While Vaishnava devotees consumed ganja moderately, Bose explained, Trinath's lower-class devotees often began smoking ganja "in this way and eventually became inveterate smokers."⁵⁹ Anxieties about addiction aside, Bose's comment about Vaishnava devotees also smoking ganja exemplifies how Trinath traditions mutated in different pockets of agrarian eastern India and took on very different local attributes.

In Dacca and Mymensingh districts, where Kali's Trinath Mela first took root, congregations had quickly absorbed Baul musicians and chanting for Shiva. Having observed Trinath closely, Dacca's magistrate and collector, T. L. Jenkins, assessed how its cosmology had connected with Shiva's divine forms, "Mahadeo and Trailokyanath." Trinath worship, he wrote, "is held after nightfall in the houses

of Hindus of all classes,” and “a few of the bhadrakok now allow the ceremony to be performed at the special request of their dependents of the lower class.”⁶⁰ To the IHDC, he described how three kolkis were filled with ganja and people made offerings to the god while everyone congregated around a lamp placed in the courtyard outside a house. Jenkins noted how different the puja was in that there was no idol of Trinath, adding that “people begin to sing Baulah songs in a chorus, and while so singing, the persons, three at a time, smoke the three chillums, [and] no brahmin is required for the ceremony.”⁶¹ He surmised that the gatherings had indeed led to increased ganja consumption in Dacca city and that domestic workers in wealthy households had integrated Trinath Melas into their calendar of regular rituals and ceremonies.

In Mymensingh, sellers with licenses from the colonial state testified similarly on habitual consumption. For instance, while Babu Dhani Ram Saha, an excise vendor from rural Mymensingh, noted that the three chillums of ganja used in Trinath Puja could indeed “lead to the formation of a habit,” his competitor, Babu Ram Nidhi Shaha, who sold in Mymensingh town, took a contradictory tack. Shaha asserted that ganja use by Trinath devotees was “temperate, and [did] not lead to the formation of any habit.” Doctors like Preonath Bose, assistant surgeon and teacher of materia medica and practical pharmacy in Dacca who traveled in Mymensingh frequently, reflected a tentative consensus in the area. Even though the use of ganja at Trinath Melas could be both “temperate and excessive,” Bose insisted that it could not plausibly lead to a widespread habit “unless it [the mela] was frequently observed,” which he did not think was constant enough. Trinath worship did not need frequency per se to cross-pollinate across space. In Khulna district, south of Dacca, Trinath congregations had, according to Reverend G. C. Dutt, absorbed followers from the Kartabhaja sect and itinerant Muslim fakirs. In Backergunge district, in the heart of the Bengal delta, poor Hindu tenants who only consumed siddhi as an essential part of Vijayadashami, the last day of Durga Puja celebrations, were frequent attendees at Trinath Puja. Babu Banku Behari Dutt, excise deputy collector of Backergunge, testified that in his district, siddhi drinking during Durga Puja and ganja smoking during Trinath Puja were complemented with “small cakes of bhang, distributed in case a cow yields issues.”⁶²

The parallel spread of Trinath traditions in Jessore district registered some negative assessments. Inspector of Police Babu Mathura Mohan Sirkar in Jhenida vehemently argued with the IHDC that Trinath worship was merely an invented tradition. He was convinced that it aimed to dupe uneducated people into becoming followers by theatrically enacting the role of a Shiva-like persona who could embody a sage, a lover, and a teacher. “Smokers generally make a rule among themselves as to who will become Shaivas of Trinath worshippers,” he insisted, “and with a view to allure others, give out that ganja smoking and bhang drinking is necessary. Illiterate men commonly fall victim to such allurements.”⁶³ Sirkar’s disdain nonetheless registered how men at Trinath congregations in Jessore enacted

new possibilities, led others in ceremonies, and adapted master-disciple dynamics to craft new practices.

In Faridpur district, *jat-vaishnava* and *antyaja* castes introduced new rites altogether. Babu Amvika Charan Mazumdar, a government pleader as well as a zamindar, had served as the chair of the Faridpur municipality for six years. During this tenure, he had surveyed ganja shops in the town and observed his “Chandal tenants” (castes deemed untouchable) indulging in ganja. In his testimony to the IHDC, he noted that Trinather Mela spread from Poragacha village, tucked away in the district’s southeastern fringe. From there, it had mutated appreciably. Mazumdar described how it involved “raising a mud vedi or alter [*sic*] to Trinath” on which devotees “placed betel leaves, betel nuts, sugar drops, and quantities of ganja” and congregated around it. “Songs are sung in honour of the deity,” he wrote, and “the assembly then smoke the ganja thus offered to the deity . . . the consumption of ganja is often very excessive.”⁶⁴ The *Trinather Pancali* does not prescribe a *bedi* (raised platform), a ceremonial altar, or even an elevated seat for the deity. In fact, visual representations of Trinath made by iconographers often depicted not a single supreme being but simply the many-headed body of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Faridpur’s Dalit devotees had transmuted forms of idol worship into an idol-less practice and added offerings like *batasha* (sugar drops). Mazumdar complained that “a very appreciable portion of persons of bad livelihood, who often enter into brawls” and “prostitutes of lower order” were the prime consumers of ganja in Faridpur. “It is remarkable,” he noted, “that little children have generally a morbid dread in approaching a habitual ganja smoker.” The figure of the vulnerable and fearful child, a familiar discursive site of contests and settlements between Brahmanical and imperial masculinity, was invoked here to index Mazumdar’s own discomfort with Chandal workers and women consuming ganja in public.⁶⁵

In the hills and plains of Tippera and Comilla, southeast of Mymensingh, low-caste devotees and young men gathering at Trinath Melas invited vocal detractors. Babu Gobind Chandra Basak, deputy magistrate and deputy collector of Brahmanbaria, then in Tippera district, was alarmed at the unholy alliance between “low-class women, Baishnabis, and unfortunates.” He told the IHDC that “boys below 16 who are tobacco smokers, also smoke ganja in Trinath Mela, the religious gathering among low people.” At the mela, “a number of persons meet and sing religious songs. Ganja is then offered to the god Trinath and everyone present is bound to smoke ganja on pain of the god’s displeasure.” In North Tippera, Babu Prakash Chandra Singha, deputy magistrate and deputy collector of Chandpur, complained that Trinath Puja had “become the favourite amusement of the low-class Hindus,” where “many lads I know learn ganja-smoking.” Babu Mohini Mohan Burdhan, the government pleader of Tripura district, with two decades of legal practice in the town, claimed it was routine “to see the peaceful villagers, old and young, including even those who have not yet been initiated in the habit of smoking,” in attendance at Trinath Mela with the “clear intention of indulging

themselves in a sort of nocturnal revelry to give sauce, as it were, to their dull and monotonous life." The figure of the onlooker, the impressionable young man, and the uninitiated were all meant to cast aspersions on Trinath's authenticity as a religious tradition, just as they simultaneously reflected conviviality, popularity, and unbridled appeal. Burdhan was indeed concerned, claiming that it was compulsory for everyone to smoke at a Trinath Mela. "To decline is considered sacrilege," he declared, adding that "devotees in their zeal often run into excess while the innocent people attending such meetings run the risk of being converted into the faith."⁶⁶ Burdhan's was not a concern about ganja per se, because he otherwise acknowledged that it was routine for Hindus to consume bhang during the "national festival of Sarasvati puja," meant to honor the goddess of knowledge. Reactions from men like him cataloged Brahmanical consternations about Dalit sociality and intoxication in public.

In fact, in 1875 the commissioner of Tippera had discovered that low-ranking excise officers charged with monitoring illicit cannabis trade in rural markets often "met with little sympathy from the people." He noted that in some instances people had beaten up chowkidars and excise peons when they attempted to verify the origins of ganja products being bought, sold, or consumed in haats. In Brahmanbaria subdivision, where Trinath Puja had likely caused significant increases in ganja consumption, he considered this a notable problem. In markets and nearby public spaces, "lower classes of Hindus" would assemble "fifteen or twenty persons in number" to worship Trinath after buying ganja, leading to the sale of 133 maunds in Brahmanbaria's three thanas (police circles), far outstripping the 118 maunds in the nine thanas that constituted the rest of the district.⁶⁷ Whether statistically causal or not, popular discontent regarding colonial control of market spaces and the ritually legitimized public intoxication at Trinath gatherings haunted British administrators. The Indian Hemp Drugs Commission acknowledged discontent concerning excise drugs but conveniently cited lack of sufficient evidence.⁶⁸

The specter of a Dalit devotional public that was frequently intoxicated pivoted on two other factors: dusk and night in a rural landscape, and touch and contact with oral fluids among different caste groups. Men and women gathering in proximity under cover of darkness caused notable panic in Comilla. M. Kazi Rayazuddin Mahamed was a former sub-registrar in Moradnagar for twenty years before he inherited a zamindari in Comilla. In 1894 he dwelt extensively on Trinath's catholicity toward everyone gathered in the evening, noting how "the working and labouring classes of Hindus and Moslems" and caste groups such as "Sahas, Pals, low-class Moslems, chamars and mehters consume ganja at Trinath Melas." Whether one claimed formal Hindu or Muslim identity or not, members of *antyaja* castes mingling at night immediately suggested inauthenticity. Syad Abdul Jabbar, a wealthy Comilla zamindar who had graduated from a mission school, highlighted this in his complaints about his tenants and servants smoking ganja: "A large number of lower uneducated people use ganja. An enormous

number of the low-class Hindus consume ganja in pretence of their religious worship." Jabbar believed that the "spread of civilisation" will reduce both ganja consumption and Trinath's appeal. The "persons of licentious character, menial servants, and women of unchaste character" who used ganja, Jabbar argued before the IHDC, were attracted to Trinath only because of its culture of gaiety. "In Trinather Seva, which is done on Saturdays and other appointed days of the year," Jabbar explained, "they prepare a huge ganja smoke for the god . . . they pass the whole night in a large company in merriment and revelry, smoking the ganja." The pleader at Comilla Judge's Court, Babu Ananga Mohan Naha, further critiqued Trinath Mela for not being authentic, deeming it simply a "quasi-social" practice that was an eyesore and a site where caste transgressions delegitimized its potential. Another court lawyer, Babu Kailas Chandra Dutta, remarked that "ganja was smoked in solitude, except in the Trinath Mela where smokers assemble at a place at night." Among such nocturnal communities, women devotees among itinerant Vaishnava performing troupes "occasionally smoked ganja," and "females of the singing class and songsters generally use ganja to keep their voice clear and to prevent its being hoarse."⁶⁹ Cultures of nocturnal revelry were laden with spiritual meanings in Bengal Vaishnavism in which night represented a time of introspection, of sexual communion, and of engaging with meanings of secrecy and singing *kirtana* songs till morning as a rite to mark the passage of darkness into dawn.⁷⁰

Men from Hari and Mehtar (or *methor*) castes, who took up hereditary work in cleaning toilets and public sanitation, figured in discourses farther east in Chittagong. Babu Ganganath Roy, the district's deputy magistrate and deputy collector, found that "a limited number of low-caste" and "hindu ganja-smokers" occasionally sat together "to offer ganja to Trinath . . . [and] fill a chillum with ganja prepared in the usual way, put fire on it, and after pronouncing a formula of prayer asking God to accept the offering, smoke it away." Roy, a Kayasth by caste, believed that low-caste people smoked ganja because their "occupation in life compelled them to." He particularly described how people of the Hari caste, coolies, fishermen, Mehtars, and palki bearers in Chittagong smoked ganja moderately. Fishermen and coolies smoked it to "bear up the fatigue," and Mehtars to "enable them to carry on the work of cleansing latrines without feeling revulsion," he wrote. Observers like Roy who were often tasked in their official positions to substantiate changes in consumption patterns of liquor and drugs routinely relegated the appeal of Trinath traditions to the necessity of intoxication for labor and, by extension, inheritance of caste habit among laboring castes and communities. As he put it, "The evil effects of ganja do not operate on fishermen who use the drug moderately in pursuit of their calling."⁷¹

Officials posted to the north in Assam, Sylhet, and the Surma valley echoed Roy's reference to Trinath traditions among indentured coolies from Bihar and Bengal living on plantations.⁷² After leading excise administration in almost every district in Assam, J. D. Anderson, was officiating as commissioner of excise when

the IHDC received his testimony. Commenting on the circulation of Trinath and ganja to the Brahmaputra valley (Assam) from lower Bengal, he particularly highlighted the role of music. “At a Trinather Seba” in his district, he said, “the chanting of hymns, beating of drums, and consumption of ganja go on during the livelong night.” Communal gaiety drew in ganja smokers, and Anderson hinted at congregations becoming sites of exchange and interaction between coolies living on plantations and tenants cultivating on surrounding peasant farms.⁷³ While *sheba* (service) connoted the upkeep of and offerings to idols in Bengal, the word and its etymological relation to *shebon* (ingestion or consumption) and *ganja shebon* (ganja smoking) influenced the ways Trinath traditions circulated as sites for tending to and serving simultaneously the deity and the self.

In the Surma valley and Cachar, Trinath metamorphosed into Piri traditions of popular Islam as Muslims renamed the deity as a pir, a spiritual master revered for their teachings, blessings, and miracles. Trilokh Pir attracted followers who worshipped him for the benefit of their cattle. This was a particularly novel use of the “open-ended religious systems” of both Hindu and Islamic traditions that have historically shaped each other in Bengal.⁷⁴ Heterogeneity and eclecticism in traditions of Bhakti have always involved reinvention of divinities and recrafted rituals. Sumanta Banerjee has called the heterodoxy and heteropraxy of dissident sects the expressions of “logic in a popular form.”⁷⁵ Richard Eaton, who counted nearly sixty syncretic heterodox sects in the nineteenth century, has described a nonbinaristic and flexible religious tradition following fakirs who acted as cultural intermediators between Vaishnavism and Islam.⁷⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, important traditions that had begun with Bengali Islam in the eighteenth century had slowly become Hinduized as increasing numbers of Hindus received formal education and emerged as a middling class. The deity Satyapir, who emerged as a figure in the eighteenth century among Muslims and was worshipped with *shirni* (a confection of fruits, milk, flowers, nuts, and flour), was the most prominent example. His *Pancali* began with the story of a Hindu Brahman finding wealth and prosperity after being blessed by a Muslim fakir. Imitating the Brahman, the story went, a Hindu merchant also asks for a blessing but forgets to offer shirni as promised. Once he sets sail on the seas with his newfound wealth, Satyapir’s retribution for the merchant and his daughter’s carelessness result in fatalities. The merchant and his son-in-law die, after which the young girl apologizes to Satyapir, which brings her family back to life and helps them to recover her father’s sunken goods. Sumanta Banerjee’s comparison of Satyapir texts to later ones about Satyanarayana, an incarnation of Vishnu, reveals the liberal use of motifs like reincarnation and a physical human form, both heretical in orthodox Islam, to have been common among Bengali Muslims. The “Satyapir-Satyanarayana” tradition combined stories of swords and arrows, floor decorations in white rice paste (*alpāna*), and themes like piracy, cyclones, and voyages to the southern Bay of Bengal. *Satyānārayaner Bratakatha* and *Satyapirer Pancali* were twinned textual and performative

forms of devotional practice with common plotlines like the encounter between a Brahman and a merchant or a sea merchant and a son or son-in-law.⁷⁷ Most Satyapir poets were Hindus and as the deity was reinvented as Satyanarayana in the late nineteenth century, older tales of God appearing disguised as a Muslim mendicant gave way to a new genealogy, drawing on the Skanda Purana, of Satyanarayana as an incarnation of Vishnu.

Flowing in the opposite direction in the exact same period, Trinath, a Hindu deity, was absorbed into the pir tradition of Sufi Islam in Bengal. In Silchar, then part of Cachar, the medical practitioner Prosunno Kumar Das told the IHDC that the use of ganja by Muslims in the Surma valley as an offering to Trilokh Pir was coterminous with Hindus smoking ganja in turns from the same pipe at Trinath gatherings. Cachar's prominent pleader Babu Abantinath Datta in fact confessed that in his youth, he "had no alternative but to mix with several confirmed ganja-smokers," because he was born to a poor family where many smoked ganja. In his experience, Trinather Seva was "a religious entertainment" held at night among "low class men of Sylhet and Cachar, [who] invoked god to come and share the offering of ganja." This, he added, was supplemented by a "distribution of sweetmeats and fruits among the spectators and smokers." The popularity of Trinath Piri among rural Muslims particularly registered as offensive to affluent Hindus like Silchar's pleader Kamini Kumar Chandra, who called them "disreputable." Having observed Muslims using ganja to prepare shirni for their pir, he claimed that their worship of "Tinlokh Pir's Sinni" was nothing but a "cloak for covering the questionable character of the habit under the sanction of what passes (as anything can pass as religion in this country) as religion." "It would be ridiculous," Chandra told the IHDC, "to consider it as religious worship." Chandra's contempt for the relay of the smoking pipe for everyone to take a pull, which could cause mixing of fluids across caste boundaries, led him to blame Trinath's *piri* variant for creating a "training ground for beginners in ganja consumption." Brahmanical panic around impurity and authenticity similarly suffused the views of Ishan Chandra Patranavish, the extra assistant commissioner of Sylhet, just south of the Cachar hills. Trinather Seva, he argued, led to ganja habits and could "prove injurious" to inhabitants in Sylhet. "It has sprung up in recent years," he added, "but has no Shastric injunction." Sylhet's civil surgeon, superintendent of jails, and labor inspector, Surgeon-Major H. C. Banerjee, concurred with Patranavish, particularly because Trinath was an affliction of "lower class Hindus." Others, such as the assistant surgeon of Nayasarak, Baikuntha Kumar Nandi, observed that even though Trinather Seva was supposed to cost only three pice, the "limit was exceeded very often" and led to the spread of "this baneful habit" in Sylhet.⁷⁸

By 1894 this expansive geography of Trinath devotion encompassed at least sixteen districts in colonial Bengal. From this large swathe of eastern Bengal, it gradually spread far to the south in Orissa by the twentieth century. The deep-seated discomfort, prejudice, and anxiety among dominant castes congealed at the close

of the nineteenth century particularly against heterodox claims on Hindu-ness, transgressive devotional practices, challenges to middle-class Vaishnavism, and women's mobility and public intoxication. Underneath the tip of the iceberg that was the colonial record of Trinath lay a larger world of subaltern creativity, mutation, and fluidity. In 1904 this world emerged very briefly into official discourse when four men who had met regularly in Trinath congregations were swept up in a murder trial.⁷⁹ In Doyhata, a small village in Dacca district, Prasanna fatally stabbed Ananda, a fellow disciple of a sadhu called Kalachand, and then orchestrated a series of enactments, initiated to bring on what he considered to be the apocalypse that would end the Kaliyuga and set the world right again. He forced Brahman men to undress in public, and he tore their most intimate adornment, the sacred thread. He then commanded Brahman women to perform specific rites of divine motherhood from Shakta worship and submit to purification by the touch of a kolki. In his purification ritual, Prasanna separately used a knife that was for cutting ganja before smoking it in the kolki. Sumit Sarkar, in his pathbreaking study of the case, analyzed how Prasanna scripted this theater of life and death using a bricolage of sacral practices from the fluid world of religious meanings in agrarian Bengal. His life had changed in the company of three men—Ananda, the victim; Lalmohan, the Brahman landholder with declining fortunes; and Kalikumar Chakrabarti, a former teacher in a colonial government school who left home and took on the persona of the traveling sadhu Kalachand. Prasanna came from an untouchable Chandal home; Ananda came from a Bhuinmali family, a caste group often more marginalized than Chandals; and for most of that fateful night, at least three of the four were highly intoxicated with ganja.

Sarkar examined the sense of disenchantment that new British institutions had created and that shaped young men's desires for spiritual adventure and devotional community. In rural Bengal where Brahmanical revivalism, fears of the Kaliyuga, various iterations of the Kalki myth, pir traditions, and the Shakta worship of Kali co-constituted a shared and contested divine landscape, Prasanna's cohort had ample room to explore at Trinath gatherings. In the malleable world of Trinath worship, as noted before about Jessore, men like Kalachand were enacting the role of a master within refabricated master-disciple relations. Kalachand's biography itself resembled that of Ananda Chandra Kali, who left a teaching job in a school set up under the colonial state to begin experimenting with heterodox religion. When Prasanna used the ganja pipe and the sacral knife and deployed themes from the Mahabharata, the Puranas, Kaliyuga literature, and Shakta rituals that night, he sought to initiate a world-shaping moment after which Kalachand would bring Ananda back to life and the English would be compelled to acknowledge his greatness.⁸⁰ Laced with such millenarian tones, the "scandal of Doyhata" nonetheless remained a muted event. Unlike Elokeshi's murder in 1873, which became a widespread sensation, Prasanna's powerful reversal of caste domination did not lend itself favorably to the emerging politics of Brahman masculinity, middle-class

respectability, and Hindu nationalism prevalent in Calcutta on the eve of the Swadeshi movement.⁸¹ Prasanna's assertiveness was historically the result of thirty years of Trinath traditions, across rural Bengal, that had curated the transgression of caste norms, public intoxication, and metaphysical mutations.

The popularity of aggressive Hindu identity, especially after the 1905 Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi movement, led to the gradual recession of Trinath traditions in Bengal after 1909. Intoxication among young men was cast by Swadeshi activists as harmful to the health of the nation. In oral tradition, the *Pancali* circulated as object and material for elocutionists and instrumentalists as congregations required only a few persons to be literate or orally versed in reading the poem. Unlike heterodox communities like the Matuas, which made claims on English-language education, jobs in the colonial state, and political legibility by mobilizing a new Namashudra identity, Trinath devotion had no organized structure or built institutions. The number of editions and copies in circulation of the *Trinather Pancali*, with one rare exception found by the Sanskrit scholar Chintaharan Chakrabarti, fell in numbers over time.⁸² Among surviving editions of the Bengali *Pancali*, a short, ten-page prosaic iteration by Umacharan Jyotirbhusan was printed in 1924 at the Jnanadayini Library Press in Mogultuli, Dacca.⁸³ Another, undated version, by Bhairab Chandra Shastri, was printed by the Orient Library in Calcutta.⁸⁴

The rare exception—namely, Chintaharan Chakrabarti's discovery of ditties from Kotalipada—is fascinating evidence of how Trinath devotion through ganja migrated from the *pancali* to the *chhora*, a genre of rhymes and proverbs. Yet another vehicle of proverbial knowledge in colonial Bengal, repetition in form and lucidity of content defined the *chhora*, whose primary constituency consisted of children. In these ditties, a stubborn Tinnath loves ingesting ganja but not food. The lines have a lively cadence, rhyme memorably, and were sung together joyously by devotees and transmitted as lessons on discernment. For countless reciters who passed it along, ganja simultaneously occupied a non-physical and a tangible state, sitting in pipes that Tinnath prepared, per the song, at the same time as it did in the pipes his devotees lit up and shared while singing the *chhora*. It drove home how such simultaneities—as ganja occupied and shifted between symbolic and tangible states, and between substance and commodity—enlivened relations between human, plant, and more-than-human. Lodged in the rhyme, ganja ties the immaterial to the tactile, taking the political economy of market relations that defined exactly one paisa of manufactured ganja straight into the believer's cosmology. The social history of the market-dependent consumer-devotee was also one of plant life. Although Chintaharan Chakrabarti called Tinnath a deity of Bengal and Orissa's lower classes and rued that the tradition's texts were scant, the ones he collected stood out for the way they explained the rite and Trinath's retribution.⁸⁵ Two examples are particularly illustrative:

(1)

*amar thakur Tinnath, kichu noy re khaaye
 ek poishaar tel diya teen baati jaalaaye
 amar thakur Tinnath, kichu noy re khaaye
 ek poishar paan gura teen bhaagey shaajaaye
 amar thakur Tinnath, kichu noy re khaaye
 ek poishar ganja diya, teen kolki shaajaaye*

My lord Tinnath, doesn't eat a single bite,
 With oil worth one paisa, three lamps he does light
 My lord, Tinnath, doesn't eat a single bite,
 With betel nut worth one paisa, sets three portions aside
 My lord, Tinnath, doesn't eat a single bite,
 With ganja worth one paisa, he prepares three pipes

(2)

*amar thakur Tinnath, shey koribe hela
 haat pao shukaiya jabe, rong hoibe kala
 amar thakur Tinnath, shey koribe hela
 haat pao shukaiya jabe, chokh diya bair hoibe jyala*

My lord, Tinnath, his neglect should you get
 Shriveled limbs, and skin scorched black, you will regret.
 My lord, Tinnath, his neglect should you get
 Shriveled limbs, and molten tears, you will regret.

The prolific biographer, historian, and editor Jogendranath Gupta found similar poems in Bikrampur, some of which were written and performed by one Romai Fakir. Among them, some continued the style:

*Trinather puja dekhe, jey koribe hela
 Taar golaay hobe golgondo, chokh diye ber hobe jaala.*

Having been to Trinath Puja, should one show him any neglect,
 A goiter-ed throat, and molten tears, that's what they will get.

Others, however, produced new storylines. In Fakir's poem, the supreme mother deity Durga (*adyashokti uma katyayini*) resolves the conundrum that originated with the prelude to the first *Trinather Pancali*, by Ananda Kali. As Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva discuss the urgency of easing human sorrow (*jiber dukkho*), Durga is invited to suggest what their ideal form on earth might be. As the single three-in-one body becomes Durga's suggestion, and she anoints them "Trinath," she emerges as the most recent force in the contest to establish the supersession of deities in the Trinath tradition.⁸⁶

By the 1910s, as Trinath sedimented into lay poetry and proverbial knowledge in Bengal, the tradition became increasingly noticeable in Orissa, where devotees charted other paths to carry it into the late twentieth century. Local Oriya poets combined Trinath texts with Jagannatha worship by rewriting the *Pancali* as a “purana” and projecting a deeper historicity into the tradition. The Satvadhikari Dharmagranth Store published its version of the *Sri Trinatha Purana* by Chandrashekhara Nandasarma in 1984 in Jajpur, a famous center of Hindu devotion and a pilgrimage site for Gaudiya Vaishnavas.⁸⁷ Other authors rewrote it as *Trinatha Charita Akhyana* so as to place it within the genre of life narratives that propagated around Chaitanya in Vaishnava practices. An *Akhyana* edition, likely from 1900, described Trinath as a tradition that originated not in Bengal but in Orissa, near a tributary of the Mahanadi River in Sripur.⁸⁸ Many devotees in Orissa also synonymized Trinath with the trio of Jagannatha (as an incarnation of Krishna), his brother Balabhadra, and his sister Subhadra, eventually referring to rites at their temples also as Trinath rituals.

This traffic of Trinath devotion from Bengal to Orissa had an early indicator in what is perhaps the longest composition of the *Trinather Pancali*. It was first serialized as a *punthi* in the weekly *Nihar*, which published Oriya texts in Bengali script from Contai.⁸⁹ *Punthi* (literally, handwritten manuscript) was a capacious term for printed poetical texts by Muslim and Hindu Bengali writers who employed elements of multiple languages (*misrabhasha*) such as Arabic, Urdu, Persian, and Oriya in their Bengali composition. Ending at thirty-one pages in bound form, this composition by Ambika Charan Biswas was circulated as a unique edition in Khulna in 1918 and signaled a new orientation in the text’s plotline.⁹⁰ Biswas was from Chalna, a small town in Khulna district, and had a reputation as an established elocutionist in nearby Bagherhat. He dedicated the edition to his father, Nityanand Biswas, who had been a connoisseur of the *Trinath Pancali* and had encouraged young Ambika Charan to recite it to him in his old age. For his part, Ambika Charan, viewed his composition as an act of recuperation. His preface began by chiding other versions of the *Pancali* available in markets for lacking the fuller story and sophisticated poetics.⁹¹ He claimed that belief (*biswaas*) and faith (*aastha*) in Trinath had waned among the people of Bengal. To remedy this decline, he claimed to have studied with Haripada Misra in Bhubaneswar in Orissa, from whom he had retrieved the entire authentic tale.

Trinath traditions had thrived in Orissa decades before. Babu Manmohan Chakravarti, the deputy magistrate and deputy collector of Jajpur, Cuttack, testified to the IHDC about Trinath Mela arriving in “Balasore and Cuttack from Bengal.” Babu Kanti Bhushan Sen, the special excise deputy collector of Cuttack, echoed the claim. “Many Bengalis have been settlers in Orissa since some generations past,” he noted, before adding that they had introduced bhang and sidhi in sweetmeats during Durga Puja and Ganesa worship. According to him,

Trinath Mela was popular in both Jajpur and Bhadrak in Orissa for at least “fifteen to twenty years” before the Commission arrived. Abhilas Chandra Mukerjee also testified about Orissa but not before commenting on “Baishnavis” in Bengal who attended Trinath gatherings and did not leave “the place of worship . . . as long as the light burns.” *Baishnavi* (literally, Vaishnava woman) was deployed by men to imply an ambiguous collectivity that could include widowed women, unmarried women, prostitutes, and outcaste women who had claimed the identity of a female devotee of Vishnu and spent time touring the countryside or cities in devotional troupes. Such groups often entertained other devotees for alms, hospitality, and charitable donations. In stark contrast to such women in Bengal, Mukerjee reported, in Orissa it was Bengali men or “Bhadralok young people in the Trinath Mela” who were beginners and “occasional moderate consumers” of ganja.⁹²

Mukerjee’s words in 1894 were implicitly challenged in Biswas’s edition of the *Pancali* in 1918, which did not present the geography of Trinath as one of diffusion from Bengal in the hands of educated *bhadralok* elites. Biswas reframed it as a circulatory process in which the text began in eastern Bengal, transformed in Orissa, and returned home through his hands. Biswas’s *Pancali* established the centrality of ganja in Trinath worship by explicitly situating it in a world shot through with contests of class, caste, and sect. The tale began with Madhusudan, a poor Brahman from Sripur, whose wife delivered a son. Tragically, she had not received any breast milk. To ease the hunger of the child, Madhusudan goes to a village of large moneylenders with enormous wealth and countless cows. There, he manages to find a lender willing to sell a disobedient milch cow that had attacked crops and plants, for five rupees, a price much less than the fifty rupees the cow was actually worth. Once he is on his way back, this cow goes missing from Madhusudan and the story follows the established plotline of *Pancali* compositions as well as the Oriya *Trinatha Charita Akhyana*. It uses familiar objects and characters—the oil and *gamcha* (waistcloth), a wicked oil vendor (*тели* from the oil-pressing caste), and the ganja kolki to be used in ritual. Things change, however, once the *proja*, subjects of the king of Sripur, find prosperity from Trinath worship and break the shackles of their commercial dependency on moneylenders.

She rajye jotek chilo dhoni mohajon
Nahi choley dhaar karjo byapsa dadon
Joto mohajon shob ekotro hoilo
Rajar kache te giya nalish korilo.

All the moneylenders in the realm
 Couldn’t keep up their loan business
 They banded together, and as one
 Complained to the king, for redress.

The decline of moneylenders’ influence infuriates the king, who in a fit of jealous anger announces penalties on his subjects who worship Trinath. A penalty of

150 rupees and a six-month prison sentence awaited Trinath devotees. The instant the king makes this pronouncement, his son dies, and the tale returns to familiar arcs. However, once Trinath forgives the king for his arrogance and jealousy, the poet turns to the contradictions of Vaishnavism and caste power.

*Shuno shorbojon, hoy ek mon, Opurbo kahini aar
Shei mela sthane, aashe protti dine, Ek boishnob Kumar*

Listen, one and all, to this wondrous tale
Of the Mela, where a Vaishnav youth came everyday

This verse prefaces the fate of a Hindu youth from an orthodox Brahman family who is disillusioned with Vaishnavism and comes to Trinath Mela every day. However, Mela attendees refuse to allow him into the *sabha* (gathering), reflecting the image of consolidated collective power among dissident and heterodox groups:

*Totpor diboshe, boishnobo aaishe, nishedhe shokoli taay
Boshite na dibo, shunoho boishnobo, tomare ei shobhaye.*

The next day, the Vaishnav came, despite his debarment
You are forbidden, O Vaishnav, from our gathering, they said.⁹³

The Vaishnava man persists in his pleas to become a Trinath devotee. One day, his teacher, a Brahman *doiboguru* (exalted teacher) follows him to the Trinath congregation. The teacher's eventual screed against Trinath disrupts the whole gathering and offends everyone present. Once he kicks the ganja kolki to break it, he offends Trinath, whereupon rain, thunder, and lightning envelope the teacher. The same instant, his family dies. Conditions improve only after the guru asks for forgiveness and smears ganja ash on the corpses of his family. The faith of the Trinath Mela is upheld and justice is restored as Brahmanical orthodoxy is forced to reckon with the divine power of a new god.

The closing episode in Biswas's text highlighted the importance of dusk to Trinath worship. Dusk, twilight, and night as times of darkness had deeper meanings in Vaishnava cosmology, and the congregation of itinerant, unfamiliar, and unhoused bodies without the social and sedentary moorings of normative Hindu structures had long troubled upper-caste critics of Trinath traditions. Biswas insisted nonetheless that dusk and evenings had prior status for Trinath and that the first *prahar* (hour) of the night was essential for worship. Whether or not Biswas's vision for renewing Trinath devotion in Bengal, where it had supposedly lost its authenticity, was ultimately realized, the practice of Brahman poets using the *Pancali* to justify and resolve Trinath's primordial challenge to Vaishnavism clearly continued. In 1924, Umacharan Jyotirbhusan's smaller *Pancali* invoked yet another act of inversion and supersession within its established architecture.

*Koli'r aarombho kaale deb narayon
 Nobodwipe gourango roop koren dharon
 Dvare dvare ghore ghore hori sonkirton
 Horibol boi aar nahik bochon
 Tobu nahi kolir norer paap jay
 Dekhiya ki kori hori bhaben upaay
 Nobodwipe trinath roop koren dharon
 Kemonete paapigon koribe pujon.*

At the onset of Kaliyuga,
 Narayana came as Gourango to Nabadwip
 Homes rang out in *sankirtana*
 None had words other than Hari's name.
 Sin remained, however, among men
 So, wondered Hari, what must be done
 In Nabadwip then, he came as Trinath
 What will sinners do now? How will they worship anymore?⁹⁴

Nabadwip, renowned for its Vaishnava devotional complex of temples, gardens, and schools, was Chaitanya's home. Jyotirbhushan claimed that it was Vishnu (Hari) who came reincarnated as Chaitanya (the golden-skinned Gouranga) but failed to remove sin from the Kaliyuga epoch. Vishnu's failure, and that of his devotees who spent all their time worshipping him through *sankirtana* music, were the reasons for Trinath's birth among humans. Thus, Trinath became another incarnation of Vishnu, necessitated by the limits of existing traditions. Jyotirbhushan further concluded that worshipping Trinath with ganja was thus an act not of sin but of deliverance from it. Jyotirbhushan inverted the logic of Trinath's relationship to Vishnu by both claiming that Trinath was an incarnation of Vishnu and superseding the original antagonism by blaming Vaishnava devotees for the failure of Chaitanya-centered society to cure sin. Unlike Biswas, however, Jyotirbhushan did not include Orissa in the sacred geography of Trinath, leaving its imprint ambiguous.

Trinath's life in Orissa transformed again with the new construction of a provincial state in the Republic of India after formal decolonization. As men from the Mallia caste acquired jobs in state offices, their dedication to Trinath surfaced in the new state capital, Bhubaneswar, and its adjacent temple town Kapileshwar. After 1950, the Trinath Mela, with its intercaste congregations, music, and ganja as divine offering, witnessed a muted revival in Orissa's public domain, even acquiring fairgrounds and verandahs in big government houses that were "widely attended by government clerks."⁹⁵ Clerical government workers in Orissa from the Mallia caste regularly sang at Trinath Melas after a day of work, and Trinath's reputation for granting boons for future prosperity percolated into discourses of post-colonial welfarism and the new nation-state. In an illuminating example, Ramesh Chandra Dhall's short tale *The Story of Kalyan Nagar* situates Trinath in a newly

built township called Kalyan Nagar (Welfare Town). In the story, set in the 1960s, Dhall's Bhubaneswar is full of government bungalows, youth hostels, and apartments built for Reserve Bank officials. One goes to Kalyan Nagar, in the story, to approach new bureaucrats for solving a range of problems—desired job transfers, financial assistance for failing local institutions, a hospital bed in a good government hospital for a diseased relative, and even a recommendation from a civil servant to help one's son get admitted to a government medical college.⁹⁶ Government bureaucrats now embody boon-granting powers, channeling the attributes of Trinath.

Nari, the transgender informant of Chairman Mr. Das in the story, tells him about the Trinath Mela planned by Sundar, Raghua, and Natia, three unemployed youths who regularly visit the municipality's office hoping they can get recommended for a peon's or contractor's job. Others like them even go to the Chairman's village in the countryside and till his land for the promise of a government job. Sundar's family had suffered an alcoholic father's violence and waywardness, Raghua had a partial hearing impairment and labored all day as a rickshaw puller, and with Natia, they believe the Chairman could be won over by Trinath's blessings. They have good reasons for this prospect: Raghua's skills as a *khanjani* player (percussionist) at Trinath Mela has attracted the attention of the Chairman and a spiritual guru. In addition, a renowned minister in the Orissa state legislature was a Trinath devotee, in following whom Nari learns that many civil servants have become Trinath worshippers. In a cruel turn of events the three men fail in their aspirations. Affluent Trinath devotees exploit Raghua for his labor, and the Chairman leads them on with promises in exchange for doing multiple odd errands. After Natia angrily vows to teach the Chairman a lesson in the next election by voting against him, Nari cautions Mr. Das with a rhetorical question: "How long will they keep their lives by drinking tap water that is used to water the plants in the gardens of high officials?" Dhall's story leaves the reader with a sober assessment of Trinath in Orissa as a deity ensconced in state structures, enabling the writ of post-colonial bureaucracy inside new configurations of caste, gender, and class.

In Assam, Trinath temples were built in Maligaon and on the Nilachala mountain, temples that regularly held worship sessions in the 1960s, using Assamese compositions of the *Trinather Pancali* by Dulalchandra Majumdar and Ramratan Samkhyatirtha.⁹⁷ In Bangladesh, Willem Van Schendel and Meghna Guha-Thakurta note, Trinath congregations gather occasionally even today.⁹⁸ Each such iteration of Trinath devotion carries the imprint of the elasticity that allowed the Trinath tradition to embed itself in popular devotion in eastern India between 1870 and 1910. Although Trinath never became a social or political movement with coherent goals that made claims on the colonial state, its pliability and the *Pancali's* rematerialization of existing tastes for ganja among Dalit castes and communities of labor put congregational intoxication and transgressing caste taboos at the heart of public practice. The resultant legitimization of desires for individualist

self-transformation, which did not invoke a collective identity, carried Trinath devotion forward even as the system of sacral meanings around objects like the kolki pipe dissipated. Nonetheless, the embodied, social experience of imagining utopias seated together at a Trinath congregation in the nineteenth century remained inherently also a critique of an impoverished, stifling colonial present.

As the following chapter highlights, the British colonial state perceived ganja in economic terms in ways entirely different from the social, spiritual, and utopian meanings that Trinath devotees popularized. For the colonial state, the economic logic of revenue extraction through taxation depended on bounding ganja cultivation to Naogaon and, on one hand, refraining from interfering in the cycle of intergenerational indebtedness and, on the other, supplementing revenue extraction through excise operations. However, with the tumult that World War I brought, economic crisis became the major key in which ganja and its meanings proliferated under empire. Crisis came to Naogaon in the form of a peasants' strike that powerfully reshaped peasant life between 1916 and 1930.

A Cooperative Experiment

As a result of the prosperity of this institution, we now see so many well-built and pretty buildings standing in the place which was once a vast tract of wasteland. The elegant mosque which you can all see from here and the beautiful temple opposite it give indisputable evidence of the prosperity of the Ganja Society.

—KUMAR KRINKARINATH RAY CHAUDHURI, CHAIRMAN, RECEPTION COMMITTEE, 1926 CO-OPERATIVES CONFERENCE

A few years back, the ganja cultivators . . . were no better than Irish cotters working hard without any remuneration commensurate with their labour . . . and were as miserable as the jute growers of Bengal . . . but [here] under Excise rules, the society enjoys the position of a monopolist. This has ensured its success.

—NAWAB KHWAJA HABIBULLAH, PRESIDING OFFICER'S ADDRESS, 1926

9 April 1916: The official deadline for Naogaon's cultivators to apply for licenses to produce ganja in the following year. As the superintendent of excise and the subdivisional officer of the Revenue Department waited, not a single cultivator came to apply. Two things became quickly apparent: No ganja would be grown under license in Naogaon in 1917, and the warehoused inventory of ganja would fall drastically short of predicted demand. Even as Naogaon's peasants were ready to allocate their land to other crops, the colonial state couldn't let go. Naogaon's ganja had a unique reputation, the state had actively suppressed cultivation in other districts, and the demand from buyers in Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, and the United Provinces, which generated hundreds of thousands in state revenue, could quickly be met by smuggled goods and other drugs. Reeling from World War I and facing pressure to develop industries in India to support the war effort, the government particularly wanted to avoid discontent among the laboring poor and consumers for whom devotion and religion were intimately tied to ganja. Ganja cultivators putting down tools was extraordinary: While brief rent

strikes were common during agrarian crises in Bengal, a coherent, collective, and methodically organized peasant producers' strike was certainly not. That day, no one knew that ten years later, Krinkarinath Ray Chaudhuri and Khwaja Habibullah would publicly salute the fruits of the producers' strike.

A DE FACTO STRIKE

The 1916 strike reflected a deep-rooted historical crisis of prices, debt, and infrastructure that, remarkably, colonial officials had foreseen for years, if not decades. Prices for Naogaon's ganja products often fluctuated wildly in the open market, and visiting wholesale buyers, though promising to buy specific batches from cultivators, did not pay the complete sale price at purchase. Tensions around arrears and installments bubbled up in 1914, and with each subsequent price fluctuation, the desires and decisions of cultivators to grow ganja the following year shifted. Prevailing prices at specific times of the commercial and agricultural calendars directly defined livelihoods because cultivators used them to negotiate prices with wholesalers with whom they had close ties. Prices in any one year also directly influenced changes in the area under cultivation the following year. In 1905–6, a decade before the strike, prices had fallen sharply, but their effect had been mitigated by sudden floods that reduced the land allotments for ganja. This reduction in supply improved the average prices cultivators could demand in 1907, in turn inviting more applications for cultivation in 1908. The resulting larger crop in 1908–9 sent prices plummeting from “unremunerative” to “nominally low” in 1910. Exports also fell that year, and the huge stock of unsold ganja in 1910 along with lower yields the following year meant that prices recovered only in 1912. Fluctuations sharpened again in 1914, and the revenue administration's Settlement Department received special statistics per village on “widespread illegal enhancement of rent” and “the subservient condition of tenants” in Naogaon subdivision's ganja tract as the world war depressed prices to record lows in April 1916.¹

The price of ganja wobbled on many determinants, and retail prices in different districts moved entirely independently of wholesale prices in Naogaon. Annual cycles of market fluctuations left peasant families and Santal workers intergenerationally indebted to moneylenders. Such structural dependencies of debt also pivoted on the arithmetic of colonial tax administrators. The state allocated farming licenses based on calculations of future demand. When peasants applied to grow ganja, based on relative prices at specific points of the year, they calculated how future earnings might help them service their past debts. Within this estimation lay another subjective calculation of quality, whereby excise officials tabulated the relative potency of cannabis products based on time elapsed since packaging and storage in bond warehouses. Therefore, physical conditions in storage warehouses could also sway market prices. As time passed, products warehoused in batches

under sealed bond by cultivators underwent dryage and loss of value. Simultaneously, price fluctuations in the open market could leave wholesalers unable to pay the installments of the full price at which they had first bought their batches of ganja. Alternatively, peasants who applied for a license to grow ganja in one year but didn't manage to sell off the crop the next faced prospective losses due to dryage in the peasant's field or home, especially if local warehouses were filled to capacity with unsold stock from previous years.

In June 1916 A. N. Moberly, the commissioner of excise and salt in Bengal, wrote a confidential letter assessing British colonial policies that underlay the historic strike. He was particularly despondent about efforts to develop storage techniques for ganja: "Although experiments have been and are still being made with the object of discovering a method of storage which shall prevent, or at any rate, retard deterioration, they have hitherto met with no success."² If the government were to intervene to forcibly limit the licensed production in any year based on the stores from previous years that needed to still be sold, the ganja stock available in the market would have contrasting potencies. If, Moberly noted, a high price prevailed but less potent older ganja was retailed, it would be "hardly fair to consumers." Moberly was also wary of consumers shifting to other drugs. Until 1916, the British government of India had decreed that ganja lost all its quality in exactly twenty-four months, which meant that licensing procedures and estimated output in any year had to be matched with the potential demand over the following two years. Between 1904 and 1916, the average yield per bigha had ranged between 1 maund, 19 seers and 3 maunds, 8 seers, 2 chataks. In the same period, the smallest area licensed in Naogaon was 2,719 bighas, making the minimum difference between the lowest and highest average yield a substantial 4,700 maunds. Such constant yawning gaps exemplified how the government had bitten off much more than it could chew. In fact, as Moberly painfully recalled, in December 1914 an excise official with four years' experience in the ganja mahal had submitted the predicted outturn for January and February 1915. When the yield was finally calculated, he was off the mark by 1,432 maunds, a full 20 percent.³

Scaling up the calculations magnified the errors. Excise officials for the government of Bengal, particularly after the rollback of the 1905 Partition, worked closely with the province's divisional officers and those in Bihar, Orissa, the United Provinces (previously North Western Provinces and Oudh), and various princely states to calculate exports and taxes and set market rates for their respective administrative territories. Covering a landmass in British India stretching between Chittagong in the Bengal delta to Mathura in the western United Provinces, officers corresponded about predicting relative prices of other commodities, potential effects of famine or low rainfall, and changes in the subjective taste for ganja vis-à-vis liquor and opium. Despite discomfort with this immensely knotty web of estimations and approximations, officials proceeded until reduced credit circulation and falling purchasing power just before the World War I forced Bengal's ganja exports

down from the 8,727 maunds in the year preceding September 1914. By August 1915, “immediately before the effects of the European War began to be felt,” exports fell to 6,296 maunds.⁴ As estimates teetered, Moberly bluntly described his department’s subsequent data as “guesswork.”

Every year since 1882, the Financial Department of the government of India, which received reports from all the provinces, had in some way walked a tightrope between over- and underproduction of ganja products. Overproduction would hurt cultivators because extra ganja would decay and become, in Moberly’s words, a “dead loss.” Underproduction would pull inferior year-old ganja out from warehouses into the market. Overproduction could reduce prices since sellers would want to avoid losses from wastage and get rid of the crop quickly in an already sensitive market. Underproduction could skew excise calculations across every district since tax rates would have to be tabulated more finely using extra headings for each ganja product differentiated by quality and age, with older ganja priced lower than newer batches.

Unlike the upper echelons of the Excise and Financial Departments in Calcutta, however, the staff on the ground in Naogaon struggled with numbers more directly. Until 1917, temporarily employed inspectors were tasked with checking whether the actual area cultivated exceeded the area the cultivator had applied for in the license. Each inspector was employed for nearly three months between December and February. This practice kept costs low and was moderately useful in checking smuggling and unlicensed production.⁵ Even though local staff warned that cultivators could smuggle off their unlicensed crops illegally, Calcutta’s officials refrained from investing in the large recurring costs of permanent staff. Moberly admitted that “any direct evidence as to the quantity of ganja smuggled was, of course, impossible to obtain.” So he insisted on reforming the chator system, in which, he believed, oversight was “weaker than anywhere else in Bengal and far too weak to be effective.” The “weakness” also stemmed from the fact that temporary subinspectors worked double shifts under the same excise administration. Many “temporary inspectors” tasked with detecting unlicensed ganja manufacture were also asked to hand out licenses for home-brewed alcohol (*pachwai*) to applicants in Naogaon. Often, the same group of men were responsible for evaluating local alcohol establishments and inspecting ganja manufacture. Overworked and underpaid, this class of Indian employees had less incentive to serve the state’s statistical ambitions than to exploit the arbitrary power embedded in their limited-term contracts. Unpopular decisions made by inspectors during their tours of villages regularly created discontent in Naogaon and threatened revenue collections. Moberly knew this was “an unpopular arrangement, in which, as reported elsewhere, they meet with a great deal of passive resistance.”⁶ He signaled growing antagonisms around corruption by inspectors in the decades preceding the strike.

The strike revealed that relations of debt and brokerage between small and large landholders and moneylenders had collapsed by 1916. Since the 1840s, visiting wholesale buyers had sent assistants and brokers to tour lands north of Naogaon and buy ganja from specific cultivators and allocate it for manufacturing at chators. Since most brokers were themselves current or former ganja cultivators and had garnered power to regulate access between wholesalers and cultivators, smallholders relied on them for successfully selling all their manufactured ganja. Brokers routinely negotiated higher prices for the large landholders they served and then took cuts from smaller peasants in exchange for giving their crop preference when acquiring ganja for wholesalers. By temporarily excluding, or simply delaying, the potential sale of ganja from one set of cultivators, brokers could skew prices and manipulate potential annual earnings. For decades, many cultivators petitioned and complained to government administrators about the power of brokers. In 1909, the Superintendent's Office finally enforced a license system for brokerage whereby brokers were also required to register with the state. The superintendent identified and registered sixty brokers and issued them licenses to practice brokerage at a fixed fee. A year later, he confronted a fully rotten system: All sixty registered brokers had hatched an elaborate scam whereby they joined forces to falsify the actual sums of money in their transactions.⁷ The amount noted in the delivery order was different from the actual sums paid to the small peasants and received from wholesale buyers for the brokers' services. They had also cooperated to crowd out the early market by selling off ganja from their own lands and those of others with whom they had monetary agreements.

The ramifications were significant. The investigation gave the state names and details of broker malpractices. Broker families had over time become an extremely well knit network that privileged its social relationships with visiting wholesalers and brokers' past loans to smallholders. Having refrained from directly intervening in Naogaon's debt structures since 1853, the Board of Revenue finally decided to stop all brokerage practices in 1910 and introduced a small cadre of trained men to act as touring brokers. Their job was to visit fields across the ganja mahal and, for a fee, help visiting buyers in Naogaon conduct business and oversee the full payment of money. Applicants for the position had to meet two requirements: have attended middle school at minimum and not be a current or former ganja cultivator. This state-deputed corps could negotiate with cultivators on behalf of wholesalers arriving from cities across British India. The Board fixed a brokerage rate of two rupees per maund as the maximum a registered broker could charge a buyer. Predictably, the new policy met with further failure. This "professional class" had very quickly understood the lay of the land. When Moberly visited Naogaon in 1913, small cultivators complained that the newly designated brokers had paid cultivators very little of the amount owed to them per sale. When Moberly

and the Superintendent's Office confronted the brokers, most blamed wholesalers from Calcutta and Bihar, arguing that the requisite amounts had simply not been forthcoming.

Given that visiting wholesalers weren't coughing up full amounts, in the harvesting season of 1914, the deputy superintendent was authorized to reject any application for wholesale purchase by visiting buyers who had remaining arrears either to brokers or smallholders. Cautiously, Moberly ordered that outstanding payments to brokers be made in the presence of a government functionary at the Superintendent's Office. He worried that some of the complaints against new government-appointed brokers were "being engineered by the old cultivator brokers."⁸ In early 1915, a sizable 140 petitions against these new changes poured into the Deputy Superintendent's Office. All of them complained that brokers weren't paying the amounts noted in delivery orders. When the deputy superintendent investigated further, he discovered that all the licensed brokers had indulged in either withholding cash or demanding bribes from small peasants in exchange for providing preferential access in the following harvest period. Some had even negotiated advances by using threats like fully denying future access to buyers. Things were so bad that even large landholders complained.

As of 1915, the production regime that had historically sustained the ganja mahal stood atop entrenched indebtedness and a brokerage system in need of abolition. Wholesalers had cut their costs by handing over most responsibilities to brokers instead of visiting Naogaon during cultivation season. Brokers could now make substantial gains in transactions with both wholesalers and cultivators that outstripped any penalties that the state might impose. Since social relations and historical familiarity with wholesalers assured sales, broker intermediaries could substantially manipulate the production regime, sharply reduce real household income, and transmit incorrect price data for government account books. For a system built on speculative projections up to two years into the future, fallacious numbers compounded the arithmetic chaos. As of 9 April 1916, not a single ganja cultivator thought it worth their while to grow the crop anymore.

The strike of 1916 produced a rare episode in the history of ganja in British India. With no options left on the table, the colonial state proposed forming a peasant producers' cooperative society. The ensuing experiment in cooperative production transformed the way ganja materially circulated, channeling unprecedented amounts of profits in the interwar period into urbanizing infrastructure and public investment in the ganja mahal. Using globally circulating ideas about producers' cooperatives, the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators' Co-operative Society broke cycles of intergenerational debt, reorganized production and manufacturing, distributed risk socially, and cultivated deeper connections with colonial officials. The changing social fabric of Naogaon caught the attention of nationalists in

the interwar period as the Society navigated the global depression. At the heart of this story lay the Society's power of monopoly.

A MONOPOLY AND A COOPERATIVE SOCIETY

Between 1870 and 1914, colonial officials repeatedly debated the creation of a monopoly on ganja production to mirror the Bengal opium monopoly and its system of auctions and licenses. The ultimate decision was never made, however, both because ganja didn't earn revenue on the scale opium did and because a monopoly on a second drug was bound to attract more denunciation from reformers and critics. Instead, the state made modest investments in warehousing and licensing infrastructure which did not address the structural roots of indebtedness and entrenched relations of dependency. Peasants, particularly smallholders, nonetheless petitioned government officials over the years to impose state-enforced higher prices that were remunerative. Pressures from below became more palpable at the turn of the twentieth century when reformers across British India began organizing cooperative production based on the Raiffeisen principles of self-help, collective ownership of wealth, state economic support, and democratic decision making.

Colonial officials in the British Empire often hailed the Raiffeisen model of cooperative organization and credit, popular since the 1850s in the Rhineland, as a counterweight to the power of local and indigenous moneylending. The Raiffeisen model began in Germany as an experiment in consolidating credit and lending among poor peasants with guidance from the church. The system was modified in different agrarian conditions as it was adopted in Greece, Mexico, Egypt, and Scotland, and by 1910 peasants in England, Russia, the Nile delta, and Ireland had all experimented and struggled with cooperative agricultural production at scale.⁹ In British India, cooperative societies held the promise of turning peasant dissatisfaction with debt into consent for imperial rule. British officials who saw credit cooperatives as a panacea and who celebrated passage of the Cooperatives Act (1904) in Bengal also hoped cooperatives would ease the peasant discontent that fueled Swadeshi nationalism in the 1900s. Before cooperative societies became a larger global strategy of reorganizing agricultural production, first in the interwar period and then with formal decolonization movements, British officials conceived of them more as emergent experiments, laced with desperate hope that Indian peasants and reformers would take up the rudimentary ideas and principles and make them their own.¹⁰

The first cooperative societies began in 1904 after W. R. Gourlay, the newly appointed registrar of co-operatives in the government of Bengal, completed a long tour of Ireland, Hungary, Austria, Bavaria, Frankfurt, Nassau, Neuwied, Italy, and Egypt.¹¹ Under his initiative, several cooperative societies were formed in the

eastern and southern Bengal delta between 1904 and 1910. Henry William Wolff, founder of the International Co-operative Alliance, welcomed Gourlay's extensive work in Bengal's countryside, and the *Indian Agriculturalist* acknowledged that his extensive studies set him apart from registrars of cooperatives in Bombay and Punjab.¹² As dairy and jute grower cooperatives started populating the countryside, officials of Gourlay's newly formed Co-operative Department considered responding to petitions from Naogaon with proposals for a cooperative. Inexplicably, when the department did formally propose a cooperative in Naogaon to the Financial Department of the government of India in 1909, it was denied. Dragging its feet, the imperial government prioritized protecting smallholders from brokers without directly troubling relations of moneylending. It directed the formation of the Ganja Cultivators' Association in 1910 with the hope of eliminating "the ring of cultivator-brokers" that Moberly had previously flagged.¹³ Upset by this move, the registrar of co-operatives "refused to have anything to do with it [the association]" because it lacked cooperative principles, a written constitution, and regular democratic elections.

The stopgap Ganja Cultivators' Association was a key turning point. According to Moberly, in 1910, the Financial Department bureaucracy knew how such an association could quickly become a monopoly seller of ganja with the same cultivator-brokers at the helm. He revealed how the government had imposed it to temporarily pacify the petitioners from Naogaon who repeatedly demanded intervention against the brokers (*dalals*). Peasant disaffection had come to a boil when more than two thousand Hindu and Muslim peasants assembled at the Superintendent's Office in 1910 and surrounded the building. Kalimohan Chakrabarti recounted the days leading up to the encirclement of the office as a time of large frenzied meetings across the ganja mahal, some with officials present and others without.¹⁴ After successive inconclusive meetings convened over several weeks, the *krishok-kul* (peasantry), he wrote, demanded an open meeting with excise officials.¹⁵ At first, Chakrabarti wrote, Naogaon's peasants were as soft as the weaver's cloth (*shutikagarer komolotvo*), but with each inconclusive meeting, they became firmer (*drido*) until the day they surrounded their "Ganja Office" to demand a resolution of the debt crisis.

That day, the rhetoric of ganja cultivators emphasized two words—*upokaar*, or "favor," and *unnoti*, or "upliftment." Demanding the generous favor of the state for the upliftment of a debt-shackled peasantry evinced a tactful political approach. The term *upokaar* carried connotations of subjects making claims on the state and forcing it to act according to its stated ideals. *Unnoti* suggested development, land improvement, and agrarian prosperity especially amid raging Swadeshi agitations. Chakrabarti recounted the rhetorical flourish of smallholders who referred to themselves as subjects of England and George V, often calling the emperor "*inglandeshwar*" or God of England. Having encircled the Ganja Office, Naogaon's peasants exhorted local officials and their imperial figurehead to live up to

their claim to rule, intervene against brokerage, and manage the welfare of the ganja economy. Conceding to these demands, made by peasants from a noticeable position of strength, the Cultivators' Association was inaugurated in 1910 by District Magistrate Kiran Chandra De, along with Excise Deputy Superintendent Jagadish Chandra Sen, Excise Supervisor Sarat Chandra Basu, and six thousand ganja cultivators from around Naogaon. The same year, Moberly introduced the new class of formally educated, designated brokers hired to quell the power of the cultivator-brokers. As Chakrabarti recounted, these new brokers were thoroughly corrupt, but none had managed to earn the hundreds of thousands of rupees that established *dalals* like Enayatullah Kazi or Jorip Mohammad Mandal had earned from their businesses.¹⁶

The Ganja Cultivators' Association ran aground within months, primarily at the hands of older wealthier landholders. Colloquially called the *ganja sabha* (ganja assembly) and *ganja phand* (ganja fund), the Association split into two competing factions. One centered on the local lawyer Sharada Charan Majumdar, and the other on Tarif Mohammad Maul, a big landlord. Both had been elected to serve as secretaries of the Association. Ganja cultivators deposited a minimum of eleven rupees per maund sold in the fund the secretaries managed. The collected capital served as the source of subsequent loans to cultivators for spending on cattle, seeds, and other costs. Chakrabarti gloomily conceded that the whole fund effectively remained in the hands of a "*shoktishali porichalok borgo*," or powerful managerial class ruled by factionalism. In 1911 an excess yield of more than 9,500 maunds of ganja, compared to the estimated 7,000, lowered prices suddenly and caused sufficient hunger and distress.¹⁷ Public discussions centered on the havoc caused by rapid price fluctuations. In Chakrabarti's solemn words, "*krishokerai to bolen, bhao bhogobari*," meaning that according to the cultivator, price itself was god. As hunger and immiseration racked Naogaon, the Association's loan fund lay mostly unused. Majumdar and Maul's rivalry shaped the eventual election of Jorip Mohammad Mandal, possibly the richest broker in Naogaon. He was closely supported by Jadob Chandra Promanik, an influential political figure in Naogaon. Yusuf Ali Kazi was elected as cashier. Kazi owned the printing press that later published Kalimohan Chakrabarti's collected chronicles and was likely related to the wealthy broker Enayatullah Kazi. When Chakrabarti described the aftermath of 1911, his only commendation was for Mandal and Kazi's charitable disposition for allocating a portion of the fund, albeit small, for peasant relief.

The imprint of patronage relations aside, Chakrabarti's memoir provided an affective gloss on the stranglehold of rich cultivator-brokers who by 1913 had left the fund in tatters (*londo-bhondo*). After having risen like a flame to promise upliftment, the Association was now a "dying fire." Chakrabarti tactfully steered away from naming the culprits, instead blaming the peculiar habits of Bengalis themselves. Educated people (*shikkhito somaj*) were arrogant about their new wealth, education, caste, and creed, Chakrabarti wrote. As a reformist, he had previously

opposed Hindu Brahman orthodoxies about the loss of caste status from foreign travel; hailed Vidyasagar's movement to legitimize widow remarriage, promote women's education, and abolish child marriage; and believed that without Ram-mohan Roy's efforts at enlightenment, Hindus would have had to convert to Islam to escape caste strictures of Bengali Brahmans and educated classes. Chakrabarti's dismay at the mishandled Ganja Cultivators' Association transposed local class contradictions into cultural terms through prevalent forms of commentary on social backwardness in India. The fund had gathered Rs. 50,000 in deposits but little of them had filtered down to low-interest or interest-free loans. Factional conflicts between large landholders and brokers had killed the original dream of the fund. His last serialized column in 1914 solemnly recounted how protecting "the small peasant from the hands of the moneylender was the only promise of the ganja fund." The promise lay suspended, like the fund's capital, "in the treasury of George the Fifth."¹⁸ A shared sense of despondency was palpable by 1916, when large landholders refused to cultivate for low prices, and small landholders, constituting nearly 90 percent of all cultivating homesteads, forsook a crop that had forged Naogaon's fame but could no longer service intergenerational debts.

Moberly responded to the strike with the proposal to finally grant monopoly rights to the yet unformed Naogaon Ganja Cultivators' Co-operative Society. Awarding a monopoly, he deliberated, could endanger "the profits which Government has been accustomed to secure for itself," but he conceded that it was equally "anomalous, that the producers of an article that gives Government a revenue of many lakhs of rupees, should be placed in such a position that it may, before long, cease to pay them to produce it at all." Moberly appeared to see the light. "The only fair course seems to be to ensure that they shall obtain a reasonable price for their produce," he insisted.¹⁹ The monopoly had surfaced intermittently in meetings to resolve the strike in Naogaon and enjoyed the support of Jamini Mohan Mitra, the new registrar of the Co-operative Department. Mitra believed that combining cooperative democracy on the ground with a monopoly award could uplift Naogaon's debt-strapped peasantry. The Excise and Financial Departments finally granted that a monopolistic cooperative society under state purview was substantially better than the informal monopoly of cultivator-brokers.

The Financial Department of the government of India and the Excise Department of the government of Bengal saw the ganja monopoly as key to breaking the chokehold of moneylending capital in Naogaon and of wholesaler monopolies in towns and cities elsewhere. In districts across India that imported Naogaon ganja, the Financial Department had long observed that wholesale buyers brought ganja from Naogaon without making complete payments, carefully waited on warehoused stocks, sold cautiously during periods of higher prices, and manipulated prices in nearby divisional towns. Over time, ganja wholesalers from prominent towns in Bengal, Bihar, and the United Provinces had accumulated enough capital to dominate trade networks. Extra capital allowed many wholesalers to open retail

vending establishments. The Indian Hemp Drugs Commission had clearly stated that it was “averse, as a rule, to the grant of retail licenses to wholesale vendors” because it allowed them to “command the market to an undesirable extent.” But the IHDC had left it to provincial governments to take necessary steps.²⁰ In effect, wholesalers could set prices however they wanted, and if their retail shop applications were outbid by others, they could strategically increase prices when selling to retailers who had received new retail shop licenses. In other words, between the subdivisional realities of Naogaon, the provincial networks of Bengal, and the imperial demands of governing ganja circulation in Bihar, Orissa, and the United Provinces, colonial officials faced a “double monopoly” that had grown since the 1870s.

In 1894, the IHDC had considered opinions from all provinces, Native States, and Princely States in British India regarding a full monopoly by power of writ. It had ultimately decided against it because British India was too big to control via monopoly and that the state would be absorbing excessive risks by buying up all cannabis products and becoming the sole seller. The Commission argued that this “outweighed” the more “sentimental objection to Government identifying itself more closely with the traffic” in cannabis drugs.²¹ The “sentimental objection” of temperance activists, reformers, and missionary opponents of imperial drug revenue and opium-fueled warfare continued to haunt deliberations in 1916. Moberly acknowledged that protemperance objections to any drug monopoly would be “difficult to meet by argument.” He made arguments nonetheless. “The Government of India,” he wrote, “have laid down the principle that it is necessary to provide for the need of the moderate consumer . . . and since 1894, Government has been brought into much closer contact than before with the liquor business by the extension of distillery systems.” Arguing that, in the case of state-regulated alcohol distribution, “the advocates of temperance have acquiesced on the ground that improved control was secured thereby,” Moberly noted that a monopoly would be desirable to critics if it produced greater market control and the moderate consumer of ganja was well served.²²

The 1916 strike and the amended Co-operatives Act (1912) facilitated Moberly’s vision. Large and small landholders in Naogaon were united against the power of broker families, frustration at lost revenue was widespread, and antagonism against moneylender-wholesaler relations were sharp. Tight networks of commercial and usurious capital had long resisted the pressures of colonial capital in British India, and the prospect of breaking moneylending strangleholds was persuasive in the Financial Department.²³ Unlike opium, this monopoly wouldn’t lie directly within the purview of a state office; if it didn’t recklessly profiteer, the argument for monopolies as market stabilizers would become stronger. As the strike unfolded, the Office of the Registrar of Co-operatives became the crux of instituting this unique arrangement, which could potentially represent the needs of small cultivators and protect the projected revenue of about Rs. 6,500,000 in 1916.

A final momentous public meeting between ganja cultivators and officials from the Excise, Finance, and Co-operative Departments of the government of Bengal led to the formation of the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators' Co-operative Society in 1917 and a new, dedicated superintendent of excise in Naogaon.²⁴

At first, not all cultivating homesteads took to the cooperative, especially after the failure of the Ganja Cultivators' Association.²⁵ To garner popular consent, state officials organized *ganja sabhas* like the ones held in 1910. For homes located in the far northern reaches of the ganja mahal, officials had to go the extra mile. John Younie, then a young revenue officer who later became a magistrate in British India, described such efforts regularly to his mother in England. On 2 January 1917, he wrote to her about his first visit to the ganja mahal. "The ganja," he said, "grows into tall feathery leaved bushes with very sticky resinous flowers. These are dried and pressed into cakes. The crop has to be stored in government warehouses like whisky at home and a heavy duty is exacted." To better contextualize things, he added, "The narcotic in it is more powerful and injurious in its effects than opium. Both of them look horrible in appearance, the ganja resembles compressed cow dung while opium looks like very sticky tarry rope and smells worse."²⁶ Later that year, on 9 June 1917, he wrote to his mother about accompanying J. T. Donovan, the registrar of co-operative societies, on horseback to convince more cultivators to sign up for the cooperative: "The present society which we are establishing here is a specialised one. I think I explained before that ganja or Indian Hemp is a powerful and noxious narcotic smoked like opium as a drug. Government can't prohibit it but it makes the price as prohibitive as it can by collecting an enormous duty for its sales. Its cultivation, manufacture, and storage in bond warehouses previous to being released into the retail market is carefully controlled by Government (just like whisky is at home)."²⁷

The cooperative was essential, Younie told his family, because there were "many stages between the Naugaon [*sic*] cultivator and the consumer . . . throughout the districts of Bengal, Orissa, Assam etc. there are wholesale ganja sellers who sell at enormous profits to the small retail seller." Detailing the matter, he wrote, "Most of the wholesale sellers can't come to Naugaon in person to buy their stocks so they have to buy through brokers or middlemen who cheat the active cultivator and also make their profit out of the wholesale man." Proudly he continued: "By establishing a society of ganja growers we will eliminate brokers and wholesale men. The goods will sell for a fair price to the Society which in its turn will deal directly with the retail vendors. Everybody will profit and the Government gets a bigger revenue." For men like Younie, Naogaon's experiment offered a blueprint for the future. "I will be here for a week getting some experience of the working of Co-operative schemes which," he added, would "be useful to me later when I am in charge of a subdivision."²⁸ By September 1917, Younie had toured all of the ganja mahal, learned to manage the registers of Rajshahi jail, inspected the newly built

agricultural science farm in Bauleah, and liaised with the Co-operative Department at length.

Younie gradually saw himself and the empire as carriers of vital energy to the colonies. In September he distilled for his family his experiences of cooperative and agricultural reform movements in Bengal. "The two movements" he wrote, "mean much for the future of Bengal—the emancipation of the raiyat from a species of debt slavery to the mahajan (the Bengali equivalent of the gowbeen man in Ireland), the creation of new resources for the development of village amenities, the revival of local industries, the better training of children, the establishment of healthy and pleasant surroundings—a veritable breath of life over the stagnant waters of rural existence."²⁹ Men like him were cutting their teeth in state institutions deeply threatened by the Young Bengal revolutionaries in 1917, crippling credit shortages by 1919, and Gandhian noncooperation in 1921. Increasingly, the cooperative movement presented a vehicle for cultivating the loyalty of small landholders to British rule and affirming imperial values. Similarly, senior officers like J. T. Donovan genuinely thought that greater peasant self-reliance would increase the governability of the empire after World War I. Meanwhile, Naogaon's peasants understood the achievement as the first institutional space in which smallholders could occupy a political platform to challenge brokers and divert profits into a developmentalist vision.

With a managing committee of twenty persons, the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators' Co-operative Society, Limited, was fully functional by December 1917. The positions of chairman and vice-chairman were nominated: the collector of Rajshahi district permanently served as ex-officio chairman, and the vice-chairman, or chief executive officer or manager, was appointed by the Co-operative Department to operationalize and implement decisions made in resolutions by the Annual General Meeting or other special meetings of members. The eighteen directors on the committee were elected—six from each of the ganja mahal circles (or *thanas*) of Gobindopur, Muradpur, and Kirtipur. By-elections were conducted as soon as a post-holder died or retired, and bylaws were regularly amended. The Society began taking deposits from cultivators who became members. With the subscriptions of twenty-six hundred members who signed up in 1917, along with a loan from the Provincial Bank, the Society began with a working capital of Rs. 246,900. The government of India granted a legal monopoly to make the Society the only body that could buy ganja from cultivators and sell to visiting wholesalers, bolstered further by the cancelation of all brokerage licenses and stoppage of noncash "on credit" purchases.³⁰ Since cultivators were also shareholders, they could use the rules and bylaws of the Society, written in consultation with the Co-operative Department, to further defend their own economic interests. The government of Bengal used its official voice on the board to tacitly support smallholders against largeholders, moneylenders, and broker interests. As the

formal body that owned networks of storage warehouses across Bengal's districts from which licensed retailers bought their inventory, the government also turned buyer of ganja from the Society at a fixed rate per bigha.

The Society hired temporary "Mofussil Agents," numbering more than forty by 1924, in various towns such as Contai, Serajganj, Russa, and Lalmonirhat in eastern India to liaise with wholesalers and retailers in those districts. It distributed profits into different funds that were managed by smaller subcommittees like the Education, Building Site, and Bundh Subcommittees. These subcommittees were formed in Annual General Meetings (AGMs), which were attended in huge numbers. For instance, the second AGM, of 8 January 1920, attracted fifteen hundred members.³¹ Regular elections in each circle ensured that the managing committee was never overburdened by pressures from any one large landholder. Largeholders also had to win elections, which was a demanding task, and based on the separation of constituencies, they were outnumbered by smallholders on the managing committee. On the 1922–23 managing committee, only two large landholders with moneylending businesses (Tarip Mohammed and Jarip Mohammad from Gobindopur) were elected.³² Babu Trailokyanath Saha, a government pleader from Muradpur, and Munshi Khodabaksha Sardar from Kirtipur were the only other prominent people on the committee. A majority of members owned less than 2.5 acres of land.³³

In the first two years of operation, the Society used the monopoly award to garner sufficient profits to repay its original loan from the Provincial Bank. The first year's profit of Rs. 508,251 was more than twofold the Society's cumulative share capital and working capital.³⁴ Import orders began pouring in from governments in the subcontinent where supplies ran short, such as from Mysore state's excise commissioner, who bought two thousand seers of ganja in 1918.³⁵ These impressive gains paved the way for the gradual metamorphosis of Naogaon village into a town and the development of health and education infrastructure in the surrounding ganja mahal. Decades of intergenerational indebtedness in Naogaon had left smallholders with few tangible assets. With the gains of the new monopoly, public infrastructural projects came to embody the prosperity of Naogaon's *krishok-kul*.

STRIKING GAINS

The Society's investments in public infrastructure, health, and education completely remade Naogaon's landscape. Each year, the Society invested in building schools, roads, housing, irrigation works, and hospitals across the ganja mahal. In 1919, "money had been allotted by the society for the maintenance of 20 primary schools in the Ganja Mahals," wrote Donovan, "and the Director of Public Instruction was asked to arrange a curriculum for these which will make them model rural schools." Donovan added that in 1919, "a substantial grant has been given to two Middle English Schools by the Ganja Society" in addition to another,

“very considerable grant to a High English School in the Mahals.”³⁶ Rural schools like the Chakatitha High School, the Chakla Middle English School (Muradpur), and twenty-six other primary schools and *mohila madrassahs* (women’s schools) continued to receive annual investments in thousands of rupees. In 1923, the Society constructed three public libraries in the interior reaches of the ganja mahal, following which it also announced a stipend of fifteen rupees per month for two students to study at the Campbell Medical School in Calcutta.³⁷ The Chakla, Chakatitha, and Kirtipur schools were recognized by the Bengal government’s director of public instruction, received funds from the Syndicate of the University of Calcutta, and followed the curriculum set by the university to oversee successful matriculations year after year.³⁸

Public health and medicine in the northern reaches of the ganja mahal were driving priorities for the Society. In 1920, it gave five thousand rupees “to enlarge the Naogaon Hospital” and “fifteen thousand to equip a dispensary in the mahals.”³⁹ The construction of this dispensary, later named the Kirtipur Co-operative Charitable Dispensary, was followed by two more charitable dispensaries in Muradpur and Gobindopur, the other circles of the ganja mahal, which were critical in controlling the malaria outbreak in 1922.⁴⁰ Advertisements by the Society promised free housing to the doctors and dressers hired for each hospital.⁴¹ By 1925 the society hired a “lady doctor” to “remove a long-felt need of Naogaon” for better natal and maternal health services.

Earlier, in 1919, intense floods in Rajshahi and Bogra affected Naogaon even though the ganja mahal sat on higher ground. Donovan described it as “a calamity unprecedented for fifty years—thousands of houses were thrown down, crops were damaged or completely ruined, cattle drowned, and property washed away.” In response to this decimation in Naogaon, an astounding process unfolded. “Thousands of people on every side came to the Collector and Commissioner asking for Government help but none of the three thousand members of the society were among them,” Donovan recounted in his annual report.⁴² The Society had saved almost seventy thousand rupees in an account at the Naogaon Post Office, which directly helped members affected by the flood.⁴³ In the early days of the floods, elected members of the Society’s governing board had dispatched a boat downriver to purchase a thousand maunds of rice, which was distributed on arrival in Naogaon town. This was bolstered further by cash handouts from the Charity Fund of the Society’s Charity Subcommittee. As the floodwaters receded and news of the Society’s efforts spread, many wrote to its directors asking for advice on creating similar self-sustaining models of rural governance. In one instance, the Society itself intervened and helped a small group of flood-affected weavers six miles south of Naogaon town to organize a weavers’ cooperative society. In return, the Society’s governing board promised to sell the weavers’ cloth in its own store in Naogaon town and distribute them among those displaced by the flood. For distribution, the Society separately purchased 225 bales of cloth from Dacca.⁴⁴

The formation of Naogaon's first weavers' cooperative quickly caught the interest of local government officials, and soon a visiting inspector from the Co-operative Branch supplied the weavers' society with a fly shuttle loom at no charge. Once the Naogaon Weavers' Co-operative Society completed the charitable order from the Naogaon Ganja Society, it was able to "tender successfully in the open market for the supply of bandage cloth to some hospitals in Calcutta and to take on an order from the Bengal Home Industries Association." Meanwhile, the strong sales of ganja that year helped the Co-operative Society give out small bonuses to all members and invest forty thousand rupees in Post Office Cash Certificates to prepare for future ecological calamities. Predictably, in 1923, Naogaon was devastated by floods again, and most of the Post Office investments were used to rebuild school buildings, embankments, and roads.⁴⁵

Public infrastructure connecting Mohadebpur, Kirtipur, Badalgacchi, Adam-dighi, Santahar, and other villages in the Atrai-Choto Jomuna-Tulsi Ganga River plains barely developed in the nineteenth century. The subdivisional boundaries of Naogaon, with Naogaon town as the center, were justified only to administratively bound the entire ganja mahal tract. Only when the Society reinvested profits did Naogaon town begin growing exponentially. In 1919, the Society proactively set up its headquarters on prime land in the heart of Naogaon town while factoring in public health and sanitation. Donovan's report read: "There is a large open space in the heart of the (Naogaon) town consisting of an old brickfield and insanitary ditches and hollows. For years, the authorities have been talking of reclaiming this land, but funds have failed them. The Society has acquired this insanitary area. Two fine tanks are being excavated (one by the District Board) and the rest of the area is being levelled up." The Society proceeded to chalk out land along the edge of the area to house the offices and residence of the Society's officers and turn the rest of the land with the two large tanks into a public park. The Society further offered a loan of seventy-five thousand rupees at an interest rate of 5 percent per annum to the district board of Rajshahi for a project that had been stalled for fifteen years due to lack of funds—the construction of a bridge across the Choto Jamuna River. The bridge eventually improved the connectivity between Naogaon town and the Santahar station of the Eastern Bengal Railway.

In a grand announcement of its capabilities, the Society named the bridge after Lord Victor Bulwer-Lytton, then governor of Bengal and later viceroy of India, and invited him to Naogaon to inaugurate it. At the inauguration ceremony, the governor drove by motor car from Santahar station and was thus compelled to admire what ganja profits had achieved. On the dais abutting the new bridge, he began his opening address by recalling the devastation of the floods the previous year, which "destroyed houses and crops, and the inhabitants, thus rendered homeless, were reduced to great misery." Calling it "unique in Bengal," Lytton hailed the fact that a government body (the district board) had "borrowed capital not from Government but from a cooperative society in the neighbourhood."⁴⁶

To him, it signaled the potential of cooperative production to make the “spirit of self-help and cooperation as the guiding principle of the public men of Bengal.” To that end, he drove to the Society office after his speech to “discuss starting a second grade Cooperative College in Naogaon.”⁴⁷ The “public men of Bengal,” especially middle-class *bhadralok* Indians in Calcutta, had been exceptionally skeptical about a ganja cooperative society. The Society was effectively succeeding with a state-awarded monopoly while peasants elsewhere in Bengal suffered increasingly greater hardships.

British officers in Bengal nonetheless affirmed the controversial conferral of the monopoly. M. C. McAlpin, the officiating secretary to the government of Bengal in 1918, called the Society a “notable success” that was “particularly gratifying in view of the opposition it encountered at its inauguration.”⁴⁸ McAlpin heaped praise again in a November 1919 memo that announced “first and foremost” among the achievements of cooperatives “the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators Society Ltd. which has successfully ousted the ganja brokers.” He lauded the Society’s profit of more than Rs. 300,000 the previous year and its new plans, “now being expanded in the direction of a purchase and sale society, cattle insurance, a demonstration farm, education, medicine, relief of distress and town improvement.” “In fact,” he insisted, “it is making a bid, justifiable both on the grounds of efficiency and financial stability to monopolise the local self-government of the ganja mahals.”⁴⁹ The government of Bengal was so impressed, it reassigned Rajshahi’s deputy collector, Khan Bahadur Ataur Rahaman, to the post of chief executive officer of the Society. McAlpin’s words echoed how monopolization of local municipal power by the Society was a real possibility. When Ataur Rahaman took up his new post, he established Rajshahi’s central office for cooperative societies in Naogaon, not in the district headquarters in Rampur Bauleah.⁵⁰ Signaling the Society’s spillover effects, J. T. Donovan proudly recounted how, despite epidemics and inflation in food prices, many rural families had collectively applied to form different cooperative societies by 1920, taking Naogaon subdivision’s tally from seven to sixty.⁵¹ The Society’s emerging status as a parastate institution that complemented the collectorate, magistracy, and police was palpable in Naogaon.

In 1920, for the first time in Naogaon’s history, there were no petitions to the local government about unremunerative prices or moneylender harassment. As Donovan understood it, the Society was able to use its monopoly status and democratic structure to save time and money for its members, taking the earnings from the 1919 output of round ganja to Rs. 1,100,000, a huge leap from the Rs. 500,000 the same volume might have earned three years prior.⁵² As the Society was the only legal intermediary that bought all the ganja from its members and held the sole right to manage, dispose, and sell the inventory in warehouses to visiting buyers, brokers became irrelevant, and cultivators could command remunerative prices in negotiation with the government. Negotiations involved reflexive price adjustments for stocks of both new and old ganja, leading to a reasonable drop in

average market prices in Bengal. The Society's handling of prices prompted the excise commissioner of Assam to write to Donovan asking that exports to Assam be priced higher than in Bengal so that low prices didn't attract more buyers in the Brahmaputra valley.⁵³

The year 1919–20 was historically remarkable in Naogaon, earning it special notice in discussions of India's "material and moral progress" in Calcutta and London.⁵⁴ The Naogaon Central Bank, formed as an offshoot of the Society along with "50 credit societies, all financed largely by the Ganja Society," wrote Donovan, had completely "replaced the mahajans." Not only had brokerage vanished and brokers been absorbed into the Society's membership, but those who doubled up as the *mahajans* (moneylenders) had to close shop there as well. Besides the savings in interest payments and bribes, Donovan emphasized the gains in time for smallholders. "Formerly the cultivator had to come and spend a day in Naogaon about once a week to bribe someone to buy his crop. This happened always if the crop was in excess and it has been in excess since the society started. Now however the cultivator comes once with his crop and once for his money. Three thousand cultivators are therefore saved each fifty days in the year."⁵⁵ With the equivalent of fifty days freed, Naogaon's consumer demand boomed. "The time saved means more than time saved for work, for visits to Naogaon, even by cultivators, means money spent by them in the town," Donovan wrote. By July, 1919, the Society also registered an offshoot supply store, run as a cooperative, to sell on a smaller scale other crops that members produced. The shop retailed essential goods at low prices and within a few weeks, the daily sales in cotton cloth products amounted to a commanding two hundred rupees.

To effectively engage the power of established families and the colonial government, decisions made in the Society's Annual General Meetings reinforced the value of "ganja cultivator" (*ganja krishok*) as an identity to mobilize around. Prioritizing the development of the entire ganja mahal while staying within the ambit of the colonial state was a delicate balance. Naogaon's peasant homesteads capitalized on the gains as quickly as they could. In 1919, the Society's board hired a veterinary assistant surgeon on permanent service to "attend to members' cattle" and instituted a cattle insurance scheme for members to purchase.⁵⁶ The Society further moved to invest part of its reserve funds into establishing a crop science development farm to be "staffed, equipped, and stocked on the most modern lines to improve the local crops." As British rule in India reeled from a war-battered economy and new nationalist demands gathered steam, the Society's work reinforced McAlpin's vision of self-government in Naogaon.

After Edwin Samuel Montagu's committee had submitted its recommendations for dyarchic constitutional reform of provincial and imperial government, and the viceroy of India, Lord Chelmsford, signed onto the Government of India Act (1919), Rajshahi's collectorate was enthusiastic about the prospect of the Society taking on self-government. The collector wrote to J. T. Donovan outlining his

plans to “suggest that when the Village Self-Government Act is put into force, the areas in this part of Naogaon should be so arranged as to give the Society considerable jurisdiction and to make it in fact responsible to a considerable extent for local self-government.”⁵⁷ Donovan remained skeptical, fundamentally because the Society, in the face of “local self-government attractions,” could not afford to forget its primary duty to members and the cooperative principles of agrarian production. The Society’s increasing goodwill in Naogaon and ability to prevent further debt dependency was too rare an example. Donovan didn’t want to lose the shining showpiece of cooperative production that was Naogaon.

In Calcutta, the empire’s “second city,” Naogaon’s reputation went from that of a little-known village associated with ganja to that of a centerpiece in debates on agrarian reform. At the Tenth Provincial Conference of all Co-operative Societies in Bengal, held in February 1919 in Calcutta, the joint registrar of industrial co-operative societies, Mohammed Mahmud, was unequivocal in his praise for Naogaon. Mahmud led the Industrial Branch of the Department of Co-operative Societies, which promoted cooperative organization among artisans and small craftworkers. In his speech, delivered to a full house on 16 February 1919, he discussed reforming industrial work in Bengal to compete with international imports from Europe, China, and Japan and promote nationally produced goods among youth. Country-made “cottage” goods like *chadors* and *gamchas* (cotton towels), brass utensils, conch shell jewelry, cane baskets, wooden combs, and most important, silk goods, he argued, could all be produced by enterprising cooperative societies. Naogaon was a “striking example of what co-operation could do” since it could produce jobs in the countryside and keep peasants from being “dragged into the smoke laden and morally unhealthy atmosphere of the large cities and factory towns.”⁵⁸

The day before Mahmud’s address, Lord Ronaldshay, the governor of Bengal, had announced a similar vision from the dais at Calcutta’s Writers’ Building.⁵⁹ He was extremely satisfied with how the cooperative movement had expanded beyond credit cooperatives toward producer organizations and sale-focused store enterprises.⁶⁰ Naogaon was a “striking success,” in view of the fact that the Society had made a profit of Rs. 500,000 in its first two years and had a membership of three thousand cultivators working on an average of eighty square miles of land.⁶¹ Naogaon’ Society had pledged forty thousand rupees from the profits toward education, sanitation, and road building, an achievement Ronaldshay applauded. But more tellingly, the governor was also “surprised and deeply touched by the unexpected receipt of a cheque of Rs. 1000 from the Society to the King George’s Fund for Sailors.” Donating to the fund, set up to support families who lost members at sea during war, demonstrated the prudence of the Society in its relationship to colonial power, a fact that captured additional approving eyes when the governor’s speech was subsequently printed in full by Calcutta’s major newspapers.

Ronaldshay's admiration for Naogaon's ganja farmers sent ripples in many directions. J. G. Cumming, the conference president, introduced a late resolution by T. C. Roy, the joint registrar of co-operative societies for the Bengal presidency, for the creation of production-and-sale societies for paddy and jute. Whereas Mahmud had made a case for cooperative small manufacturing industries for cotton, silk, and jute products in the countryside, Roy demanded the conference promote production and sale societies for raw paddy and jute instead. "Credit societies," Roy argued, had "failed to evolve the spirit of real cooperation" and were constrained by prevailing illiteracy among members. And so, his resolution read, "in view of the conspicuous success achieved by the Ganja Cultivators' Society in Naogaon, this conference recommends that efforts be made to organise similar societies for the joint sale of paddy, jute, and other agricultural produce all over Bengal."⁶² Roy's zeal for reproducing the Naogaon experiment was high despite knowing that ganja production was concentrated in a specific agrarian tract that rendered the monopoly award highly effective. Regardless, Roy insisted that the experiment was replicable with paddy because a number as small as five hundred cultivators could jointly sell to rice mills or small local *dhenkis* (petty rice huskers), thus generating further employment, primarily for women. With Naogaon as a shining light, the possibilities suddenly appeared endless.

Compelling commendations from the colonial metropolis emboldened the Society further. By the end of 1920, with profits over Rs. 175,000, the Society began helping ganja peasants diversify their patterns of land use.⁶³ It purchased and distributed, free of cost to some of its members, tobacco seeds from the experimental farm at Rangpur.⁶⁴ To help farmers adopt tobacco farming, the Society sent three young men from former ganja-cultivating families, each with a monthly stipend of 10 rupees, to learn tobacco cultivation in Rangpur. Agricultural diversification efforts had grown in Naogaon since the Bengal Department of Agriculture had distributed samples of Darjeeling Red Potato seeds. Many ganja farmers had successfully grown potatoes in their non-*bhiti* lands in the winter of 1919. In 1920 the Department of Agriculture also supplied sugarcane cuttings to the Society's members to further expand their agricultural productivity. The same year, a seed farm financed by the Society opened in Nagaon on a plot of nearly four hundred *bighas* to conduct agricultural experiments suited to local soil.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, the cooperative storefront formerly run by the Society was turned into its own self-sustaining enterprise. Rechristened the Naogaon Supply and Sale Society in 1920, the cooperative store emerged as the "biggest society of its kind in Bengal except perhaps Calcutta." Donovan hoped that its "success will disappoint the pessimist who fears that cooperation in commercial enterprises, like foreign plants, cannot be grafted on the soil of India."⁶⁶ Since it was inside Naogaon town, it was classified as a nonagricultural society, but more than 90 percent of its three thousand members were farmers from Naogaon and its neighboring villages who needn't have been ganja farmers to become subscribed members.⁶⁷ Donovan was

rightfully impressed. By 1921 the store had successfully reduced prices of essential goods in the subdivision by providing locally made wares at marginally marked-up prices. It had also begun a small printing press to cater to local demand. In an act of goodwill to get its business rolling, other cooperative societies in Rajshahi district sent the press orders for printing receipt slips and account books. By 1922, the store had set up a second establishment, a grocery store, in Naogaon town and was reportedly “exercising a controlling influence on the price of many commodities.”⁶⁸ Tragically, this second store had to close two years later when floods devastated Naogaon subdivision in 1923 and destroyed most of the store building. The remaining profits were subsequently transferred to an industrial cooperative store, the Naogaon Samabay Bayan Shilpa Samiti, which was classified as a Central Industrial Society, which invested in and procured from small cooperative societies of weavers and metal workers in the subdivision and earned a percentage from the sales of their products.⁶⁹

Naogaon’s ganja society paved the way for another striking use of cooperative principles. In 1922, all colonial government officers stationed in Naogaon subdivision, across the Revenue, Judicial, Police, Excise, and other departments, along with military officers of the British Indian Army, bought equal shares in the brand-new Naogaon Officers’ Co-operative Club. The cooperatively run clubhouse earned its revenue by providing social amenities, a library, and recreational facilities to both members and the general public. Nonmembers could use the space and services for minimal fees. On completion, the club began offering music and reading classes and featured a cafeteria open daily. Its governing board solicited charitable donations from government officers and the regional elite, with the Dubalhati Zamindari Estate being a primary contributor. By 1925, the club’s charitable work funded the medical treatment of more than thirty-one thousand patients. Starting in 1924, the club also held regular demonstrations of first aid practices for Naogaon town’s residents, conducted by the St. John’s Ambulance Association. Subsequently, it aided the distribution of free medicines by the Rajshahi branch of the Baptist Mission, then led by one Dr. Hope, and invited the well-known homeopath Dr. Shital Chandra Banerjee, who was also a sub-registrar of co-operative societies in Rajshahi, to provide free homeopathic treatment to the public.⁷⁰

Word of Naogaon’s successes spread globally through periodicals, imperial offices, and mouthpieces of organizations that promoted cooperatives elsewhere. In 1919, *The Leader*, published from Allahabad and acclaimed across northern India, syndicated the *United Provinces War Journal* report calling Naogaon a “phenomenal success” and “perhaps the most successful Society in India,” while the accompanying editorial hoped it could inspire more enthusiasm for cooperatives in the United Provinces.⁷¹ On a single page that also contained the paper’s condemnation of the brutal British police raids on the Sinn Fein in Ireland, and coverage of “European-Asiatick tensions” in the Transvaal, *The Leader* illuminated the

complex tapestry of global empire that enveloped Naogaon's ganja society. The *Irish Economist* hailed Naogaon in 1923 as an example of cultivators taking the reins of their lives into their own hands.⁷² Calcutta's premier rival dailies the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and *The Statesman* began reporting more regularly from Naogaon in 1920. Panchanandas Mukherjee, the secretary of the Bengal Co-operative Organization Society and professor of economics at Presidency College, Calcutta, wrote in *Better Business*, the Irish journal of the agricultural and industrial cooperation, that monopoly cooperatives composed of "producers of a crop in a compact area" could become a portable model.⁷³ Mirroring and complementing the model of the Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society, this "Naogaon Type society" that bought the products of its members to sell them as a centralized wholesale seller was possible, he imagined, in every province of British India. If the Departments of Agriculture combined with the Departments of Co-operatives in each province to "give their best energies to Naogaon Type societies and Irish Wholesale Societies, [they would] hasten the day for a real agricultural renaissance in India."⁷⁴ The *Manchester Guardian's* correspondent, one Mr. Gwynn, specially visited the Society on 9 November 1922 "during his tour of the co-operative movement in India."⁷⁵ The Society received its first major international visitor, the Thai royal family, on 11 January 1923. The Crown Prince and Princess of Siam traveled to Calcutta and then upriver to Naogaon to see the ganja mahal. Subdivisional officials and the Society's board received them at the Ferry Ghat on the little Jamuna. After touring buildings constructed by the Society and the ganja mahal's villages, the Thai royals were chief guests at a ceremony honoring the work that members of Naogaon's cooperative societies had done in the year prior. Princess Bidya distributed five medals and several certificates, the Naogaon Weavers' Co-operative Society presented the royals with fine tablecloths, and the Kalyanpur Co-operative Society from Serajgunj, 140 kilometers southeast of Naogaon, came to the event with "fine and cheap Muslins" of which the royal family "made extensive purchases."⁷⁶

International recognition in Ireland, Britain, or Thailand was a symptom of the reconstitution of debt relations under way in Naogaon. During the first seven years of its operation, the Society had reinvested capital earnings from the monopoly into the physical space and infrastructure of Naogaon. By 1923, deposits collected from members amounted to one-tenth of annual sales revenue per member. To help members get even higher returns, the profits earned from sales were combined with deposits and pooled into capital reserves that became the basis for loans offered to members, nonmembers, and even government departments. Advancing loans to each such group at variable rates of interest helped the Society emerge as a dominant moneylender in the region. Its 1924 annual report noted that it had "established a steady credit and is now freely resorted to by local capitalists."⁷⁷ Other charitable institutions that had reserve capital also began investing portions of it in the Society's capital fund at a fixed annual rate of 9 percent. The high rate signaled the efficiency of debt recovery and precise apportioning of

profits by the Society. Besides physical buildings, the Society's portfolio of investments in 1924 included war bonds that earned regular interest on an invested capital of forty thousand rupees.⁷⁸ Future international visitors—including J. S. Lase of the Zanzibar Protectorate in 1932, representatives of the Dutch East Indies government in 1928 who sought to bolster their oppressive colonial structure in Java and Sumatra through “ethical” public works, cooperative activists in the Philippines who received publications from Naogaon in January 1937, along with others from Egypt, Salonique (Thessaloniki) in Greece, and the Horace Plunkett Foundation—grasped the distinctive combination of monopoly control and agrarian development inaugurated in the ganja mahal.

Signs of transformation were everywhere in the 1920s. Investments in better packaging led to new packing boxes, inlaid with paper, for ganja products. Instead of galvanized wire, the Society invested in steel bands that could be used to tie boxes down the middle. Temporary thatch-roof and clay-brick chators that had popped up around the ganja mahal in the past gave way to permanent fixtures. Over a frenetic year, the Society built permanent chators with corrugated tin sheets as ceilings and fencing and lights to enable patrols at night, and even replaced Dietz Pioneer streetlights with more effective Dietz hurricane lamps and Wizard lanterns.⁷⁹ Members of the Society aimed to realize tangible effects of peasant prosperity. As the Society's gains materialized across Naogaon's landscape, its status appeared more an exception than the rule. The colonial history of circumscribing ganja primarily in Naogaon, making competition scarce, and ensuring quality and taste allowed the Society to tactfully rescript the logic of cooperative economics. Using the “technical expertise” the government offered, Naogaon's cultivator members kept themselves close to the colonial state while attending to the situated needs of their constituency. Proportional representation and a shared investment in the fortunes offered by ganja kept differences of class and community in tense balance, even when the storms of economic contraction, Gandhian nationalism, and discord between the Indian National Congress, the Krishak Praja Party, and the Muslim League, rocked the Society's boat.

GANJA'S ANTAGONISTS

The exceptional gains of Naogaon's cooperative experiment in the 1920s stood in stark contrast to the decline in peasant household incomes and the crashing prices of jute and rice in Bengal. Other truths aggravated this polarity. Naogaon had a predominantly Muslim population that produced ganja, a disreputable drug in the minds of many nationalists, using cooperative ideals and agrarian welfarist rhetoric otherwise dear to anticolonial nationalists, and gained financially from a position of intimacy with, not opposition to, a repressive colonial empire. Naogaon's peasantry, and its historical entanglement with ganja, was as intractable as it was remarkable.

Naogaon's rapid metamorphosis from rural backwater to bustling town commanded nationalist agitators to wrestle with its complexity. The Congress had long argued for economic nationalism and Indian self-government as remedies to the drain of wealth inflicted by British rule.⁸⁰ Proponents of economic nationalism like Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Mohandas Gandhi had also hailed the autonomy of rural Indian caste-based social structures like panchayats as ideal for local self-government. For Rabindranath Tagore, cooperative societies in Indian villages could become an economic model that was neither capitalist nor explicitly socialist. Amid the spreading anticolonial horizons of the 1920s, the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators' Co-operative Society represented a particular challenge. Its unique anatomy aside, it also claimed no official political position despite having many members in the ranks of the Congress and the Krishak Praja Party. The Society's board, including the Indian civil servants who served *ex officio*, prioritized supporting public health, building long-term infrastructure, sustaining the Society's early profits, navigating favorable relations with imperial offices in Delhi (after 1911) and provincial ones in Calcutta, and cautiously distancing itself from nationalist discourses bemoaning the emasculation of Indians by intoxicating drugs.

Nationalist antagonism to drugs and alcohol became amplified with Mohandas K. Gandhi's growth in popularity. On 22 April 1926, in the pages of *Young India*, Gandhi called drugs and drink "the two arms of the devil with which he strikes his helpless slaves into stupefaction and intoxication."⁸¹ Ganja, opium, and liquor were all the same in Gandhi's vision of total prohibition. To him, even the reform of opium addicts, especially after the Assam Opium Committee report, was meant to encourage the poor to join the nationalist movement. Gandhi's political categories, such as "the poor," "the addict," and "the helpless Indian," drew on Swadeshi rhetoric from the 1900s.⁸² During the Swadeshi movement both militant and moderate ideals of masculinity had included the repudiation of intoxicants.⁸³ For instance, among the pamphlets of the Anushilan Samiti apprehended by the Intelligence Branch (Bengal Criminal Investigation Department) in 1912, the initiation vows of young militant nationalists included celibacy, self-sacrifice, reading the Gita, observing "the rules of ascetic life," refraining from "fowls, onion, garlic, such food as is generally used by Mlecchas (untouchables)," and avoiding "any intoxicating drugs [which] are strictly forbidden."⁸⁴ Well before Gandhi's career in Bengal, militant Hindu self-assertion among young Swadeshi men had propagated Brahmanical associations between ganja, vegetarianism, untouchability, purity, and pollution. In the 1920s, demands for prohibition in nationalist discourses enfolded caste taboos and self-discipline, demands that boiled over in moments of violence.

Violence defined popular agitations when local units of the All-India Congress rallied for Gandhi's Non-Co-operation movement from 1920. Despite his pronouncements on nonviolence, Congress workers regularly used violence to discipline people otherwise not supportive of the party. Congress campaigns of looting and picketing excise shops selling liquor and ganja and burning foreign cloth

in public cast intoxicants as villains, along with comprador Indians, in a theater of colonial oppression. The Non-Co-operation movement came to Naogaon in August 1920, soon after the Congress launched it.⁸⁵ Its full effects were felt quickly thereafter when Congress political workers held large meetings in Naogaon town in February 1921 to distribute Non-Co-operation literature and exhort cultivators to distance themselves from the government. This was a response to the Society's January Annual General Meeting that had passed several resolutions to operationalize investments committed in the previous year. The minister for agriculture and industries in the government of Bengal, Nawab Saiyid Nawab Ali Chaudhuri, had visited from Calcutta to endorse their plans, one of which was the allotment of sixty thousand rupees for land on which to establish an agricultural research demonstration farm to enable crop diversification.

Chaudhuri was the first Muslim minister of united Bengal after the first partition was reversed in 1911. He was a prominent critic of Muslim peasant "backwardness" and "ignorance." On seeing investments made by Naogaon's cultivators in schools and hospitals, he hailed them as signs of Muslims using cooperation to advance their own goals.⁸⁶ After acknowledging the park, hospitals, school buildings, dispensary, and other structures "yet to be erected," he used his podium to address matters of Muslim selfhood in the ganja mahal. "Naturally," he began, "I am interested particularly in the proposal to erect near this office a mosque, or at any rate, a prayer house for the use of the members who are predominantly Mahomedan." "When so much has been done for the public," he added, "it is meet that the society should provide for its own needs." While Chaudhuri welcomed the Society and its Muslim members, the Naogaon Congress Committee lambasted his visit because he was a member of the elected government under the Government of India Act (1919). The Congress led a *hartal* (strike) against his visit on 16 February 1921, enforcing a complete shutdown of shops and sanitation work. It was the day for the weekly haat, but Congress workers barred anyone from opening shop windows. A Naogaon correspondent reported that "local students did not attend classes" and that "batches of students were seen patrolling the streets. The carters, the hackney carriage wallahs, the sweepers and the methars all suspended work."⁸⁷ The actions of Naogaon's Congress unit, composed mainly of men in high school and college, mirrored larger patterns of caste and class as low-caste workers like sweepers and mehtars, the caste group that performed sanitary work, forewent their earnings and educated men set norms of rightful sacrifice.

The Congress's Non-Co-operation movement propagated ideas of purification (*shuddhi*) that would cleanse the nation-to-be of its psychological and dietary "impurities" like ignorance and intoxication.⁸⁸ Meanings of purity were imposed by village panchayats through violence and public chastisement, eventually outlasting the Non-Co-operation agitations to animate Hindu nationalist parties. The rhetoric of *shuddhi* in Congress-led demonstrations reinforced the "otherness" of Muslims. In May 1921, soon after Chaudhuri's visit, Chittaranjan Das, the famous

lawyer and Congress leader with deep ties to the Anushilan Samiti, visited Naogaon. He was on an All-India Congress Committee drive to gather donations for the Tilak Swaraj Fund. The fund was named after Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a proponent of Indian home rule, believer in ideas of selfhood derived from the Gita and the Upanishads, and a renowned opponent of caste emancipation and women's rights. The fund's collections were meant to finance local Non-Co-operation activities.⁸⁹

The Congress organized two separate meetings for men and women. The women's meeting, led by Das's wife, included speeches by Kumari Suprova Debi and Srijukta Urmila Debi and a collection drive for ornaments and subscriptions from women. In the men's meeting, Das gave a speech in which he reportedly "asked the people to take to Dharma, and explained to them that this purifying movement of non-cooperation will bring Swaraj within easy reach."⁹⁰ Concepts like *dharma* as religious duty and *swaraj* (self-rule) intersected with ideas of purity in Congress campaigns. In Naogaon, Das's words indexed local iterations of that intersection. He referenced debates about swaraj and ganja cultivation that had preceded his visit. Weeks before Das arrived in Naogaon, the Barisal meeting of the Bengal Provincial Conference of the Congress in March 1921 passed several resolutions to embolden Gandhi's call for *swaraj*. Ganja was the sole subject of one resolution, which appealed to the "peasantry of Naogaon to abandon immediately the cultivation of ganja and instead introduce the cultivation of cotton, potato, sugarcane, paddy and other crops." It further offered to lend "wholehearted support to the people of Rajshahi district in their efforts to induce the peasants of Naogaon to give up ganja cultivation."⁹¹ A visit from Das, a renowned lawyer and respected nationalist, emblemized the seriousness of the call on the Provincial Congress to follow through.

The local Congress Party's support of peasants who would give up ganja production reproduced the plant's association with impurity, individual debility, and national impairment while driving a rift through the Society's membership. After Das's speech, Moulana Akram Khan, a Muslim Congress leader directly addressed the crowd of ganja cultivators gathered to hear speeches. Khan reportedly "delivered a stirring speech specially advising the people to give up cultivation of intoxicants as it doubly injures the individual and the society at large."⁹² The Congress's tactics escalated political tensions in Naogaon as speeches at rallies and market sites and the rhetoric of discipline, morality, and emasculation through intoxication seeped into Society meetings. Members who were critical of the Board or had opposing interests to it used the emerging grammar of nationalism to challenge the Society's internal structures. External antagonists of the Society assailed it as either a selfish, financially driven collaborator of empire or a body that corrupted religious morals.

Just weeks before Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury's visit, on 23 January 1921, the Milad Sharif celebrations to honor Prophet Mohammad's birthday were under way in Naogaon. This was the thirteenth annual celebration, and the Society had

contributed funds to it since 1919. In recognition of that contribution, Maulvi Aatur Rahman, the Society's chief executive officer, was voted in to chair the session. Midway through the event, a local lecturer named Moulana Fazlur Rahman began his speech by denouncing enslavement under imperialism. This, he announced, was manifested in all the education that graduates of Calcutta University now working as government employees in Naogaon had received. Calcutta University was, he asserted, a "golamkhana," or slave dwelling, that was producing subservient minds. He then exhorted the audience by reading passages from the Qur'an. Rahaman was a devout Muslim, a teacher, and a campaigner increasingly drawn to the Congress's campaigns against foreign goods. His speech offended Maulvi Aatur Rahman so much that he reportedly "stood up shouting 'Out of order, Out of order!'"⁹³ When Rahaman persevered with his speech, Aatur Rahman walked out of the meeting, asking other government servants and teachers to do the same. The headmaster and teachers of the K. D. High School and other local schools followed him out.

The students who had organized the meeting reportedly stayed at the venue even as other officials left, claiming rather uneasily that it was too hot inside. Aatur Rahman was the primary interface between ganja cultivators and the government, and his importance was not lost on the students, some of whom pleaded with him to return. Rahman did take the stage but declined to resume chairing the meeting, a decision that angered the students, who reportedly shouted "shame! shame!" The proceedings continued only after Babu Upendranath Banerjee was nominated to chair the meeting, making this the first time a Hindu person had led the celebration of the Prophet's birthday in Naogaon.

Banerjee was a known advocate of Non-Co-operation, and his leadership of the meeting allowed Rahaman to continue his speech. According to the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Rahaman now "vowed never to use any foreign things and to encourage indigenous trade and exhorted the audience who were mostly ganja cultivators to stop the cultivation of ganja, which was encouraging the use of intoxicants." The heat of the debate did not abate. In a subsequent speech, another prominent Muslim figure in Naogaon, Moulavi Mobarak Ali, refuted Rahaman and "hoped to see the mighty edifice of the Ganja Office become a national institution" and "explained its necessity at this juncture of our national existence." However, Banerjee, in his capacity as chair, had the last word: He reportedly "exhorted the audience very feelingly to stop ganja cultivation both for a religious and pecuniary point of view." The speech, in the words of the special correspondent, "touched the cultivators bitterly and great effect is expected in no time."⁹⁴

The "great effect" never came. As local Congress activists organized demonstrations, they watched as obvious crucial contradictions persisted. While the Congress and Gandhi had taken strong positions against the sale of liquor and drugs, Naogaon's families considered ganja production their most important agricultural product. Not cooperating with the colonial state would crush Naogaon's

gains. Demanding that the Society not pay taxes or cooperate with government was counterproductive in that the Society embodied the fortunes of the surrounding ganja mahal and depended entirely on the state-granted monopoly. These contradictions eventually dampened the potential of the Non-Co-operation movement in Naogaon, and despite the Congress's largest demonstration, in February 1921, just weeks later, in March, the Excise Office received a record-breaking number of applications to grow ganja in 1922.⁹⁵ Internally, relations between members remained tense as critics of Aatur Rahman won elections, forcing Donovan to demand that the government of Bengal mandate a three-year term limit on holding office or a two-year period before reappointment to the Society.⁹⁶

The Congress's failure to wean farmers away from ganja production left important cleavages between the Society's cultivator-members and its board. Through the year, costs of hiring farm labor in harvest months rose as did prices for new farm implements. Between April and June 1922, tensions over rising costs quickly fueled a movement that demanded the Society's intervention and Aatur Rahman's removal from the office of deputy chairman and chief executive officer. Rahman resigned and Maulvi Hamidur Rahman, the former assistant registrar of Chittagong, replaced him on 24 October 1922.⁹⁷ Aatur Rahman's rivals on the Society's board also halted plans that he had put into operation, prime among which was the cattle insurance scheme in which an assistant veterinary surgeon had been employed since 1918. Having painstakingly gathered statistics on cattle ownership and cattle disease for two years, the surgeon was summarily dismissed and the scheme scuttled. The surgeon was poached immediately by the Khepupara Supply and Sale Society in the Sundarbans, another successful cooperative venture, for its own cattle insurance scheme to protect against the frequent outbreak of disease in cattle.⁹⁸ Donovan's annual report highlighted "local jealousies and spites" as roots of the agitation against Aatur Rahman.

Signs of discord dissipated only when economic fortunes recovered. In June the Board of Revenue, with the recommendation of the excise commissioner, sanctioned an increase in the price set for round and flat ganja. As the increase took effect in October, the sale price of ganja in Bengal increased from Rs. 150 to Rs. 200 per maund, finally rising to Rs. 260 in April 1922.⁹⁹ On resuming its regular duties, the Society's board shored up investments and held public meetings. For its part, the Co-operative Department exempted the Society from Provision 33 of the Co-operatives Act (1912), which limited the allocation of profits to the reserve fund, thus allowing the Society's board more flexibility in remunerating its members.¹⁰⁰ Over the next few years, it continued granting annual exemptions. Even though total sales fell by a substantial 8 percent in 1922–23 due to increased prices and the Non-Co-operation movement, the Society secured substantial profits.¹⁰¹ Portions of profits were cashed back to ganja cultivators across Naogaon irrespective of whether they were Society members. Members received Rs. 24 per maund

and nonmembers Rs. 12. The Society's reputation soared, and a dividend of 12.5 percent on shares deposited further cemented it.

Other outlays totaling Rs. 17,506 to various educational and medical charities, employment of a new assistant veterinary surgeon, and a donation of Rs. 1,000 to the registrar of the government of Bengal's Co-operative Department for expanding the cooperative movement renewed the Society's goodwill with stakeholders. The Corbin Cabinet Company of New York sent "indented home safe boxes" for the Society to sample, and Calcutta's Macbeth Bros. & Co. petitioned to send tractor ploughs for demonstrations in Naogaon.¹⁰²

Local infrastructural investments, like renting out a plot in Naogaon town for the construction of the new Naogaon Central Bank, complemented the Society's growing heft in Calcutta's corridors of power.¹⁰³ In 1924 the Society buttressed its attempt to keep communal divisions at bay with new investments. It devoted almost five thousand rupees to the Naogaon Co-operative Mosque Fund, which Saiyid Nawab Ali Choudhury had highlighted earlier. The Jama Masjid, built in 1926, abutted the Lytton Bridge by the Choto Jomuna. It stands to this day barely a hundred yards from the small Sri Lakshminarayan Mandir (founded 1923 [1329 BS]) and the Sri Sri Mohadeb Mondir, two Hindu temples also built with small contributions from the Society. The same year, the Society began making small charitable contributions to the Haj Committee of Bombay. Instituting public manifestations of investments for Hindus and Muslims consolidated *ganja krishok* as an identity against the prevailing tensions of Khilafat, Swaraj, and communist politics raging in Provincial Congress meetings and in public gatherings in the 1920s.¹⁰⁴

The Society's tremendous popularity even impressed Rai Bahadur Jamini Mohan Mitra, who became the registrar of co-operative societies after the Non-Co-operation agitation subsided.¹⁰⁵ Previously, Mitra had been deeply troubled about Naogaon's cooperatives and, unlike his predecessor Donovan, never defended the Society against critics in Rajshahi and Calcutta. Mitra focused more time and energy on supporting cooperative societies of weavers and artisans. While his official reports kept descriptions of Naogaon minimal, unlike Donovan's that devoted an entire subsection to it, Mitra's comments lauded two crucial realities.¹⁰⁶ First, even though victories like remunerative price increases flowed from the monopoly award, the Society's actual strength lay in its decision-making tactics that absorbed views of cultivators and the government and blurred lines of power. Mitra had sanctioned independent audits of the Society that corroborated the good health of its balance of investments.¹⁰⁷ Second, Mitra was compelled to laud the sheer power of public buildings, the most recent of which was a hospital with compounders' residence in Fatehpur village, to physically manifest, stabilize, and make accessible the identity of *ganja krishok*.¹⁰⁸

So, in 1926, Mitra was surprisingly far more vehement than Donovan had been when the government of Bengal promulgated clear separations of power between the registrar of co-operative societies and the collector of Rajshahi, the ex-officio

chairman of the Society's board.¹⁰⁹ The Society's detractors in Calcutta had complained about the unfair advantage of the monopoly grant, which made agricultural management in other districts look comparatively much worse, drawing sharp rebuttals from Mitra. "It is conveniently forgotten," he wrote, "that every effort to organise the ganja producers into a cooperative society was discouraged till a situation arose when, tired of the oppression of the brokers, the cultivators did not come forward to take the license for the cultivation of ganja." Reminding his colleagues that the cooperative and the monopoly were the last resort, not a favored preordained boon, he pointed out that the Society's critics continued to "overlook that it is by cooperation, and cooperation alone, that it has been possible for the producers to secure this monopoly and that the grant of the monopoly has been as much to the interest of Government as to that of the cultivators themselves."¹¹⁰ By investing their profits in tangible buildings, the Society was changing "the face of the whole country" in Naogaon and "developing in them [cultivators] a sense of self-help and self-respect."¹¹¹

An era appeared to have elapsed between the strike of 1916 and the celebration of 1926. In December 1926 the Society's members set up a *shamiana* (large tent) with flags and festoons to welcome leaders of other cooperative societies in Rajshahi division to a two-day conference to shape the future of the movement. On stage, three members of the Bengal Legislative Council—Khan Sahib Muazzam Ali Khan, Ashraf Ali, and Khan Bahadur Maulvi Emaduddin Ahmed—sat next to Mitra, Krinkarinath Ray Chaudhuri, Nawab Ali Chaudhuri, and the conference's elected presiding chair, the nawab of Dhaka, Khwaja Habibullah.¹¹² Their speeches gauged the crossroads where the Society and the cooperative movement stood and augured tentative futures. Nawab Ali Chaudhuri envisioned unending horizons for Naogaon-type societies to jump from successes in production, credit, and sale to defining a peasant utopia with no middlemen and complete transformations in all areas of agriculture. He hoped cooperatives would find special mention in the report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, which was conducting its work at that time.

Krinkarinath's speech, in Bengali, echoed other dreams for the "prosperity of the agriculturalist" and listed the Society's achievements: three charitable dispensaries, one veterinary dispensary, two English-language high schools, one English-language middle school, thirty primary schools for boys and girls, multiple metaled roads, and a new "Co-operative Ward" in the hospital. "This little town," Naogaon, compelled "wonder and admiration," he confessed, before declaring that instead of the cooperative credit banks that preoccupied Bengal, Naogaon was a sign that producers' cooperatives with state support could build a movement that could end diseases like malaria and kala-azar, generate livelihoods in various "religious, social, racial, and cultural" aspects of life, and "provide a remedy for bitter communal discord."¹¹³

Communal violence between Hindus and Muslims raged in 1926 and 1927 amid the fractures and hostilities of Non-Co-operation, Khilafat, rising Hindu conservative movements for *shuddhi* and “reconversion,” fault lines of dyarchic representation and “non-Muslim”-designated constituencies, and the inadequacies of Das’s Congress and later Swarajya parties in tackling problems of class issues like peasant poverty, subinfeudation, and exploitation in industrial workplaces.¹¹⁴ Amid such tensions, inviting Khwaja Habibullah, whose father, Sir Salimullah, had led the Muslim League, to preside over the conference in Naogaon was deliberate. Many in Naogaon and Rajshahi publicly hoped that Khwaja Habibullah’s record of balancing Muslim interests in eastern Bengal and negotiating with the Congress since the Bengal Pact (1923) would help him “emerge a leader of Hindu and Mahomedan communities in Dacca,” where “communal tensions had reached a climax.”¹¹⁵ For his part, Habibullah acknowledged the power of the Society and conceded that while he thought ganja “did not lift the morality of the people,” it was clear to him that only a cooperative organization could have kept the cultivation under control. Speaking in English, he regretted being unable to speak Bengali. Habibullah’s hopes for a rich cooperative movement echoed those of Rabindranath Tagore, who, on 3 July 1927, concluded his president’s speech at International Cooperators’ Day in Calcutta’s Albert Hall by comparing cooperatives to the “organized strength of puny monkeys who caused the downfall of the powerful monster, Ravan, ten-headed in his greed, twenty-handed in his exploitation.”¹¹⁶ Tagore did not mention Naogaon, but in 1929 Naogaon’s ganja cultivators used the Society’s profits to fund stipends for three students to apprentice for three months in “Village Welfare Work” at Tagore’s Visva Bharati University in Sriniketan.¹¹⁷

The 1920s closed with the calamitous decline of prices and livelihoods wrought by the Great Depression. Lasting well beyond 1932, the prolonged effects of the depression were further compounded by the imposition of the Dangerous Drugs Act (1930) as Naogaon’s ganja products became subject to criminal law and closure of international trade except for strict medical research. With declining fortunes in the regional economy, the horizon of possibilities for Naogaon and its advocates shrank in the 1930s, forcing the question of the Society’s survival into legislative debates. After the dyarchic electoral system of the Government of India Act of 1919 politically introduced the “non-Muslim” constituency and entrenched separate electorates, the Government of India Act of 1935 brought a wider swath of representatives from across electoral and political identities. At a time of immense contention between visions of nation and territory, ganja and the Society swirled through the whirlwind of institutional and electoral politics, Gandhian prohibitionism, and international criminalization.

Coda

Ganja and the Nation

This book opens with two poems as epigraphs. The second was written in Calcutta in 1873 by an Indian sonneteer amid a brief Victorian surge in experiments with the Renaissance sonnet sequence.¹ The poet, whose style strongly suggests it was Toru Dutt (signing off as “D.”), deployed the three-quatrain one-couplet form to praise the medicalized extract of cannabis sold as tinctures in British India.² The poet’s “magic dust” was chur ganja, one of Naogaon’s popular exports. The poem’s invitation to taste it, let the spirit float untethered through a sensuous conflux of body and ornament, and visualize great celestial circles (colures) intersecting with golden bars was not just a passing colorful experiment with English sonnets common in Bengali and Marathi.³ Setting aside the possibility of authorship by Toru Dutt, a prolific woman poet and translator whose ill-health and early death were tragic, the sonnet exemplifies a moment when modes of describing the experience of intoxication in Bengali through the relationality between self, spirit, body, and world expressed in poetry and proverb, breaks through into English even when the consumed form is a medicalized cannabis tincture. The sonnet captures the noncontemporaneity of oneself with one’s intoxicated self, because one could transmute into the other and wander elsewhere under the influence. Instead of explaining in the introduction how this irruption into English literature of ideas otherwise common in the ganjakhor’s ecumene in Hindustani and Bengali was symptomatic of empire, this book has followed a different path indicated by the first epigraph poem, a ganja workers’ song from Naogaon.

First published in Mohammad Afzal’s history of Naogaon, that song also acknowledges the ganjakhor’s ecumene but praises specifically the ganja of the land of Bengal—a commodity-space interlinkage that this book has materialized in detail.⁴ Published in 1970 at the height of the Bangladesh Awami League’s

popularity in East Pakistan, Afzal's history exemplifies the genre of "district histories" written by Bengali civil servants like him in the East Pakistan Civil Service and the Indian Civil Service. Composed mainly of Hindustani words common to Urdu, Bengali, and Hindi, the song locates a *bangla desh*, or "land of bangla," before the liberated nation-state of Bangladesh formally announced itself to the world in March 1971. It appears that ganja belongs to that unpartitioned Bangladesh. Afzal's memory of living and growing up in Naogaon included the song being sung in rhythm by men holding one another as they worked in tandem with their feet to press ganja stalks in the chator. *Ganja marai*, the art of feet pressing, had its own *taal* (beat) and *naach* (dance) as workers swayed alongside one another. The song's metaphorization of embodied experiences of ganja intoxication, pivoting on desires of nobility and royalty, relayed familiar features of the ganjakhor's ecumene, which was, more often than not, a refuge of the poor in colonial India. Tellingly, Afzal calls lovers of ganja *gonjikasebi*, meaning "those who serve themselves with ganja" (here, feminized), and relates the rise of *siddhir prochaar* (the use of siddhi) among students in American universities and colleges in the 1960s. Afzal's nouns for cannabis plant matter (*ganja*, *gonjika*, *siddhi*) coexist without any qualification, a mark of how the proverbial, vibrant, and metaphorical modes of capturing relations between plant and human, absent from official archives, survived in fields and streets.

Afzal's nostalgia in the text is palpable. He reproduces in a large typeface the words "Supervisor, Nayagaon Rajshahye," from the seal of the Ganja Supervisor's Office in 1888, as if it were a totem of past glory. He narrates Naogaon's *unnoyon* (growth, upliftment) as a product of ganja and the cooperative society that struck a fatal blow to *dalali* (brokerage). In glowing terms, he singles out the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators' Co-operative Society as unlike any other in *pak-bharot* (India and Pakistan), marvels at how its office buildings resembled Calcutta's Writers' Building, and recalls the roads, buildings, and residential apartments built after 1949 to earn rent and supplement the reduced earnings from ganja.

Like Afzal, graduates from schools funded by the Society also acknowledged it as an engine of unmatched contributions to Naogaon. On the first page of his memoir, Mahfuzur Rahman, economist and former assistant director of economic policy analysis at the United Nations, invited readers to "mention the name Naogaon to any Bengali" and see how "the thing that would flash across his mind" would be ganja.⁵ The "school we went to, the house we lived in, the mosque we prayed in, the park we walked in, the pond we bathed in" all belonged to the Society, he wrote. "There was little show of ownership, though," he added, before describing his childhood in the late 1930s. As the son of the imam of the Naogaon mosque and teacher at the madrasa who witnessed his father face contempt from in-laws for leading prayers at a mosque "built with ganja money," Mahfuzur Rahman keenly observed how leaders of the Society like the director, Khan Bahadur Bashir Uddin, and the manager, Dhirendranath Majumdar, patronized Hindu

and Muslim religious festivals at a time of rising communal conflict. Despite caste norms, untouchability, and “unscalable walls” of separation between Hindus and Muslims in the everyday life that he described, Rahman was conscious of how Naogaon’s mixed neighborhoods never witnessed a riot, even as polarization grew elsewhere in Bengal during and after the World War II.

From the Depression years to Partition in 1947, ganja and bhang became increasingly policed and debated in the Indian legislatures. In the limited ambit of provincial politics under British dominion, excise revenue was channeled into expenditure on education, agriculture, and sanitation that elected Indian legislators prioritized during their tenures in government. Naogaon’s cultivators negotiated closely with the government of Bengal, but given that British India was a signatory to international agreements on “dangerous drugs,” Naogaon’s horizon of possibilities shifted quickly. Medicalized tinctures of cannabis slowly disappeared, and the rise of prohibition in nationalist politics suppressed alternative histories. Even as the circuits of trade broke on either side of the Radcliffe Line, Afzal’s memoir shows, the associations of commodity and place behind Bengal Ganja remained.

THE DEPRESSION AND DANGEROUS DRUGS

As the effects of the Depression years (1929–32) wore on, hunger, poverty, and peasant protests fundamentally redefined agrarian life across eastern Bengal. Paddy and jute prices suffered, credit lines dried up, and the words *krishok* (cultivator) and *proja* (tenant) became charged identities with the rise of what Tariq Omar Ali has called “peasant populism.”⁶ Ganja was not paddy or jute—a contrast that couldn’t have been any sharper. As cooperatives failed, deposits dwindled, and borrowers (and accompanying relatives who had signed onto loan liabilities) defaulted, the four thousand members of the Society earned a profit of Rs. 50,000, expanded to fifty-nine primary schools, and bought three stud bulls to raise cattle, all in the year 1931–32.⁷ In the recent past, many had hoped to emulate ganja in the jute economy of Bengal. To the Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1927, the chair of Rajshahi’s district board, Emaduddin Ahmed, had described the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators Co-operative Society, Ltd., as the signal success of the division and a blueprint for protecting jute prices. Aware of growing immiseration among jute-producing peasants, Ahmed had argued that a society “managed by the government” with monopoly powers could help control jute prices even though exponentially higher numbers of peasants grew jute. When interrogated by Sir Henry Staveley Lawrence about whether the government or the cultivators were actually in charge of the Society, Ahmed framed their close working relationship as one of mutual benefit. He illustrated this assertion with instances of *ganja-porano*, where the stationed excise officer in Naogaon “proportionately burnt quantities grown by various people” to raise prices in the market,

the proportional incineration ensuring “all the growers get a price.”⁸ Advocates of cooperatives similarly desired for jute what had been accomplished for ganja. Citing the way “nature had conferred a monopoly” of producing jute on Bengal and its neighboring districts, an anonymous advocate of cooperatives echoed Ahmed in 1930, wondering if it was “chimerical” to hope that the jute crop could be supervised just as ganja was.⁹ Illusory or not, the rise of the *krishok* movement’s no-rent campaigns and peasant populism among paddy and jute cultivators in 1930 carved new alliances among rural Muslims across districts to create “a new spatial formation in the Bengal Delta.”¹⁰ While in the Legislative Council, Naogaon’s representatives argued that jute cultivation could be restricted and higher prices ensured using the ganja model, Naogaon’s cultivators had a history of courting Muslim zamindars and Anglophile Muslims in Calcutta for their upliftment, a stance that did not suit the rising Krishak Praja Party’s moves against the zamindar-dominated Muslim League in Bengal.¹¹

Signs of trouble in Naogaon’s relationship with the Bengal government began to appear everywhere after pressures to adopt prohibitionism gathered steam in 1928. Akhil Chandra Datta, member of the Legislative Council from Tipperah, demanded a stoppage on budget outlays for the Excise Department until the government followed the spirit of the opium conventions signed in 1925 at the League of Nations.¹² Having drawn a sharp rebuke from Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy, who thought abolishing excise revenue “jeopardized the finance [when] a strenuous fight with the Government of India—[the] most implacable enemy”—lay before Bengal’s legislators, Datta’s motion failed the floor test. Suhrawardy did not think it wise to allow Delhi’s imperial government to think that Bengal’s Indian representatives did not appreciate their financial responsibilities. Minister of Excise Musharruf Hosain, though a Muslim who didn’t drink or smoke, also opposed prohibition on grounds that India wasn’t solely a home of Muslims. “My country,” Hosain said, was “composed of other elements as well . . . it was not possible to make everybody sober by legislation . . . and . . . Bengal is not composed of one section of people.”¹³ Nonetheless, allegations of financial mismanagement continued coming from members like Jitendralal Banerjee, who accused Hosain of neglecting realities on the ground, such as the fact that Excise Superintendent Wilson had granted one family in Calcutta licenses for eleven excise shops in the mill areas of Barrackpore outside the city.¹⁴ Routine procedures between the Society and the government of Bengal often teetered on disagreement and reflected economic tensions. In 1927, when Bengal’s accountant general had claimed that the land on which the Society’s office and quarters stood was government property, Rajshahi’s Collectorate had conceded to turning the land over to the government once the Society stopped using it. The Society paid through land acquisition cheques to keep the land.¹⁵ In 1929, the Revenue Department withdrew from contributing to land acquisition for the Naogaon Supply and Sale Society, which ran retail stores in Naogaon town.¹⁶

The rise of electoral politics and civil disobedience and the scramble for seats in constituencies defined by the Government of India Act (1919) brought the latent prohibitionism among elite Indians to the forefront of political life. With passage of the Dangerous Drugs Act in 1930, the imperial government of India in New Delhi agreed to rigorously exercise controls inside British India and ensure that no cannabis flowed into international territory where it was now a prohibited substance that demanded dedicated policing, oversight, and prevention.¹⁷ The act used the term “hemp drug” to define the entire cannabis plant, now placed in the same schedule as opium and cocaine. Except for strictly controlled pharmaceutical research and small consumption for religious purposes inside British Indian territory, “hemp drugs” became prohibited substances. The government of India encouraged a significant reduction in total output from Naogaon’s fields annually thereafter, and the government of Bengal responded favorably. In 1931 Member of Legislative Council from Calcutta Dr. Haridhan Dutt, introduced a resolution to demand a complete prohibition on charas, which he called “the essence of ganja.”¹⁸ Describing how trade routes from Nepal and the North West Frontier Province brought potent charas into Bengal, he accused the government of earning money from a substance that other parts of the world, and even Bengal and Madras, were prohibiting. In support of the resolution, temperance advocate Kes-hab Chandra Banerji stated that other provinces had banned imports of charas, yet the increased sale price in Bengal had not prohibited Calcutta’s charas consumers, who had bought 52 maunds that year. “It brings ruin and misery to the addicts,” he announced, adding that the “League of Nations has prohibited the export of charas to all countries.” Singh Roy, speaking for the government, agreed with the resolution and announced that Colonel R. N. Chopra of the Indian Medical Service was studying the effects of hemp drug addiction in India and that the government had already raised the minimum age of buying charas from sixteen to twenty and limited possession to one tola per person.¹⁹ Awaiting an expert report from Chopra, Dutt withdrew his motion.

The Congress’s civil disobedience agitations, complemented by revolutionary armed movements, social movements in major cities, and repressive police actions, either indirectly referenced or directly centered on excise policy and intoxicants. With liquor, opium, and hemp drugs under government-regulated excise regimes, Congress-led campaigns to picket excise shops drew tremendous support. Picketing of excise shops in Bengal and Bihar regularly led to injuries to sellers and peons staffing warehouses and storefronts.²⁰ In May 1930, for instance, violence in Mymensingh town resulted in the theft of ganja from an employee of the retailer Nikunja Behari Lahiri and injuries to bystander Jogesh Chandra Rai by stick-wielding Congress activists. Both Hindus and Muslims who happened to be near the excise warehouses faced brickbats and stones. As prices of British India’s major cash crops halved by 1932, the resulting liquidity crunch forced the Society to face bad debts, consolidate ganja production into increasingly smaller

plots, and even sell one maund, five seers to the Jaipur Princely State in Rajputana in northwestern India. Falling demand, major floods in 1929, a reduced number of chators (only ten), and a growing political movement against intoxicants signaled the decline of the Society's prominence outside Naogaon.

In the ganja mahal villages, however, the Society continued shaping matters of life, death, and illness as the Congress's moralizing prohibitionism and rhetoric of Brahmanic caste sanctions distanced it from Naogaon.²¹ Multiple hospitals, charitable dispensaries, English-language education alongside Islamic studies in schools, and the health of cattle all pivoted on the Society's interventions in the 1930s. To encourage farmers to explore new seasonal patterns of land use or grow different crops, the Society started experimental farms where tobacco, sugarcane, and oilseeds could be tried out before being introduced in larger fields. A. M. Arshad Ali, the Society's chief executive officer from 1929 to 1938, was a defining figure during this period. He negotiated a new monopoly in 1930, just before the civil disobedience movement gained momentum, on the sale of bhang cakes produced in Bihar's "Bhaugulpore farm." Bhang's usage in Hindu religious festivities left it in a gray zone in the definitions of the Dangerous Drugs Act, and the government of India had made that argument for excepting bhang in Geneva in 1925. The Society secured the privilege of being the sole buyer of bhang cakes manufactured in Bhaugulpore, which it then sold through agents and retailers across Bengal.²² The new monopoly award helped the Society mitigate losses in sales of ganja caused by the Dangerous Drugs Act, Congress's campaigns against excise and drugs, and the Depression.²³ The Society insisted that ganja cultivation was akin to any other crop, and the identity of *ganja krishok* was reflected in a collective body with shared public assets. Ganja production provided incomes for Santal families and substituted the history of private wealth in the region with one of modern public buildings dotting its landscape. It continued to uphold the stated goals of economic self-reliance and rural upliftment to mainstream nationalists and to transform them into material realities using its monopolies.

To reduce its dependency on Naogaon, however, the government sanctioned a larger area in Bhagalpur in 1933 to grow ganja and bhang for districts in western Bengal and the United Provinces. It also reduced the price, from 300 to 200 rupees per bigha, at which the Excise Department bought ganja from the Society and stored in its warehouses. In council, Muhammad Basir Uddin demanded that R. N. Reid, then in charge of the Appointments Department, answer whether the government was ready to give the "sons and wards of Naogaon's ganja cultivators" special consideration for government job appointments because a rise in ganja production in Bihar would reduce Naogaon's income by three-fourths, cause heavy losses, and leave loyal subjects of the empire with no protection.²⁴ Reid disagreed, responding that the fall was barely one-third, Bengal's consumption had dropped on its own, and that the government did not intend to recruit among educated children of Naogaon's farmers. Two days later, on 27 March 1935, Basir Uddin

demanded further answers from the minister in charge of the Excise Department, Bijoy Prasad Singh Roy.²⁵ Roy responded similarly that decreases in the wages of laborers had reduced production costs, and the adjusted price of 250 rupees per bigha ought to suffice for Naogaon. If Naogaon's cultivators were unhappy, it was simply because consumption had decreased and Bihar and Orissa districts now had small-scale cultivation. Persistent lobbying and increasing consumption gradually did pay off. In 1936, the Society won the exclusive privilege of supplying ganja and bhang in Bengal and the government agreed to a fixed cost price that out-of-state wholesalers had to pay the Society. Further, the Society's products outcompeted Bhagulpore ones in Bihar, and it also became the main source of supply in the "Cooch Behar System," whereby Princely States in eastern India took responsibility for suppressing all ganja within their boundaries in exchange for receiving Naogaon's products duty-free.²⁶ Among Princely States in Orissa, for instance, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, and Dhenkanal continued buying Naogaon Ganja, while a small farm in Sambalpur supplied Seraikella and Kharsawan. Besides that, the French colony of Chandernagore, which had an annual contract with the Society dating to 1917, remained the Society's only external buyer.²⁷

By 1940, a deep agrarian crisis set in as huge unpaid debts were racked up in rural credit institutions and the Bengal Agricultural Debtors' Act brought some relief and the leadership of the Krishak Praja Party in the Bengal legislature sought to fulfill its electoral promises in an unforgiving economy. As sales fell, the Society remained financially solvent in Naogaon by using its reserve funds.²⁸ Sales had suffered particularly since 1938, as loan defaults had forced the government of Bengal to form the Rural Indebtedness Department and dangerous drugs policies came into enforcement. The Society had demanded a seat at the table if prohibition was being discussed, but got no such invitation.²⁹ The supposed fall of ganja remained instructive in political one-upmanship. In the legislature in 1941 Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy, now minister of commerce and labour in a government led by Krishak Praja Party's firebrand A. K. Fazlul Huq, rejected demands for fixing minimum prices of raw jute, especially without first systematically inspecting and grading them for quality, as ganja had been.³⁰ When "ganja was sold in the free market," he claimed, cultivators had incentives to grow better ganja, but government fixing of minimum prices for the Society had led to the end of "good quality ganja altogether." Amid wartime contractions, after profits trickled to three thousand rupees in 1941, the Society still contributed minor amounts annually to the schools and hospitals it had instituted, agitated for reasonable prices from the government, and tried new methods of improving the quality of ganja products.³¹

Arshad Ali was so moved by the welfarism of Naogaon's peasants during his tenure that he loudly echoed past demands to replicate the Naogaon model to save the constrained and failing cooperative movement in Bengal. When Ali was eventually appointed registrar of the Co-operative Department, he recalled Naogaon as an example of the way "entire aspects of the economic life of a cultivator"



FIGURE 11. The shuttered Record Room of the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators' Co-operative Society in 2017. Water damage, infestation, and crumbling paint have destroyed much of the Society's archives. The plaque reads: "The Office Building of the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators' Co-operative Society Ltd. Opened by the Hon'ble Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, C.I.E. Khan Bahadur, Minister, Govt. of Bengal, on the 16th February 1921." Photograph by author.

must be taken over and shaped by a cooperative institution. Failure to do so, he said, would defeat the "real aim of the agricultural cooperative movement, which is to turn out a self-reliant, contented and thrifty race of peasantry." To emulate Naogaon's ganja model, he proposed redoing the cooperative system to make a peasant "carry out a definite agricultural programme" whereby a cooperative society and the government together controlled the quality and quantity of "his produce," besides supervising seeds, manure, irrigation, health, sanitation, and training in small cottage industries. The state, he concluded, should "take over his produce for sale in the best possible market." The crux of this cooperative policy would deal not with a fragment but with the "whole man."³² Ali's utopian desires refracted the male peasant householder whose figure stood atop a complex social structure of gender, caste, Santal labor, and land tenure that had been refashioned through an exceptional grounding of cooperative economics and monopolistic regulations in the soil of Naogaon. His words rang hollow, however, at a time of declining ganja production in Naogaon. Increasing nationalist agitations in the

1940s made Ali's vision an impossible wish. The exception could not be the rule, and Naogaon could not be replicated anywhere.

THE GANJAKHOR AS ADDICT

The Radcliffe Line, by demarcating an East Pakistan state and partitioning Bengal in 1947, also separated a large swath of Naogaon ganja's consumers in western Bengal and other parts of India from its producers. In fervent debates in the Constituent Assembly of India, Congress leaders championed prohibition among their proposals for shaping the future of the republic. Since 1931, the Congress's Karachi resolution had included the line "Intoxicating drinks and drugs shall be totally prohibited, except for medicinal purposes" as crucial to "Swaraj, as conceived by the Congress." This line itself overturned Motilal Nehru's 1928 Congress report that left excise a "provincial subject" in a future federated nation-state. Gandhian self-rule envisioned an India without intoxication, in the service of which liquor, opium, and cannabis were all grouped together, even though the main focus remained fixed on alcohol use by mill workers, Adivasi peoples, and Dalit castes.

Ultimately, the allocation of excise on liquor and drugs to the provincial legislatures in the Government of India Act of 1935 remained in the Indian constitution, and the imperative for prohibition became enshrined in the Directive Principles of State Policy. While not legally binding in any court, the words "the state shall endeavour to bring about prohibition" on the consumption of intoxicating drinks remains, symbolically if not in actual force, a directive principle in Article 47 of the Constitution of India. While debated at length by many members of the Constituent Assembly, including the chief minister of Bombay State, B. G. Kher, and the prolific Gandhians Shibban Lal Saxena and Mahavir Tyagi, perhaps no one had as strong an opinion about ganja as the Assembly's vice-president.³³ Harendra Coomar Mookerjee, a Christian Bengali and longtime Congress member, was arguably the most stringent critic of ganja in the aftermath of Partition. While serving as vice-president under Rajendra Prasad in the Constituent Assembly, Mookerjee wrote an extensive tract on "our hemp drug problem" that was later published as *Why Prohibition?* to serve as a temperance manual for Congress workers in Calcutta.³⁴ A series of six articles, between November 1948 and June 1949, drawing on the book further publicized his studied opposition to ganja in India.

Mookerjee's articles appeared in the *Calcutta Review*, the *Modern Review*, and the *New Review*, all of which were intended for English-educated government officials and intellectuals. Based on a studied dissection of four volumes of testimony presented to the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission in 1894, alongside the research published by Chopra and Chopra on addiction in 1939, the tract elaborated the most thorough case for prohibiting all "hemp drugs" ever made by a nationalist

politician in India.³⁵ In two essays published in the *Calcutta Review*, he took up the question of “physical” and “moral” damage. Cherry-picking evidence from the IHDC testimonies and David Prain’s studies, he argued that moderate use of bhang caused unhealthy accumulation of fat and excessive use impaired digestion, and that moderate use of ganja led to tissue damage and emaciation and its excessive use caused bronchitis, asthma, diarrhea, and dysentery. Mookerjee’s sweeping generalizations combined racialized assumptions with unfounded contentions. For instance, Punjabis had a “favourable climate” and “outdoor habits, sturdiness, splendid physique and abounding health,” which still couldn’t prevent hemp drug disease, and India did not have “moderate ganja consumers,” because “it [was] a well-known fact” that such use had “practically disappeared among the well-to-do since the days of the Non-Co-operation Movement.” About the sharing of intoxicants, he wrote, since charas smokers consumed in company with one another, “there [was] always a tendency among addicts to ‘treat’ one another.” Claiming that moderation was impossible in India because immense subjective variations in bodily temperament rendered “excess” and “moderate” purely relative categories, and hemp drugs directly caused pharyngitis, tonsillitis, tissue damage, and premature death, Mookerjee insisted that ganja, bhang, and charas should all be prohibited.³⁶

His subsequent analysis of “moral damage” pinned laziness, obesity, theft, and other unpremeditated and premeditated crimes on all three hemp drugs. Reproducing verbatim the colonial discourse of doctors, zamindars, and British officials from the nineteenth century about frenzied lunacy, “running amok,” and “bad characters” who are more active, walk long distances, and plan and execute criminal acts of deliberation, speed, and skill, Mookerjee traversed a landscape of contradictions. The ganjakhori was clumsily reposed as the addict, at once diseased of the will, without discernment, driven to thieving and borrowing to satisfy cravings, and depending on whim, also lazy and active, feeble and strong, mentally impaired and cunning, with some even using the drug to “retain their memory sharp, sense keen, eye clear, and ear acute.”³⁷

Another two articles in the *New Review* used the same sources to describe the prevalence of addiction in all administrative territories of the Indian subcontinent.³⁸ Analyzing each former presidency and Princely State, he considered all available statistics on how much ganja, bhang, and charas were consumed, produced, and traded between states. “No part of British India was or is free from addiction,” he concluded, and “members of almost every religious or social group” were regular users. After ranking the United Provinces, Punjab, Bengal, and Bombay as territories with the highest consumption, each with cities full of “large labour populations” and religious centers like “Puri, Allahabad, Benares, Muttra, and Hurdwar,” he schematized the Princely States into three classes. First were those that banned all hemp drugs, like Mysore, Baroda, Travancore, and Cooch Behar. Second were those that produced their own bhang and ganja, like

Hyderabad and the Rajputana States. Finally came Gwalior, Indore, Bhopal, and the Garhjat States in Orissa, which produced enough bhang and ganja to supply local consumers and export to the rest of India. Prices for hemp drugs were lower in nearly all such states, and Mookerjee blamed these states for inadequate staff and inefficient organization.³⁹ Projecting the numbers available to him, which he considered conservative estimates, Mookerjee announced that “1 percent of the total population of our motherland” was addicted to a hemp drug.

Finally, his two essays in the *Modern Review* laid out a full history of British laws on cannabis in India and an overarching program of their future reorientation.⁴⁰ Mookerjee painstakingly recounted the abkari laws of 1789 and 1798, Regulation VI of 1800, government inquiries of 1873, Kerr’s report of 1877, the successive Excise Acts after 1882, and the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission, a history leading to the point “where the shoe pinches,” which, he argued, was the sudden spike in drug consumption after 1940. Whether due to the war or not, Mookerjee took this sharp increase as a failure of British excise policy that had explicitly aimed to reduce consumption since 1896. “Our old rulers never made any secret of the fact that it was not their purpose to stamp out addiction to hemp drugs,” he declared, before calling all availability of cannabis an incitement for “fresh addicts.” His imagined reorientation was as ambitious and authoritative as his research: He wanted the state to fully centralize hemp cultivation and drug manufacture, require all addicts to get a license, keep a tight grip on supplies as existing addicts slowly aged and passed away, deter any fresh addicts, control charas imports at the Punjab and Kashmir borders, prohibit ganja with special inspection of porous boundaries between Indian Princely States and the rest of the mainland, impose new penalties on buyers of illicit ganja that would supersede previous penalties on sellers, and adopt a wholly new bhang policy.⁴¹

The “new bhang policy” Mookerjee postulated was a confrontation with on-the-ground realities. “Certain religious observances of Hindus” required bhang, he conceded, and counted among them “the Durga Puja of Bengal and the Holi and Dewali festivals of Upper India.” Others drank it as a cooling beverage in Sind, Rajputana, and Punjab. With the expectation that, as with commodities like “the red powder used during holi” that appeared before a major festival, the state could make bhang available to worshippers before key religious events. He conceded that this was “fundamentally a compromise with objectionable practices” and therefore required antidrug education to discourage newer addicts, and the employment of respected figures like the postman, village headman, and doctors or medical men to aid in distribution. Finally, he argued, the state needed to take out the profit motive altogether and charge consumers only the price of production and distribution. Such a low price would “checkmate illicit dealers” because their efforts would result only in higher prices and not be worth the risk. “The State is not a commercial institution,” Mookerjee insisted. “It exists for one purpose only, the benefit of people,” who in this case required protection from

“an admittedly evil practice.”⁴² Mookerjee’s essays sutured hemp drugs in expansive detail to the powerful wave of prohibitionism, particularly against liquor, across India. He cited in his articles O. P. Ramaswami Reddiyar’s announcement of prohibition in Madras, anticipated the passage of the Bombay Prohibition Act (1949), and subsequently served as governor of the new state of West Bengal as an important Gandhian voice with a record of supporting prohibition publicly since 1938.

Mookerjee illuminated crucial paradoxes of prohibition in late colonial India that plagued lawmaking consistently afterward. The centralization and reluctant monopoly on production, the religious sensibilities of a bhang-loving Hindu figure, the pressures of international criminalization and interstate policing, the politics of class and respectability around addiction, and the moral discourse of national health all structured how the cannabis plant, its constituent parts, and its potential intoxicants were governed. With passage of the United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961), the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971), and the formation of new states in India, each legislating excise and jostling with prior legal precedent, such paradoxes intensified further.⁴³ For instance, in 1982 the state government of Madhya Pradesh allocated land specifically for bhang farming to supply buyers in Hindu pilgrimage sites like Ujjain. Since the Dangerous Drugs Act (1930) definition named only the female flowering cannabis plant, farmers were told to grow biologically male plants, which had low psychoactive compounds but avoided the trap of a single act of pollination leading to the whole crop being classified as ganja (female flowered) and not bhang.⁴⁴

When the government of India eventually enacted its overarching and most stringent drug law, the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act (1985), it mentioned two nouns for “hemp drugs” (*ganja* and *charas*) and conspicuously refrained from naming bhang. That didn’t mean it was absent. The act directly prohibited the cultivation of the cannabis plant, along with the possession, use, and consumption of and trade in ganja and charas. Charas the act defined as the separated resin, and ganja as the flowering or fruiting tops, by “whatever name” they may go by in any of India’s numerous languages. Clearly, the polysemy of ganja continued to structure its legal and juridical life after independence from British rule. From the outset, the law “exclude[d] the seeds and leaves *when not accompanied by the tops*.”⁴⁵ This tedious and puzzling phrase referred to bhang (leaves), acknowledged the possibility of seeds within clumps of leaves, and identified a condition of being *not-ganja* (disconnected from flowering tops) as the state of exemption from the law. The law shielded bhang by placing cannabis leaves in a gray zone of exception as a disembodied object governed through a palpable absence in the letter of the law. This zone has been further shaped in practice by the arbitrary authority vested in state officials overseeing cannabis circulation locally who might determine (or not) the exact separation of leaf and seed from the flower.

The law bore marks of the Cold War and US imperialism under Ronald Reagan's presidency.⁴⁶ The escalation of the war on drugs in the United States at the beginning of the 1980s was complemented by diplomatic, military, and intelligence agency interventions overseas.⁴⁷ In 1981, after the annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board, set up by the UN Single Convention, claimed India to be a site of origin as well as transit for methaqualone and heroin seized in eastern and southern Africa and Europe, the trafficking of narcotics and policing of addiction in India attracted greater public attention.⁴⁸ Increases in opium production in Afghanistan, the circulation of heroin in cities in Pakistan and India, and the oceanic circulation of drugs in the western Indian Ocean had already become diplomatic flashpoints. Besides arming militias in Afghanistan and increasing arms exports to Muhammad Zia-Ul-Haq's military dictatorship in Pakistan, the Reagan administration pursued foreign investments in India in the late 1970s. Since India had conducted atomic tests in 1974, nuclear nonproliferation was key to India-US relations, and international investments were crucial to reducing the stagnant industrial growth rate. Narcotics and terrorism became key areas of diplomatic negotiations, and by December 1983 the Indian government began drafting the NDPS Act, which passed soon after Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi's diplomatic visit to the United States in June 1985.⁴⁹

By all accounts, the NDPS came on the heels of widespread reports of the circulation of cocaine and crude heroin, named "brown sugar" in northern and western India, and rising poppy production in Thailand, Laos, and Burma in the early 1980s. In the lower house of Indian Parliament, Finance Minister V. P. Singh introduced the bill on 24 August 1985, following intermittent discussions of a heroin panic. Prominent Hindi film actor and Congress member of Parliament from Allahabad Amitabh Bachchan had earlier raised alarm about heroin peddling, especially among and by children in Bombay.⁵⁰ There was little debate on the bill as such: It passed quickly through both houses of Parliament, which were dominated by the Indian National Congress. A shared antinarcotics sentiment among members of the House meant that the opposition questioned only procedure. Some legislators claimed the bill had neither been up for consultation nor placed before Parliament's Business Advisory Committee.⁵¹ Few had been given time to study the bill's eighty-three clauses, for which V. P. Singh and Minister of State for Finance Janardhan Poojary apologized. They cited lack of time and the need for urgency lest India become a transit point for narcotics trafficking.

As in the 1920s when cannabis had been scheduled with opium and cocaine without much debate at the League of Nations, debates on the NDPS Act revealed cannabis had again been swept up with more potent, synthetic drugs, along with organized crime and currency smuggling. The day after Parliament enacted the law, the *Times of India* editorial sounded cautious despite agreeing that older British colonial laws like the Dangerous Drugs Act (1930) were "hopelessly outdated"

and statutory changes were needed. Noting that the NDPS Act “treats narcotics as an undifferentiated category” without clearly separating extremely addictive drugs like heroin from “softer, less addictive ones like ganja,” the editorial questioned the heavy penalties imposed on the drug addict and the logic of the burden of proof in future seizures. It argued that a harsh penalty “was not the cure” for addiction, and since the bill put the onus on the individual caught with small quantities of specific drugs to prove that it was for personal use, it could lead to “gross abuse and police harassment.”⁵² The amendments the editorial suggested did not materialize, and the demand for a Joint Select Committee to review the bill fell into oblivion.

The Narcotics Control Bureau created under the NDPS Act began coordinating with border security forces as well as local police, and the word “seizure” began grabbing newspaper headlines every morning. By winter of 1986, the United States and India began negotiating treaties for extradition of drug criminals, the exchange of intelligence reports, and technological transfers to India.⁵³ The new Indo-US Working Group on Narcotics in 1986 fit directly into the institutional framework of Ronald Reagan’s Anti-Drug Abuse Act (1986), which made US financial loans and international development aid conditional on antidrug measures deemed satisfactory by US standards. Since 1991 the NDPS Act has been amended several times to respond to contingencies posed by border movements and changes in state and district boundaries in India. The heavy weight of criminalization has turned ganja into an underground business across cities, and it is routinely cited as the pastime of indolent students at elite institutions of higher education in India. Hindu festivals where ganja and bhang are consumed by male devotees continue to take place in the public glare.

As if walking a tightrope, the act’s jugglery of indication, inclusion, and exclusion that didn’t name and yet transcoded bhang into law, symptomized the way the Indian republic continued to balance the paradoxes of Hindu custom and international law that Mookerjee had wrestled with. Using a play on words and names to exclude cannabis leaves, the act strategically protected bhang from the axe of prohibition. In northern and central India, bhang beverages commonly comprising milk, sugar, cream, spices, and nuts complement other confections, ranging from elaborate sweetmeats made with clarified butter or dried whole milk, to less complicated blends of cashews, almonds, cardamom, fennel seeds, and pepper. The popular consumption of the beverage, both in everyday life especially in temple towns and during prominent Hindu socioreligious festivities, made it an important object of protection. Although under colonial rule the state did not prohibit hemp drugs, laws did name bhang alongside ganja, charas, siddhi, and hashish as subject articles. The Dangerous Drugs Act (1930) defined all three—ganja, bhang, and charas—as intoxicating and dangerous, and provincial laws synonymized bhang with siddhi, and charas with the Arabic hashish. However, with the entire

plant prohibited, bhang could survive only as leaves that were “not-ganja” and mysteriously disconnected from flowering tops.

STORIES UNTOLD

The NDPS Act’s language betrayed the arbitrary and flawed ambition of all modern colonial laws and governmental regimes to name an intoxicant as complex as ganja in isolation from its relational environments and material histories. Such homogenizing laws have only reinforced arbitrary power. Since 1985, Indian federal and state governments have strengthened control of the circulation of leaves for bhang within state-licensed retail shops while severely policing ganja and charas in urban, mountainous, and borderland geographies.⁵⁴ The severity of policing, and the public display of drug seizures and arrests, continues to also generate its own underside as state officials have ample space to allow illicit cultivation and trade in exchange for favors and bribes. But the ultimate prohibition of the whole plant, with the caveat about leaves and seeds not accompanied by flowers, illustrates how the Indian state negotiated international institutional pressure on drugs legislation while tactically preserving, to a limited degree, regional cultures of Hindu cannabis use within the juridical borders of the nation-state.

In Bangladesh, Afzal’s 1970 account indexed the extent to which exports to districts now inside India were Naogaon’s source of renown. *Deshbhaag* (partition), Afzal recounted, had led to more than three-fourths of licensed legal ganja products being either burnt in public pyres or lost in canceled transactions between 1947 and 1950. The East Pakistan state allowed licensed ganja cultivation to continue between 1950 and 1970 on about one hundred bighas of land supervised by the Society, which as M. H. Shah, the registrar of co-operatives in East Pakistan noted, struggled with annual losses and a depleted market.⁵⁵ The Naogaon Ganja Society handed over the land and institution of the Government Bashir Uddin Memorial Co-operative Women’s College in Naogaon. Rent from residents in Society-owned shopfronts and residential quarters (Ganja Barracks) and cashflow from three-year leases on ponds and buildings like the large cold storage, and on the Mukti Theater of the erstwhile Coronation Hall Society, became its sole sustenance. Workers skilled in ganja fields began migrating to Nepal in the 1970s. The Society’s buildings, non-Bengali speakers in the region, Naogaon town, and Santahar station were also bound up in important, and notably violent, flashpoints in the war of liberation (*muktijuddho*) against Pakistan’s rule and Operation Searchlight in 1971. Many of Naogaon’s stories remain untold.

Afzal ended his poignant chapter on a somber note, predicting for his readers the eventual end of ganja cultivation as “America and the west” witnessed a rise in marijuana and LSD, spurring more international prohibitions in the 1960s. He was not wrong. The Bangladesh government and courts rigorously clamped down on ganja cultivation after 1974. Prohibitions on drugs became a critical feature of

aid negotiations with international bodies and the United States while spurring entirely new networks of smuggling in Bangladesh. Today, the Society's buildings lie in a sobering state of disrepair, the result of water damage and negligence, and archival documents in the record room have been destroyed as successive court battles remain stalled.⁵⁶ Yet, as demands for the legalization of the entire cannabis plant populate newspaper op-ed pages and internet forums in India and ideas for regenerating ganja cultivation in Naogaon are finding their own voice in Bangladesh, legacies of empire and the long nineteenth century appear ever more important to address.⁵⁷ A materialist history of the many biographies and itineraries of ganja and bhang in colonial India is barely exhausted by the questions answered in this book. But, if the stories told here are any indication, the coloniality of criminalizing ganja never foreclosed the abundant histories of its material flows. Ganja matters in new ways today, but who is to say that it doesn't matter in the ways it did before.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<i>antyaja</i>	low caste
<i>bhangkhor</i>	one who consumes bhang
<i>bhita</i> or <i>bhiti</i>	plot or demarcated area
<i>bigha</i>	unit of area measure, about one-third of an acre
<i>byapari</i>	wholesale trader, buyer
<i>chitak, chattak</i>	unit of weight
<i>chowki, chauki</i>	post or checkpoint, usually at market or dock sites
<i>dalal</i>	broker, agent for deal-making
<i>darogah</i>	constable or subinspector
<i>dhula mokkhon</i>	rubbing ash or earth upon one's skin
<i>diwani</i>	legal grant for revenue collection and civil administration
<i>doya</i>	divine blessings or mercy
<i>faria, fariah</i>	agent for market trade or activity
<i>ganjakhor</i>	one who consumes ganja
<i>goladar</i>	warehouse supervisory official
<i>golah</i>	warehouse or granary
<i>gomashtha</i>	agent or functionary of estate owners or capitalists
<i>hakim</i>	medical practitioner
<i>handi, haanri</i>	container, often for rice
<i>jog, yog</i>	meditation
<i>jukti, bochon</i>	proverbial reasonings or sayings

<i>kaliyuga, koli</i>	an age of moral decline
<i>katha, cottah</i>	unit of area
<i>khyati, bikhyato</i>	fame, famous
<i>kolki, chilim</i>	smoking pipes
<i>mahal</i>	area with land assessed for tax (literally, abode, palace)
<i>maund, mann</i>	units of weight
<i>mohajon, mahajan</i>	moneylender
<i>mudi (dokani)</i>	grocer or petty vendor
<i>munsif, kaji</i>	judge
<i>pancali, panchali</i>	genre of narrative poetry
<i>parakdar</i>	examiner of quality
<i>parakdari</i>	practice of inspection
<i>pice, paisa</i>	units of currency
<i>pir</i>	spiritual master
<i>puja, seba</i>	rites of devotion and service
<i>rajbari</i>	lordly household or royal estate
<i>ryot, raiyat</i>	peasant cultivator
<i>zamindar</i>	landlord
<i>zamindari</i>	large landed estate with revenue obligations

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Epigraph: Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 3.

1. In Bengali, *Ajo baroshoto moolyer ganja ognideb ke upohaar dilam*.
2. Clarke and Merlin, *Cannabis*.
3. Mills, *Cannabis Britannica*; Mills, *Madness, Cannabis, and Colonialism*.
4. The volume, influenced less by historical thought from South Asia than by David Courtwright's assessment of a global psychoactive revolution after World War II, turns important episodes into "case studies" to test Courtwright. Fischer-Tine and Tschurenev, *History of Alcohol and Drugs*; Moritz, "Looking for Spirituality."
5. Fischer-Tine and Tschurenev fail to appreciate Claude Markovits's suggestion in the afterword of their volume that opium and ganja in India offer other histories because of their everydayness, which didn't need a "psychoactive revolution."
6. Alter, *Wrestler's Body*, 154–57. Alter incorrectly uses "hashish" to refer to bhang.
7. Green, *Islam and the Army*.
8. Chaturvedi, "Of Peasants and Publics"; Chakrabarty, "Communal Riots and Labour," 164–65.
9. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 255–70; Pello, "Persian Poets on the Streets."
10. Haroon, "Custodianship of Shahidganj." See also Stewart, *Witness to Marvels*.
11. Mills and Richert, *Cannabis*; Anguelov and McCarthy, *From Criminalizing to Decriminalizing Marijuana*; Hudak, *Marijuana*.
12. Kozma, "Cannabis Prohibition in Egypt"; Kozma, "League of Nations and the Debate over Cannabis Prohibition"; Waetjen, "South Africa's Century of Cannabis Politics"; Waetjen, "Dagga," 83–108; McAllister, *Drug Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*.
13. Campos, *Home Grown*; Guba, *Taming Cannabis*; Ram, *Intoxicating Zion*; Duvall, *African Roots of Marijuana*; Angrosino, "Rum and Ganja," 101–16.

14. In the United States, for instance, settler colonialism, imperial wars, and race science find little sway in books such as N. Johnson, *Grass Roots*; Dufton, *Grass Roots*; or Stoa, *Craft Weed*. An important interdisciplinary exception is Reed, *Settler Cannabis*.

15. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*; Goodman, Lovejoy, and Sherratt, *Consuming Habits*; Miller, *Narrative Politics in Public Policy*; Potter and Weinstock, *High Time*; Koram, *The War on Drugs and the Global Colour Line*; Foster, *Long War on Drugs*; Farber, *The War on Drugs*.

16. Mello, *Pot for Profit*; Hecht, *Weed Land*; Corva and Meisel, *Routledge Handbook on Post-Prohibition Cannabis Research*.

17. *Oxford English Dictionary*, “matter, noun,” March 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115083?rskey=2CQmou&result=1>.

18. *Oxford English Dictionary*, “matter, verb,” March 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115085?rskey=2CQmou&result=3>.

19. Smith, *Entangled Itineraries*.

20. Two powerful examples are Subramaniam and Chatterjee, “Translations in Green”; and Gutierrez, *Unmaking Botany*.

21. I am drawing on Meloni’s argument about liberal consensus in biology. See Meloni, “Political Biology.”

22. Mills, *Cannabis Nation*.

23. Deb Roy and Attewell, *Locating the Medical*.

24. Ghiabi, *Drugs Politics*.

25. Guba, *Taming Cannabis*. On the poison-medicine spectrum, see Arnold, *Toxic Histories*.

26. Hazareesingh and Maat, *Local Subversions of Colonial Cultures*; Curry-Machado et al., *Oxford Handbook of Commodity History*; Curry-Machado, *Global Histories, Imperial Commodities, Local Interactions*.

27. Government of India (Financial) Resolution no. 3773, 17 December 1873, in *Papers, relating to the consumption of ganja in India*.

28. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*.

29. Burton, *Empire in Question*; Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*.

30. Burton, *Trouble with Empire*.

31. Ballantyne and Burton, *Empires and the Reach of the Global*.

32. On empire and the politics of difference, see Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*; Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*. On colonial difference, P. Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*.

33. On Indian commodity representations, see Eacott, *Selling Empire*; and Daly, *Empire Inside*.

34. Kim, *Empires of Vice*; Rimner, *Opium’s Long Shadow*; Farooqui, *Smuggling as Subversion*.

35. *Yearbook of Pharmacy, 1884–5*, 162; Warden, Dymock, and Hooper, *Pharmacographia Indica*.

36. Robinson, “Municipal Government and Muslim Separation in the United Provinces,” 76–77.

37. Roy’s arguments channeled then-emergent popular Brahminical Hindu nationalist arguments. See Pandey, *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*.

38. Richards, “Opium and the British Indian Empire”; Winther, *Anglo-European Science*; Madancy, “Smoke and Mirrors.”

39. Balachandran, "Debasing Indigenous Statehood"; van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*; Tejani, *Indian Secularism*.
40. On bhāng, the commission wanted taxation but not prohibition, citing moderate use in everyday and religious gatherings.
41. Bell, "Republican Imperialism," 166–91; Bell, "John Stuart Mill on Colonies," 34–64.
42. Froude, *History of England*, 59–60.
43. *Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission*, 265.
44. Goswami, *Producing India*, 44–45, 74–75.
45. The claim about sati exemplifies imperial liberal self-fashioning. The abolition debate was much more complex and gendered. See Mani, *Contentious Traditions*. Mill's passage on laissez-faire or the noninterference principle is in his *Principles of Political Economy*, 567–69.
46. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 190–217.
47. Henry Maine's liberalism, for instance, cast British government in India as a historically necessary experiment in despotism by the free-willed.
48. On coevalness, see Fabian, *Time and the Other*.
49. I am echoing Marder, *Time Is a Plant*; Ernwein, Palmer, and Ginn, *Work That Plants Do*; Mabberly, *Cultural History of Plants*.
50. Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*; Schiebinger, *Secret Cures of Slaves*; Drayton, *Nature's Government*; Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*; Osseo-Asare, *Bitter Roots*; Elliott, *Erasmus Darwin's Gardens*.
51. Kumar, "Seeds and the History of Science"; Kumar, *Indigo Plantations and Science in Colonial India*; Arnold, "Agriculture and 'Improvement' in Early Colonial India," 505–25.
52. M. Menon, "What's in a Name?," 87–111; Mukharji, "Vishalyakarani as Eupatorium Ayapana," 65–87.
53. As to imperial history, I draw on Breen, *Age of Intoxication*; Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*; and Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. On the importance of language and ecumenes in South Asia, I follow Ober, *Dust on the Throne*. On social history in Bengal and Orissa, see Sumit Sarkar, "Two Muslim Tracts for Peasants"; Tanika Sarkar, *Bengal, 1928–1934*; Sartori, "Categorical Logic of a Colonial Nationalism"; Datta, *Society, Economy, and the Market*; Chakraborty, *Empire of Labor*, 64–106; and Banerjee-Dube, "Religion, Power, and Law in Twentieth-Century India." On plant studies, see Nealon, *Plant Theory*; and Ogborn, "Talking Plants." Plant humanities is a growing field in India but still remains preoccupied with upper-caste men of science and letters, as the six great men reveal in Sumana Roy, *Plant Thinkers of Twentieth-Century Bengal*.
54. Govindrajana, *Animal Intimacies*.
55. On knowledge relations, see Khatun, *Australianama*. On writing histories against recuperation that foreground intrepid relations, see Arondekar, *Abundance*.
56. The urge for inseparability drives Mawani, Burton, and Frost's introduction to *Bio-cultural Empire*.
57. P. Chatterjee, Guha-Thakurta, and Kar, *New Cultural Histories of India*.
58. Delbourgo, "Knowing World," 373–99.
59. Kowal, *Haunting Biology*; Subramaniam, *Botany of Empire*.
60. Edwards, "Materialism of Historical Materialism."
61. Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 1–46; Nail, *Marx in Motion*.
62. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 327.
63. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 39.

64. Eaton, *Rise of Islam on the Bengal Frontier*; S. Banerjee, *Logic in a Popular Form*; d'Hubert, "Literary History"; Irani, *Muhammad Avatara*.

65. "Invented tradition," though dated, captures the modern provenance of Trinath quite well. Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, 1–13.

1. A TROUBLING SUBJECT

Epigraphs: Watt, *Hemp or Cannabis Sativa*, Linn., 1, 10, emphasis mine; *Indian Hemp Drugs Commission (IHDC) IV*, 46.

1. Damant, "Bengali Folklore," 271. Contemporary iterations use the motif in children's fiction. Kumar, *Thakurmar Jhuli*.

2. Bhattacharya, *Ghostly Past*, *Capitalist Presence*.

3. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*; Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze*.

4. Watt, *Hemp or Cannabis Sativa*, Linn., 10.

5. Grotenhermen and Russo, *Cannabis and Cannabinoids*, 123–42.

6. Parker, *Cannabinoids and the Brain*, 14.

7. Instead of an agent or actant, following Jane Bennett or Bruno Latour, I conceive of ganja as a form of matter that exerts an organizing force on relations of power surrounding it. See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; and Latour, *Reassembling the Social*.

8. Menon, "Making Useful Knowledge"; Drayton, *Nature's Government*; Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion*.

9. Burton, *Gender History*, 29.

10. Hem Chunder Kerr, *Report on the Cultivation of, and Trade, in Ganja in Bengal* (hereafter *Report on Ganja*), 9, BL/IOR/V/27/625/6A (emphasis mine).

11. Hem Chunder Kerr to Officiating Commissioner, Nuddea, 2 June 1860, *Papers Relating to Indigo Cultivation*, 608–9. The town's name is spelled Kalaroa.

12. S. Bhattacharya, "Indigo Revolt of Bengal," 13–23; Tirthankar Roy, "Indigo and Law in Colonial India," 60–75.

13. On Eden and Larmour, see Kling, *Blue Mutiny*, 70–75.

14. A. R. Young to Officiating Commissioner, Nuddea, 16 June 1860, in *Papers Relating to Indigo Cultivation*, 613–14. See Bhattacharya, "Indigo Revolt of Bengal."

15. H. L. Dampier to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 5 November 1864, in *Brief History of the Cyclone*, 57–62.

16. H. L. Dampier, Agricultural Department Resolution, 30 March 1874, in Kerr, *Report on Jute*.

17. C. T. Buckland, Minute 31 May 1877, IOR/V/27/625/6A/p. 1.

18. Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*; Subramaniam, *Botany of Empire*.

19. O'Shaughnessy, *On the Preparations of Indian Hemp or Gunjah*, 5.

20. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*, 8, 9.

21. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*, 8.

22. Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 13–17.

23. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*, 9.

24. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*, 9.

25. Prain, *Report on the Cultivation and Use*, 12, 5.

26. Descamps used the phrase *inutiles et vanescentes*, or "useless and vanishing," implying weak and impermanent. I'm grateful to Natalie Cobo for pointing this out.

27. Prain, *Report on the Cultivation and Use*, 2.
28. Ramamurthy, "Why Are Men Doing Floral Sex-Work?," 397–424.
29. Prain cites Danish missionaries in Tranquebar as the first Europeans to notice such plants, in 1778. Prain, *On the Morphology*, 68.
30. Prain, *On the Morphology*.
31. Masters, *Vegetable Teratology*.
32. Teratology had an extended life in race science, white supremacist movements, and colonial gynecology. See Swarr, *Envisioning African Intersex*; Bacon and Ruickbie, *Cultural Construction of Monstrous Children*; and Yao, "Gender Variance before Trans," 721–36.
33. Worsdell, *Principles of Plant-Teratology*, v–vi.
34. Prain, *On the Morphology*, 54.
35. Different geographies can produce substantially different plants of the same genus and family. See Clarke and Merlin, *Cannabis*.
36. *Shectoria* is different from the Sal tree (*Shorea robusta* L.) and the *shyaora*, the sandpaper tree (*Streblus asper* L.) in Bengali.
37. On botanizing, see Mukharji, "Vishalyakarani as Eupatorium Ayapana," 65–87.
38. Hem Chunder Kerr to Secretary, Board of Revenue, 2 April 1877, in Kerr, *Report on Ganja*, 2.
39. Today, *ananda* serves as the nominal root for "anandamide," the endocannabinoid fatty acid neurotransmitter in the human body.
40. Kerr referenced Herodotus's *Histories*, in particular his description of Scythians in the eastern Mediterranean throwing hemp seeds on hot stones for vapor baths. For similar genealogies, see Breen, "Where There's Smoke."
41. In 1807, William Jones had argued for Sanskrit's preferability over "vulgar dialects" in India. See Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 220–24.
42. Menon, "What's in a Name?," 87–111.
43. *IHDC IV*, 102.
44. *IHDC IV*, 321.
45. Grierson, *Bihar Peasant Life*, 243.
46. Prominent examples include Maconachie, *Selected Agricultural Proverbs of the Panjab*; and Fallon, *Dictionary of Hindustani Proverbs*. See also Shahid Amin, "Introduction," in Crooke, *Glossary of North Indian Peasant Life*. For an ode to proverbs as a genre, see Christian, *Behar Proverbs*.
47. Descriptions of ascetic figures like lone sannyasis and faquirs were a minor exception to this narrative.
48. *IHDC V*, 52.
49. *IHDC V*, 53.
50. The story originates in Puranic texts. Its most famous nationalist iteration was Prabhu Dayas's *Bharat Uddhar*, in which the figure of Mohandas Gandhi as Shiva protects Mother India from a British officer personified as Yama. The image was proscribed by the state in 1931. See Pinney, *Photos of the Gods*, 114.
51. *IHDC IV*, 11.
52. *Vazir* is Turko-Persian and is shared across South Asian languages.
53. *IHDC V*, 96–97.
54. *IHDC IV*, 168. Mukherji does not say whether the original was in Hindi or Bengali, though both languages would have contained similar words.

55. *IHDC IV*, 468.
56. The character of Kumbhakarna, a rakshasa in the Ramayana, was tricked by Vedic deities into sleeping for the entire year except for two days when he ate. *IHDC IV*, 468.
57. Tantras, a South Asian textual tradition dating to the seventh century CE, treat subjects of esoteric and popular practice like yoga, sexuality, and magic across Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shakta, Buddhist, and Jain philosophy. *IHDC IV*, 122.
58. *IHDC IV*, 268.
59. *IHDC IV*, 464.
60. *IHDC IV*, 283.
61. *IHDC V*, 510.
62. Ram likely used the Hindustani phrase “kisi shaayar ne kisi zamanein mein kaha hai.”
63. *IHDC V*, 511.
64. “*Ganja piye, gurgyaan ghate; aur ghate tan andar ka. Khonkhat khonkhat ganr phate; munh dekhe jaisa bandar ka*” (Should one smoke ganja, one would lose their guru’s lessons, as well as the span of their chest. As they cough and cough, their buttocks will blow, and their face will resemble an ape’s). Fallon, *Dictionary of Hindustani Proverbs*, 84.
65. *IHDC V*, 368–69.
66. On Dalit agricultural labor, see Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability*.
67. *IHDC V*, 368–69.
68. *IHDC V*, 94. Mewaram claimed to have found this proverb in Fallon, *Dictionary of Hindustani Proverbs*.
69. Fallon, *Dictionary of Hindustani Proverbs*, 40.
70. Lynch, *Divine Passions*, 91–115.
71. *IHDC V*, 96–97.
72. Fallon, *Dictionary of Hindustani Proverbs*, 200, 40.
73. *IHDC V*, 202, 346.
74. S. Banerjee, “Marginalization of Women’s Popular Culture”; P. Chatterjee, *Texts of Power*.
75. Mukhopadhyay, *Kolir Nobo Rong*.
76. “*Esho esho, amar baap esho, amar dhon esho, amar praaner lokkhon esho . . . amar dada na eley ey ganja khaabey ke?*”
77. In Bengali rhyme, “*naao, shaajo, khaao, dhaalo, [aar] gaao.*”
78. The phrase is *nijer shodeshiyo* (*desh* here means “village home”), though the scene suggests the setting is Calcutta.
79. In Bengali, “*chaataa ek chilim ganja, ebong moshari o ek chilim ganja.*”
80. In Bengali, *ek chilim teney to ulongo thakle hoy*.
81. Fallon, *Dictionary of Hindustani Proverbs*, 147.

2. A SMALL PEASANT COMMODITY

Epigraph: Afzal, *Naogan Mohkumar Itihash*, 43.

1. Chaudhuri, *Rajshahir Sankshipto Itihash*, 10–12, 57, BL/VT/1885/1901.
2. Report, 30 April 1873, in Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, 61 (emphasis mine). The political district of Rajshahi was spelt Rajshahye in official reports.

3. Goswami, *Producing India*, 188–208.
4. In 1871, the *Ronjika* had a circulation of 275 copies. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, 92.
5. Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital*, 121.
6. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*.
7. “Homestead” usually meant a small unit consisting of a dwelling, cattle shed, and kitchen, often shared among families with varying kinds of private rights. As the literature on categories such as *chashi*, *khudkasht*, and *pahikasht* suggest, caste-based labor and familial occupations in rural eastern Bengal shaped the key distinctions between village households of artisans and craftspeople that relied solely on market commerce and other households of tillers, tenants, and hired laborers.
8. Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur* (emphasis mine).
9. On smallholding peasantries, see chapters 1 and 5 in Bose, *Agrarian Bengal*.
10. I draw on inspiration from Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire*.
11. Hem Chunder Kerr to Secretary, Board of Revenue, Government of India, 2 April 1877, BL/IOR/V/27/625/6A.
12. Kerr’s date is an approximation. It is likely to have been 1720 CE, according to lunar calendar conversion. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*, 13.
13. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*, 12.
14. Hunter called the decision “probably intentional.” Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, 21.
15. Chowdhury-Zilli, *Vagrant Peasant*.
16. Summary of the Consultations of 28 April 1770, in Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, 26, 417. As functionaries, *aumils* predated colonial rule and were likely to be large landholders tasked with revenue collection reporting to a British officer. Hollingberry, *Zemindary Settlement*, 124–26; Ascoli, *Early Revenue History*.
17. Damodaran, “Famine in Bengal,” 143–81; McLane, *Land and Local Kingship*, 194–222.
18. Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*, 18–22. On the immediate drain of silver specie from Bengal to China, see Steuart, *Principles of Money*.
19. O’Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Jessore*, 78.
20. Westland, *Report on the District of Jessore*, 11.
21. Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*, 21.
22. Sixty thousand maunds equates approximately to 4.9 million pounds of ganja.
23. Westland, *Report on the District of Jessore*, 158–59, 160.
24. Westland, *Report on the District of Jessore*, 170.
25. Stern, *The Company-State*; Travers, *Ideology and Empire*.
26. On Natore, see Marshall, *Bengal, the British Bridgehead*, 16–17. On Natore in zamindari histories, see McDermott, *Mother of My Heart*, 17–31. Today, Boalia is the town of Rajshahi in Rajshahi district.
27. Despite the initial success of such experiments, Rajshahi never became a major jute-growing district.
28. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, 24.
29. Some peasants would briefly grow wheat (*gom*) and barley (*job*).
30. Iqbal, *Bengal Delta*.
31. Chaudhuri, *Rajshahir Samkshipta Itihash*.

32. See Edney, *Mapping an Empire*.
33. Nelson, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations*, 5. One acre was roughly 3.02 bighas, implying 17,570 acres of cultivable land.
34. Nelson, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations*, 62.
35. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, 72, 74.
36. Nundjee, *Report on the Survey and Settlement of the Dubalhati Estate*, BL/IOR/P/4098/LR nos. 9–10/July 1892.
37. It is unclear whether this was Nawab Mubarak Ali Khan II or his heir Nawab Mansur Ali Khan, who formally held the titular seat of the Nawabi from 1838 to 1880, when it was abolished.
38. Munshi Nundjee to Collector of Rajshahye, 10 August 1891, in Nundjee, *Report on the Survey and Settlement of the Dubalhati Estate*, 2.
39. Nundjee, *Report on the Survey and Settlement of the Dubalhati Estate*, 6.
40. Nundjee, *Report on the Survey and Settlement of the Dubalhati Estate*, 6–7.
41. Misra, *Becoming a Borderland*, 100–104.
42. P. Banerjee, *Politics of Time*, 92–112.
43. B. B. Chaudhuri, *Peasant History of Late Pre-Colonial and Colonial India*, 314–19.
44. Bose, *Agrarian Bengal*.
45. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, 37.
46. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 4.
47. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal VIII*, 65.
48. “*Dhoray jahara roudro-brishti-hime jomiya jan ba goliya jan, tahaderi onnadi prosuto korar jonne eto potnir proyojon.*” Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 48.
49. Ali, *Local History*.
50. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 4.
51. Besides works by Jasodhara Bagchi, Sugata Bose, and Tariq Omar Ali, and essays by Rajat Datta and others in K. Roy, *Looking Within, Looking Without*, see Chowdhry, *Political Economy of Production and Reproduction*; and Agarwal, *Field of One’s Own*.
52. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 168. Mahua Sarkar’s formulation of capital-positing labor further informs my analysis of social relations. See M. Sarkar, “Work out of Place,” 1–8.
53. For brief analyses of Santal social systems in eastern Bengal, see Hossain and Sadeque, “Santals of Rajshahi”; Gomes, *The Paharias*; and Sen Chowdhury, *The Santal Women*.
54. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 16–17.
55. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*.
56. Proceedings, 21 April 1831, BNA/RDR/45/1831/p. 173.
57. “*Jahara bohudin hoitey ashiya uponibash sthapon koriyachey,*” or “those that have arrived to set up home over the years.”
58. *Porishrom* and *shorol-mon* were common Bengali stereotypes of the Santal—laborious yet so “simple” as to be “primitive.”
59. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 5.
60. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*.
61. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 5–6.
62. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*.
63. Kerr notes the term *pagarbandha* for the raised bounding of the field.

64. The *moi* were usually purchased from Rajshahi jail, where prisoners were tasked with manufacturing bamboo products as part of convict labor practices.
65. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 8.
66. *Indian Museum Notes* 5, no. 4 (1903): 22–23.
67. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Jessore*, 125.
68. Prain, *Report on the Cultivation and Use*, 4.
69. Reprinted in Chopra and Chopra, *Present Position of Hemp-Drug Addiction*.
70. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, 68.
71. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*.
72. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*.
73. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*.
74. Prain, *Report on the Cultivation and Use*, 23.
75. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*.
76. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*.
77. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*.
78. *Bhita*, or *bhiti*, is a term for the ganja plot, implying the purchase of the standing crop on the plot.
79. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 10.
80. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 46.
81. Kerr, *Report on Ganja*.

3. AN EXCISE STATE

Epigraph: IHDC Report, 289 (emphasis mine).

1. Bayly, *Indian Society*; Washbrook, "Indian Economy."
2. A fuller analysis of excise as a tool of political economy remains to be carried out.
3. Cohn, "Representing Authority."
4. Richards, "Opium and the British Indian Empire"; Hardiman, *Coming of the Devi*; N. Bhattacharya, "Problem of Alcohol in Colonial India"; Colvard, "World Without Drink"; N. Menon, "Battling the Bottle"; Copland, *Princes of India*; Mills, *Madness, Cannabis, and Colonialism*; Mills, *Cannabis Britannica*.
5. On the Dutch United Provinces between 1580 and 1770, see Tracy, *Founding of the Dutch Republic*; Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*; De Vries and van der Woude, *First Modern Economy*; and Gelderblom, *Political Economy of the Dutch Republic*.
6. Dunthorne, *Britain and the Dutch Revolt*; Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*; Ormrod, *Rise of Commercial Empires*; Scott, *How the Old World Ended*; Como, *Radical Parliamentarians*; Rees, *Leveller Revolution*; Purkiss, *Literature, Gender, and Politics During the English Civil War*.
7. Brien and Hunt, "Rise of a Fiscal State in England, 1485–1815"; Walsh, "Fiscal State in Ireland"; Yeomans, "Taxation, State Formation, and Governmentality."
8. Excise was the eighth of fourteen principal reasons Child cited to emulate the Dutch. Child, *Brief Observations concerning Trade and Interest of Money*. On Child in the East India Company, see Stern, *The Company-State*; Hunt and Stern, *English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*.
9. Ashworth, *Customs and Excise*.

10. Private excise collectors were called gaugers and wretches. Ní Mhurchadha, "Excise Service in Fingal." On military uses of excise revenues, Gentles, *New Model Army*; Beckett, "Land Tax or Excise"; J. Brown, "Alehouse Licensing and State Formation."

11. *Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Strahan, 1755).

12. Coffman, *Excise Taxation*. On the hated exciseman, Boswell, *Disaffection and Everyday Life in Interregnum England*; and Hunt, "Women and the Fiscal-Imperial State," 29–47.

13. Coffman, *Excise Taxation*, 183–99. See also Skinner, "The State"; Goodhart, "Theory in Practice."

14. Nye, *War, Wine, and Taxes*. The largely Whiggish debate on English protectionism and fiscal growth began with North and Weingast, "Constitutions and Commitment."

15. Coffman, *Excise Taxation*, 183–99. For theoretical discussions of fiscal history, see Whiteside, "Beyond Death and Taxes."

16. Outside excise in Anglophone imperial republicanism, the *taille* and *gabelle*, not to mention the exploitative *aide*, were crucial to French imperialism. Kwaas, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation*.

17. On salt excises, see Ray, "Imperial Policy and the Decline of the Bengal Salt Industry." In 1750–65, other Company excises in Calcutta briefly included fish, firewood, and by one account, slaves. Blyn, "Revenue Administration of Calcutta."

18. Coffman, *Excise Taxation*, 57–58, 183–89. See also Boyer, "Borrowed Rhetoric"; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*.

19. Coffman, *Excise Taxation*, 183–89.

20. Braddick, "Popular Politics and Public Policy."

21. Chatterji, "Abolition of the Cotton Excise."

22. M. Gupta, *Analytical Survey of Bengal Regulations and Acts of Parliament relating to India up to 1833*, 393.

23. "Modification of the Abkaree System," Draft no. 362/79606/Separate Revenue/1841, BL/IOR/F/4/1952/85009.

24. The farming system fed supply chains to Java, Siam, China, and Malaya. Trocki, *Opium, Empire, and Global Political Economy*.

25. On Madras, spirits, and excise, see Mallampalli, *Race, Religion, and Law in Colonial India*.

26. Correspondences of the Board of Revenue, BL/IOR/P/368/p. 9.

27. Mills, *Cannabis Britannica*.

28. *IHDC Report*, 304.

29. S. G. L. Platts, Deputy Commissioner, Excise and Salt, Calcutta, to Commissioner of Excise and Salt, Bengal, 22 May 1915, BNA/Finance/Excise/E.1G-6/1/Nov 1917/pp. 21–43.

30. Platts to Commissioner of Excise and Salt, 25.

31. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*; Karim, "Rajshahi Zamindars."

32. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 37.

33. On the Office's administrative role, see O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Rajshahi*, 141–45.

34. Proceedings of the Collectorate of Rajshahee, BNA/RDR/117/1855/p. 293.

35. Proceedings of the Collectorate of Rajshahee, BNA/RDR/117/1855/p. 331.

36. Proceedings of the Collectorate of Rajshahee, BNA/RDR/114/1856.

37. Britain's Mandate territories after World War I are prominent examples. Brennan, *Taiifa*.

38. A pie was a subunit, equal to one-third, of a pice, and 64 pice equaled a rupee. Proceedings of the Collectorate of Rajshahye, BNA/RDR/38/1829/p. 19.
39. The exact value was Rs. 11, 13, 1. BNA/RDR/38/1829/p. 16.
40. Proceedings of the Collectorate of Rajshahye, BNA/RDR/38/1829/p. 63.
41. Proceedings of the Collectorate of Rajshahye, BNA/RDR/45/1831/p. 47.
42. Proceedings of the Collectorate of Rajshahye, BNA/RDR/45/1831/p. 47.
43. Gopal Ghose to Commissioner of Rajshahi, 15 April 1863, Proceedings of the Collectorate of Rajshahi, BNA/RDR/140/1864/p. 271.
44. Commissioner of Excise to Collector of Rajshahi, 5 June 1863, Proceedings of the Collectorate of Rajshahi, BNA/RDR/140/1864/p. 271.
45. Collector of Rajshahi to the Secretary, Board of Revenue, Fort William, 5 October 1855, Correspondences of the Rajshahi Collectorate, 1854–55, BNA/RDR/117/1855/p. 337. Separately, see also *Report of the Abkaree Revenue of the Lower Provinces for the Official Year 1853–4*, 3.
46. Collector of Rajshahi to the Secretary, Board of Revenue, Fort William, 5 October 1855.
47. See Correspondences of the Collectorate of Rajshahi, BNA/RDR/140/1864/p. 195.
48. Trocki, *Opium, Empire, and Global Political Economy*.
49. The scales cost 19 rupees, 15 anna, 3 pice. Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, to Collector of Rajshahi, 15 March 1856, BNA/RDR/114/1856; Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 4.
50. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 2.
51. *Report on the Abkarry Revenue of the Lower Provinces for 1852–53*, 6.
52. *Report on the Abkarry Revenue of the Lower Provinces for 1861–62*, 5–6.
53. Mills, *Cannabis Britannica*, 82–98.
54. The first scales, introduced in 1856, cost Rs. 19-15-3. Standardized weights and measures arrived in 1863. Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, to Collector of Rajshahi, 15 March 1856.
55. *Report on the Abkarry Revenue of the Lower Provinces for 1868–69*, 10; *Report on the Abkarry Revenue of the Lower Provinces for 1866–67*, 8–9.
56. *Report on the Abkarry Revenue of the Lower Provinces for 1866–67*, 24–25; *Report on the Abkarry Revenue of the Lower Provinces for 1872–73*, 25.
57. Proceedings of the Collectorate of Rajshahi, BNA/RDR/140/1864/Appendix.
58. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*.
59. Chakrabarti terms this “*tatvabodhon*” and “*ganja bishoy upodesh*.”
60. For a list, see Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, 100.
61. Map showing incidence of revenue, 1891–99, in O’Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Rajshahi*, appendix.
62. Rainy, *Report on the Manufacture and Smuggling of Ganja*; Prain, *Report on the Cultivation and Use*.
63. A. N. Moberly to Secretary of Finance, Government of Bengal, 5 January 1918, BNA/Finance/Excise/Progs 67–68/Executive Orders 1916–17.
64. Retailers on either side of the Hooghly River in Calcutta and the 24 Parganas were a noted example.
65. *Report of the Commission appointed by the Government of Bengal to enquire into the Excise of Country Spirit in Bengal, 1883–84*, vols. 1 and 2.
66. Among other facts, this observation is glaringly absent in Hynd’s appraisal of British Bengal’s ganja governance. See Hynd, “Ganja and the Government of India.”

67. Rainy, *Report on the Manufacture and Smuggling of Ganja*, 25, 34–35.
68. Rainy, *Report on the Manufacture and Smuggling of Ganja*, 16.
69. Rainy, *Report on the Manufacture and Smuggling of Ganja*, 25, 8.
70. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Rajshahi*, 135.
71. Rainy, *Report on the Manufacture and Smuggling of Ganja*, 31.
72. NAI/Fin/Separate Revenue/Progs 532–33/Nov 1909.
73. Jagadish Chandra Sen to Secretary of Finance, 2 Febr 1909, NAI/Fin/Separate Revenue/Progs 532–33/November 1909/594 E.G.
74. Sarat Chandra Bose to Rajshahi Collectorate, 27 January 1909, NAI/Finance/Separate Revenue/Progs 532–33/November 1909.
75. Correspondence between Saratchandra Bose, Collector of Rajshahi, and Excise Commissioner, 22 May 1915, NAI/Finance/Separate Revenue/Progs 532–33/November 1909.
76. Statement I (Number and Nature of Ganja Cases), in S. G. L. Platts, Deputy Commissioner, Excise and Salt, Calcutta, to Commissioner of Excise and Salt, Bengal, 22 May 1915, BNA/Finance/Excise/E.1G-6/1/Nov 1917/p. 39.
77. Platts to Commissioner of Excise and Salt, 15–16.
78. Rainy, *Report on the Manufacture and Smuggling of Ganja*, 33.
79. Antiexcise histories are too numerous to cover here. See Hardiman, *Coming of the Devi*.
80. "Restriction on intoxicating liquors and drugs," Bengal Legislative Council, Progs. Vol. IV/29 August–6 September 1921/pp. 299–343.

4. AN INSURGENT BODY

Epigraph: Emphasis mine.

1. Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press*, 13.
2. Stokes, *Peasant Armed*; Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*; T. Roy, *Politics of a Popular Uprising*; Wagner, *Great Fear of 1857*.
3. Metcalf, *Aftermath of Revolt*; Anderson, *Indian Uprising of 1857–58*; Fuerst, *Indian Muslim Minorities and the 1857 Rebellion*; Wagner, *Skull of Alam Bheg*; Tignol, *Grief and the Shaping of Muslim Communities*.
4. The widest collection of themes is in Bates and Major, *Mutiny at the Margins*. See also Fisher, "Multiple Meanings of 1857 for Indians in Britain."
5. Bhadra, "Four Rebels of 1857," 229–75.
6. Paintings of bhang drinking in everyday gatherings in Punjab, Bihar, and Awadh often show straining through cloth into glasses.
7. Butler, "Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions."
8. Stephens, "Phantom Wahhabi," 22–52.
9. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*.
10. Burton, *Burdens of History*, 97–126.
11. Guba, *Taming Cannabis*, 150–214.
12. My emphasis on creation and generation draws on Mrinalini Sinha's approach, drawing on Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *événement matrice*, to the Mother India controversy. See Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*, 4–6.

13. Mills, *Madness, Cannabis, and Colonialism*.
14. Compare Guba, *Taming Cannabis*, with Campos, *Homegrown*, 81–180.
15. Mills, *Cannabis Britannica*, 82–92.
16. News from India had attracted avid readers in England since the late eighteenth century. Marshall, *Making and Unmaking of Empires*.
17. Major, *Sovereignty and Social Reform in India*; Yang, “Whose Sati?”
18. For feminist scholarship on sati, see Mani, *Contentious Traditions*; and Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 1–60.
19. Statham, *Indian Recollections*, 132–33.
20. I use “conjuncture” following Stuart Hall’s use of the term. The 1830s were a period of intense imperial convergence of historical and literary representations of British India. See Hall, *Cultural Studies*.
21. Fryer, *New Account of East-India and Persia*, 32. Fryer’s work was edited and reprinted several times, most notably by William Cooke, Thomas Roe, and other prominent civil servants. The text provided much material for Yule and Burnell’s glossary *Hobson Jobson* and was also published and circulated by the Hakluyt Society.
22. Murray et al., *Historical and Descriptive Account*.
23. Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs*, 2nd ed., 355–56.
24. Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs*, 1st ed., 402.
25. “Indian Bhang,” *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal*, 27 January 1849, 62–63
26. On the demedicalization of Egyptian hashish, see Guba, *Taming Cannabis*, 150–86.
27. “Indian Bhang,” *Gazette of the Union*, 10 March 1849, 152–53.
28. Guba, *Taming Cannabis*, 63.
29. Rogers and Lorimer, *Madras Quarterly Medical Journal*, 274–78, 275.
30. On Burton’s career, see Kennedy, *Highly Civilized Man*.
31. Burton, *Sindh*, 165.
32. Burton, *Sindh*, 46, 167, 252, 171–72.
33. On the formation of the Jalali Sufis and Jalaluddin Surkh-Posh Bukhari, see Suvo-rova, *Muslim Saints*, 148–55.
34. Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 220.
35. Dirks, “Policing of Tradition,” 182–212; S. Banerjee, “City of Dreadful Night”; Oddie, *Popular Religion, Elites, and Reforms*; R. Brown, “Abject to Object,” 203–17.
36. Statham, *Indian Recollections*, 118. For another account, via Richard Blechynden, see Robb, “Children, Emotion, Identity, and Empire,” 185–86.
37. Johnson, *The Stranger in India*, 123–26.
38. Sturman, *Governance of Social Life*; Dirks, “Policing of Tradition.”
39. Beaufort, *Digest of the Criminal Law*, 765.
40. “The Churruck Poojah,” *Indian News and Chronicle of Eastern Affairs*, 14 June 1856, 278.
41. “Delhi,” *Manchester Guardian*, 15 July 1857, 2.
42. Palmer, *Mutiny Outbreak at Meerut*; R. Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*.
43. “Delhi.”
44. Harsey to Secretary, Government of India, 9 April 1857, in Chick, *Annals*, 66.
45. “East Indies,” *London Morning Post*, 11 December 1839.
46. “The Anticipated Outbreak at Oude,” *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 22 October 1855, 2.
47. Usmani, “A Note on the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Rohilkhand,” 618–24; Hussain, “Bareilly in 1857.”

48. "The Rebels at Bareilly," *London Examiner*, 5 June 1858.
49. Both newspapers carried this report on 18 July 1857.
50. "Letters from Delhi," *Hertford Mercury and Reformer*, 5 September 1857.
51. "The Action on the 14th before Delhi," *Hereford Times*, 19 September 1857.
52. "The Indian Mutinies," *London Daily News*, 1 October 1857.
53. "Second Mutiny at Neemuch," *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, 4 October 1857.
54. "The Indian Revolt: Origin and History of the Bengal Mutiny," *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 5 September 1857.
55. "Race and Religion in India," *London Observer*, 4 April 1858.
56. "Race and Religion in India."
57. Khan, "Wahabis in the 1857 Revolt."
58. On the afterlives of imperial anxieties concerning Wahhabis, see Stephens, "Phantom Wahhabi." For earlier iterations of paranoia about Islam, see Mallampalli, *A Muslim Conspiracy in British India?*
59. "Race and Religion in India."
60. Krishnan, *Reading the Global*, 78–93.
61. Spores, *Running Amok*; McCollom, "History on Its Side."
62. Wallace, "Nana Sahib," 592.
63. Frith, "Rebel or Revolutionary?," 368–82; Wagner, "Vengeance Against England."
64. Lakshmi, "Mutiny Novel," 1746–53.
65. Glazzard, *Case of Sherlock Holmes*, 128.
66. "Indian," "Nana Sahib," *London Journal*, 5 July 1862, 7.
67. "The Effects of Bhang," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 December 1874, 8.
68. Berridge, *Opium and the People*; Milligan, *Pleasures and Pains*.
69. "Nana Sahib," *Saturday Review*, 31 October 1874.
70. Regional histories of princely states generally concur in viewing subsidiary status and hegemonic power as twinned dynamics between Indian sovereigns and the crown. See, e.g., Pati and Ernst, "People, Princes, and Colonialism"; Ramusack, *Indian Princes and Their States*; Segura-Garcia, "The Raj's Uncanny Other."
71. Wagner, *Great Fear of 1857*, 87.
72. "The Fall of Delhi," *Leeds Times*, 21 November 1857.
73. "The Leaguer of Lucknow: Havelock's Last March," *London Daily News*, 16 January 1858.
74. Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*; Streets, *Martial Races*.
75. "Entrenched Camp Guard, Cawnpore," *Norfolk Chronicle*, 23 January 1858.
76. The N-word was a racial epithet used frequently outside the continental United States, here used by white soldiers to describe Indians. On the term's usage, see Pryor, "Ety-mology of the N-Word."
77. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 67. This moment anticipated controversies over blackness and imperial democracy. For a discussion, see A. Burton, "Tongues Untied."
78. "Entrenched Camp Guard, Cawnpore."
79. "London," *London Morning Post*, 22 March 1858.
80. "London."
81. On imperial careering, see Lambert and Lester, *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire*.
82. Wood, *Revolt in Hindustan*, 43–46; Wagner, *Skull of Alam Bheg*.

83. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 12 September 1857. Vasily Vereshchagin, the famous Russian realist painter, reproduced the practice in his 1884 work *The Suppression of the Indian Revolt by the English*.

84. "India: Another Great Victory," *Leeds Times*, 19 June 1858.

85. Campbell, *Narrative of the Indian Revolt*, 52, 80.

86. Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj*, 130–33; C. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars*, 298–302.

87. The report from the *London Times* was syndicated across the world. See "The Battle of Bareilly: Desperate Attack by Fanatical Mussulmans," *Dundee Courier*, 7 July 1858; "The Attack on Bareilly," *Illustrated Times*, 14 August 1858.

88. See Anderson, "Transportation of Narain Sing"; Streets, *Martial Races*.

89. Carter and Bates, "Empire and Locality"; Wagner, *Skull of Alam Bheg*; C. Anderson, "Convicts and Coolies."

90. "The Present State of India," *Essex Standard*, 6 August 1858. The *Nottinghamshire Guardian* published the editorial the day before.

91. Orion, "Indian Affairs," *London Standard*, 19 September 1857.

92. "Imperial Parliament," *Examiner*, 15 August 1857.

93. "India," *Leeds Times*, 15 August 1857.

94. "Lecture on the Opium Traffic," *Cheshire Observer*, 5 February 1859.

95. "The Traffic in Opium," *Bury and Norwich Post*, 4 March 1859.

96. Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire*; Robb, "On the Rebellion of 1857." On the subsequent reproduction of Englishness through mutiny site touring, see Goswami, "Englishness on the Imperial Circuit."

97. Ingram, "The Queen's Urdu."

98. Herbert, *War of No Pity*.

99. Mills, *Madness, Cannabis, and Colonialism*, 43–65; Rajpal, *Curing Madness?*, 19–65.

100. Mills, *Madness, Cannabis, and Colonialism*, 64.

101. Lemon, *Addiction and Devotion in Early Modern England*, 7–10.

102. McCracken, "Christianity's Addiction."

5. A SUBALTERN DEITY

Epigraph: IHDC IV, 64.

1. Wise, *Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal*, 184–86.

2. This approach to the category of the subaltern is revisited afresh in I. Banerjee and Dube, *Routledge Handbook of Subalterns Across History*.

3. Chatterjee uses the phrase "revolt of the spirit" for popular religious cults of oppressed castes in Bengal. P. Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*, 194–5.

4. P. Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*, 195–96.

5. P. Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*, 198.

6. D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 104–5.

7. I do not use "syncretic" as a normative category, following Hatcher, *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse*, 3–21. See Oddie, *Religious Traditions in South Asia*; and A. Roy, *Islamic Syncretistic Tradition*. See also, S. Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings*; and Green, "The Faqir and the Subalterns."

8. Eaton, *Rise of Islam on the Bengal Frontier*. See also I. Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends*.
9. Bhatia, *Unforgetting Chaitanya*. The literature on bhava is extensive. See, for example, McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*; Sanyal, *Trends of Change*; Sardella and Wong, *Legacy of Vaisnavism*; and Stewart, *Final Word*.
10. Urban, "Songs of Ecstasy"; T. Sarkar, "Caste, Sect, and Hagiography," 69–120; Chatterjee, "Caste and Subaltern Consciousness," 169–209; Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest, and Identity in Colonial India*; Bandyopadhyay, "Caste and Popular Religion," 77–107.
11. S. Banerjee, *Logic in a Popular Form*, 3.
12. Cantu and Zakaria, *City of Mirrors*.
13. Banerjee, *Logic in a Popular Form*, 9, 119–43; Urban, *Economics of Ecstasy*. See also Stewart, *Witness to Marvels*, 106, 241, 259.
14. Schendel, *History of Bangladesh*.
15. Eaton, *Rise of Islam on the Bengal Frontier*, 282–86.
16. Iqbal, *Bengal Delta*, 67–82.
17. Bhatia, *Unforgetting Chaitanya*.
18. Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*.
19. On the myriad Vaishnava orders and publics, see Bhatia, *Unforgetting Chaitanya*, 53–89; and Openshaw, *Seeking Bauls of Bengal*, 82–94.
20. Ray, *Mymensingher Sadharon Grihastha Musulman Poribare Anusthito Kayekti Sinni o achar-niyamera vivarana*.
21. Ray, *Mymensingher Sadharon Grihastha Musulman Poribare Anusthito Kayekti Sinni o achar-niyamera vivarana*; A. Roy, *Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, 211–12.
22. Sukumar Sen assumes the same in *Bangla Sahityera Itihash*.
23. On eastern and central India, see Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars*; Datta, *Society, Economy, and the Market*; Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade*; K. Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics, and Society*; and T. Mukherjee, "Markets in Eighteenth-Century Bengal Economy."
24. On intoxication and heterodoxy, see Ewing, "Malangs of the Punjab"; Green, *Islam and the Army*; and Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*.
25. Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*, 182–83.
26. *IHDC IV*, 44–47.
27. *Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission*, 161.
28. On Calcutta's small-book market, A. Ghosh, *Power in Print*.
29. *IHDC IV*, 253.
30. *IHDC IV*, 253, 254.
31. *IHDC IV*, 166.
32. Although the cover and its verso name no author, the copy preserved by the Imperial Library, now at the British Library, was catalogued with an author named Ananda Chandra Raya. Raya, *Trinather Pancali*, BL/VT/1451/1872.
33. *Jantra* literally meant "machine" or "instrument" and commonly referred to printing presses.
34. *Dacca Prakash*, 3 June 1877. The piece also suggested ganja use could induce sexual violence in "bad characters."
35. On the *bhadralok* and literature, see Herder, "Modern Babu," 358–401; Chaudhuri, *Gentlemen Poets*; T. Bhattacharya, *Sentinels of Culture*; and Tapti Roy, "Disciplining the Printed Text."
36. *Calcutta Review* 74 (1882): xvi–xvii.
37. P. Chatterjee, *Princely Impostor?*, 24–25.

38. Kaviraj, *Trinathera Pancali*, BL/VT/1387/1874. It is possible this was Jagannatha Ray Chowdhuri, patriarch of the Baliati zamindari in Dacca, after whom Jagannath College was named.

39. Manna, *Trinathera Pancali*, BL/VT/1413/1875. Manna's edition was reprinted once, in 1877. See BL/VT/1932/1877.

40. "Gour rupe obotori hori naam diya, Bobo maajhe paapi lok probhu uddhariya. Na purilo mon aash probhu utkonthito, Obotirno tore naath holen tvorito. Raya, *Trinather Pancali*, BL/VT/1451/1872/p. 1.

41. On the historical memory of Chaitanya and Hindu middle classes, see Bhatia, *Unforgetting Chaitanya*.

42. D'Hubert, *Literary History of Bengal*.

43. Manuel, *Tales, Tunes, and Tassa Drums*, 198–200.

44. Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*.

45. On troupes, see d'Hubert, "Patterns of Composition," 423–43. Also, see Basu, *Poet's Song*, 71–119.

46. D'Hubert, "Patterns of Composition."

47. *Kintu jukti kori shar, Je puja proja-rajjar/Shomo shadhyo koribaar pare*

48. Raya, *Trinather Pancali*, BL/VT/1451/1872/pp. 6–8.

49. Raya, *Trinather Pancali*, BL/VT/1451/1872/p. 12.

50. Raya, *Trinather Pancali*, BL/VT/965/1872/p. 2.

51. Raya, *Trinather Pancali*, BL/VT/965/1872/p. 12.

52. Raya, *Trinather Pancali*, BL/VT/966/1873.

53. Raya, *Trinathera Pancali*, BL/VT/1387/1874.

54. Raya, *Trinathera Pancali*, BL/VT/1387/1877.

55. Dimock, "Doctrine and Practice."

56. Kaviraj, *Trinathera Pancali*, BL/VT/1387/1877/p. 4.

57. In verse, "buddhi hoye wriddhi."

58. On the deity, see Starza, *Jagannatha Temple at Puri*.

59. *IHDC IV*, 64.

60. *IHDC IV*, 56–58.

61. *IHDC IV*, 58.

62. *IHDC IV*, 515, 516, 318, 442–43, 209.

63. *IHDC IV*, 247.

64. *IHDC IV*, 478–79.

65. The Ilbert Bill and age of consent debates in the 1880s marked two of many such contests. See Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*.

66. *IHDC IV*, 104, 141, 475, 476.

67. *Report on the Excise Administration of Bengal, 1874–5*, 29.

68. *Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission*, 134.

69. *IHDC IV*, 409–10, 411, 473, 474.

70. Sarbadhikary, *Place of Devotion*.

71. *IHDC IV*, 114, 113, 115.

72. On Assam plantations, see Behal, *One Hundred Years*; Varma, *Coolies of Capitalism*; Sharma, *Empire's Garden*; Ghosh, *Market for Aboriginality*.

73. *IHDC IV*, 535–37.

74. Eaton, *Rise of Islam on the Bengal Frontier*, 280–81.

75. Banerjee, *Logic in a Popular Form*.
76. For diverging views, see Eaton, *Rise of Islam on the Bengal Frontier*; and A. Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition*, 141–60.
77. A. Roy, *Islam in South Asia*, 100–120.
78. *IHDC IV*, 567, 576, 579, 546, 556, 562.
79. S. Sarkar, “Kalki-Avatar of Bikrampur,” 1–53.
80. S. Sarkar, “Kalki-Avatar of Bikrampur,” 20–21.
81. T. Sarkar, “Talking About Scandals.”
82. The cited edition, by Maheshchandra Das, was published in Calcutta by Kanailal Shil and Tarachand Das, which lists a ninth edition. Das mentions contemporary versions by Kaliprasanna Vidyaratna and Ashvinikumar Tatvanidhi, in addition to that by Ambikacharan Biswas. Chakrabarti, *Bhasha Sahitya Sanskriti*, 187–90. I am grateful to Rajarshi Ghose for sharing this source with me.
83. Jyotirbhushan, *Trinather Pancali*, NL/924.15/182, n.d.
84. Shastri, *Trinather Pancali*, BL/EAP/SCTR/425.
85. In Bengali, “*nimmosrenir jonoshadharoner debota*.” Chakrabarti, *Bhasha Sahitya Sanskriti*, 187. I’m grateful to Rajarshi Ghose for sharing this source with me.
86. Gupta, *Bikrampurur Itihash*, 372.
87. Nandasarma, *Sri Trinatha Purana*. On Chaitanya in Orissa, see Lahiri, *Chaitanya Movement in Eastern India*, 272–74.
88. Roy, “The Evolution of a New Hindu God.”
89. Chakrabarti, *Bhasha Sahitya Sanskriti*, 188.
90. Biswas, *Trinather Pancali*, NL/918.48/182. Nd.
91. In Bengali, “*Bhashao toto pranjol noy*.”
92. *IHDC IV*, 122, 152–53, 166–67, 162.
93. Biswas, *Trinather Pancali*, 27.
94. Jyotirbhushan, *Trinather Pancali*, 4.
95. Freeman, “Religious Change in a Hindu Pilgrimage Center,” 124–33. Freeman incorrectly calls Trinath a “new” form of post-colonial devotional practice.
96. Dhall, *Kalyan Nagarara Kahani*, in *The Flood and Other Stories*.
97. Sarma, *Socio-Religious Life of the Assamese Hindus*, 15–17.
98. Schendel and Guhathakurta, *Bangladesh Reader*, 109–12.

6. A COOPERATIVE EXPERIMENT

Epigraphs: Ray Chaudhuri was scion of the Dubalhati Zamindari estate. Both documents in “Report on 1926 Cooperatives Conference,” *Bengal Co-operative Journal* 12, no. 3 (1927).

1. *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1914–15*, 8–9.
2. A. N. Moberly to Secretary of Finance, “Confidential,” 5 June 1916, BNA/Finance/Excise/E.1G-6/1/Nov 1917 (hereafter Moberly, Confidential Letter).
3. Moberly, Confidential Letter.
4. The period 1915–16 recorded the lowest export total: 5,789 maunds. In 1904–16 the import demand from other districts to Rajshahi varied between a low of 5,789 maunds to a maximum of 8,212 maunds. Moberly, Confidential Letter.

5. Cases of smuggling tended to be low: Out of the 58 cases detected in 1915–16, 45 were charges of possessing manufactured ganja with unpaid duties, and 13 for possession of raw ganja before manufacture. Colonial officials read this evidence as indicating either ineffective supervision or extremely effective supervision, depending on the channels of information they relied on. Moberly believed the former was true.

6. Moberly, Confidential Letter.
7. Moberly, Confidential Letter.
8. Moberly, Confidential Letter.
9. Doyle, *Civilizing Rural Ireland*; Johnson, *Reconstructing Rural Egypt*, 20–46; Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward*.
10. After the interwar period, see Windel, *Cooperative Rule*; and Shokr, *Harvests of Liberation*.
11. *Report on the working of the co-operative credit societies in the lower provinces for the year 1904–05* (hereafter *Report on the working of co-operatives* with inclusive years).
12. “Co-operative Societies in India,” *Tropical Agriculturalist* (September 1908): 267–68.
13. Moberly, Confidential Letter, 8.
14. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 21–22.
15. “*dibaratri, ghono ghono . . . pray proti shoptahey sabha.*” Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 20.
16. Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 31–32.
17. “*ganja krishok ashonkay akul.*” Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 24.
18. “*Krishok kul ke mohajoner hosto hoitey rokkha korai ek matro ganja phand-er sonkolpo chilo . . . amader dhon, maan, pran jinni rokkha koren, ei phand-er taka o shei doyamoy raj rajeshwar ponchom jorjer okkhon dhon bhandare gochito rakha hoiyachey.*” Chakrabarti, *Ganjar Golpo*, 54.
19. Moberly, Confidential Letter, 8.
20. *Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission*, 332.
21. *Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission*, 289–90.
22. Moberly, Confidential Letter, 9–10 (emphasis mine).
23. British agrarian reforms rarely disrupted traditional forms of capital, often shoring up agrarian hierarchies instead. Washbrook, “Law, State, and Agrarian Society.”
24. BNA/Bengal/Financial/Excise/E.1G-6/1–5/November 1917, 2.
25. Some individual largeholders resented the monopoly award. For summarized proceedings, see BNA/Finance/Excise/Progs 77–81/29 January 1918.
26. Letters of John Younie, 2 January 1917, BL/IOR/D939/5.
27. Letters of John Younie, 9 June 1917, BL/IOR/D939/5.
28. Letters of John Younie, 9 June 1917, BL/IOR/D939/5.
29. Letters of John Younie, 3 September 1917, BL/IOR/D939/6. Younie’s letters increasingly contained civilizational rhetoric and racist caricatures of the Indians whom he met.
30. Proceedings of the Financial Department, 29 September 1917, BNA/Finance/Excise/Progs 33–35.
31. “Meeting of Naogaon Cooperative Society,” *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 January 1920, 10.
32. In 1909 Jarip Mohammad had stood for elections for the Legislative Council of the lieutenant governor of East Bengal and Assam. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 March 1909.
33. *Fifth Annual Report on the Working of the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators Cooperative Society for the year ending 31st March 1923*, 204–5.

34. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1917-18*, 11.
35. Payments for this order, and a second one for one thousand seers duty-free, were a site of conflict with the Mysore Durbar. Proceedings of the Financial Department, BNA/Finance/Excise/Progs 92-94-95/20 April 1918 and 12 August 1918.
36. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1918-19*, 11-12.
37. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1922-23*, 13.
38. *Minutes of the Syndicate for the year 1933*, no. 4, 13 January 1933, 135; *Minutes of the Syndicate for the year 1933*, no. 49, 10 November 1933, 4063; *Minutes of the Syndicate for the year 1941*, no. 49, 24 November 1944, 2549.
39. The Society allotted another twelve thousand rupees for the dispensary in 1920, besides furnishing the medical ward in Naogaon town completely at its own expense. See *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1919-20*, 7.
40. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1921-22*, 12.
41. "Wanted two doctors and two dressers," *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 May 1922, 3.
42. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1918-19*, 12-13 (emphasis mine).
43. At least fourteen hundred rupees were spent in distributing cloth free of charge. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1919-20*, 7.
44. *Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette*, 7 January 1920, 343-44.
45. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1922-23*, 11, 13.
46. *Fifth Annual Report on the Working of the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators Cooperative Society for the year ending 31st March 1923*, 224-26.
47. "Short Note," *Bengal Bihar and Orissa Cooperative Journal* 9, no. 4 (1924): 304-5, BNA/JC/2844.
48. Resolution 8646, 20 November 1918, BL/IOR/Revenue/Agriculture.
49. Resolution 8592, 14 November 1919, BL/IOR/Revenue/Agriculture.
50. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1917-18*, 3.
51. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1918-19*, 7.
52. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1918-19*, 10-13.
53. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1918-19*, 11.
54. Naogaon was treated as an exception in the Reports on Material and Moral Progress, which were the basis of annual discussions in the British Parliament after the Government of India Act was passed in 1919. *India in 1919*, 102-3.
55. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1918-19*, 10.
56. He was paid a handsome monthly salary of twenty-five rupees. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1919-20*, 7. The job was advertised widely in Calcutta newspapers. See, for example, "Vet. Asst. Surgeon wanted," *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 11 March 1921, 2.
57. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1918-19*, 11-12.
58. Speeches by Md. Mahmud and Earl of Ronaldshay, in *Proceedings of the Tenth Provincial Conference of Cooperative Societies in Bengal* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1919), 37.
59. Lawrence John Lumley Dundas, the Earl of Ronaldshay, was governor of Bengal between 1917 and 1922. See *Lord Ronaldshay in Bengal* (Calcutta: Art Press, 1929).
60. "Bengal Provincial Conference Governor's Speech," *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 February 1919, 7.
61. *Proceedings of the Tenth Provincial Conference of Cooperative Societies in Bengal*, 52-53.

62. *Proceedings of the Tenth Provincial Conference of Cooperative Societies in Bengal*, 78.
63. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1919–20*, 6–7.
64. The Rangpur Demonstration Farm was northern Bengal's largest agricultural extension farm.
65. "Progress of the Cooperative Movement in Bengal, 1920," *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 5 December 1920, 12.
66. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1919–20*, 8.
67. The membership steadily increased through the 1930s.
68. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1920–21*, 7.
69. Despite the flood and the reorganization of resources, the store also made a profit of Rs. 3,484 that year. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1922–23*, 9.
70. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1921–22*, 14; *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1923–24*, 27.
71. *The Leader*, 15 September 1919, 3, reprinted in *ibid.*, 18 September 1919, 8.
72. *Irish Economist* 8 (1923): 140.
73. Mukherji, "Some Aspects of the Cooperative Movement," 94–125.
74. Mukherji, "Some Aspects of the Cooperative Movement," 103.
75. *Fifth Annual Report on the Working of the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators Cooperative Society for the year ending 31st March 1923*, 217.
76. "Short Summary," *Bengal Bihar and Orissa Co-operative Journal* 9, no. 1 (1923): 70–72, BNA/JC/2844.
77. *Fifth Annual Report on the Working of the Naogaon Ganja Cultivators Cooperative Society for the year ending 31st March 1923*, 207–8.
78. The society's cash funds were kept in a double-lock chest embedded in the treasury verandah.
79. Dietz and Wizard were both industrial manufacturers of railway lights.
80. Chandra, *Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism*; On Friedrich List's influence see Goswami, *Producing India*.
81. Reprinted in Gandhi, *Drink, Drugs, and Gambling*, 118–20.
82. Dasgupta, *Gandhi's Economic Thought*.
83. The connections between revolutionary, anticolonial, and Hindu masculinity and intoxication require more historical scrutiny. On revolutionary masculinity, see D. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*.
84. Papers of George Kenrick, Advocate General of Bengal, on matters relating to terrorism and the work of the Legislative Department, BL/IOR/Mss/Eur/D709/15.
85. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1920–21*, 9.
86. "Hon'ble Nawab Ali Choudhury in Naogaon," *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 18 February 1921, 7.
87. "Hon'ble Nawab Ali Choudhury in Naogaon."
88. The Congress strongly policed dietary norms among indigenous Adivasi communities, and the Congress Socialist Rambriksh Benipuri opposed ganja in Bihar on Gandhian grounds. Singh, *Popular Translations of Nationalism*, 130–42. On antiliquor movements, Non-Co-operation, and the *shuddhi* in Gujrat, see Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India*, 225–30.
89. Omvedt, "Non-Brahmans and Nationalists in Poona."
90. "Das at Naogaon," *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 18 May 1921, 5.
91. "Bengal Provincial Conference," *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 30 March 1921, 7.

92. "Das at Naogaon."
93. "A National Gathering at Naogaon," *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 3 February 1921, 11.
94. "A National Gathering at Naogaon."
95. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1920-21*, 9-10.
96. J. T. Donovan to Secretary, Agriculture and Industries, Government of Bengal, 29 June 1921, BNA/A&I/Co-op/List 1.3/541T.C.
97. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1922-23*, 2.
98. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1920-21*, 13.
99. Prices for sale outside Bengal presidency also went up after 1 April 1922, from Rs. 150 to Rs. 245 per maund. The price at which the Society purchased third-, second-, and first-class ganja from its members similarly increased from Rs. 60, 70, and 80 to Rs. 100, 110, and 120, respectively. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1921-22*, 12.
100. Proceedings of the Co-operatives Department, BNA/A&I/Co-op/List 1.3/progs 45-47/15 March 1922.
101. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1922-23*, 13.
102. Proceedings of the Co-operatives Department, BNA/A&I/Co-op/List 1.3/B Progs 7-8/November 1923; BNA/A&I/Coop/List 1.3/B Progs 29-30/June 1923.
103. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1921-22*, 12.
104. T. Sarkar, *Bengal, 1928-1934*; Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire*, 158-90.
105. Mitra was not an ICS officer, which caused lengthy debates between the Bengal and the imperial government in Delhi. In 1936, the government mandated that the deputy registrar must be an ICS officer.
106. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1921-22*, 13.
107. Correspondence between J. M. Mitra, Batakrishna Das, and M. Thorp, 25 July 1924-25 September 1924, BNA/A&I/Co-op/List 1.3/Progs 14-17.
108. Proceedings of the Co-operatives Department, BNA/A&I/Co-op/List 1.3/Progs 5-24/24 May 1926. The Society also bought land in Chakdeb for its offices that year.
109. Proceedings of the Co-operatives Department, BNA/A&I/Co-op/List 1.3/Progs 32-34/CSID-1/1926.
110. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1925-26*, 29.
111. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1921-22*, 13.
112. *Bengal Co-operative Journal* 7, no. 3 (1927): 222.
113. *Bengal Co-operative Journal* 7, no. 3 (1927): 229.
114. Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire*, 158-165; Pandey, *Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh*; Pandey, *Construction of Communalism*.
115. "Second Day's Proceedings" and "Vote of Thanks to the Chair," *Bengal Co-operative Journal* 7, no. 3 (1927): 233-46.
116. Rabindranath Tagore, "Co-operation and Our Destiny," *Bengal Co-operative Journal* 8, no. 3 (1928): 232.
117. Annual Report for 1929, *Visva Bharati Quarterly* (1930): 466.

CODA: GANJA AND THE NATION

1. Chapman, "Sonnet and Sonnet Sequence."
2. Toru Dutt (1856-77) used the ABBA-ABBA-CDCD-EE rhyme scheme in the 1870s, *Bianca* was serialized in the *Bengal Magazine*, and she signed letters as "T. D." See

Chapman, "Internationalising the Sonnet." If not she, a less likely, and predictable, candidate is Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Lal Behari Dey, the author of *Bengal Peasant Life*, also found cannabis in a Bengali Christian woman's story in which a sannyasi steals a camel by offering its owner tobacco and ganja. See Dey, *Folk-Tales of Bengal*.

3. The sonnet was quickly adopted in Bengali, Hindi, and Marathi. See Engblom, "Marathi Sonnet"; Gibson, "Sensation, Sati, and Retribution"; R. Chaudhuri, *History of Indian Poetry in English*.

4. Afzal, *Naogan Mohkumar Itihash*, 43.

5. Rahman, *From Naogaon to New York*, 11. Rahman died in 2017. His most prominent book is *World Economic Issues at the United Nations*.

6. Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital*, 137–67, 154.

7. Hirankumar Sanyal, "Co-operation in Bengal," *Bengal Co-operative Journal* 18, no. 4 (1933): 155.

8. Ahmed also demanded free serums during epidemics, the removal of circle officers, and disposal of extra jute stocks in a manner similar to the approach to ganja. *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India IV*, 557–66, 562.

9. "The Cultivator and the Co-operative Movement," *Bengal Co-operative Journal* 16, no. 1(1930): 22–28.

10. Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital*, 155.

11. Babu Kishori Mohan Chaudhuri on Bengal Jute Bill (II), 1930, in *Proceedings of the Bengal Legislative Council* (hereafter Proceedings/BLC), 23 July 1931/XXXVII, 263.

12. Proceedings/BLC, 12 March 1928/XXVIII (3), 58–60.

13. Proceedings/BLC, 12 March 1928/XXVIII (3), 60, 63–64.

14. Proceedings/BLC, 13 March 1928/XXVIII (3), 60, 72.

15. "Excise non-contract charges," proceedings, 30 March 1927, BNA/A&I/Coop/List 1.3/Progs 60–62/May 1927.

16. Proceedings, 26 November 1929, BNA/A&I/Coop/List 1.3/Progs 34–38/1929.

17. Mills, *Cannabis Nation*.

18. Proceedings/BLC, 29 July 1931/XXXVII, 369–72.

19. Chopra's research was published in 1939 as Chopra and Chopra, *Present Position of Hemp-Drug Addiction*.

20. Chief Secretary, Bengal, to Secretary, Government of India, "Civil Disobedience Movement: events in Bengal," 4 June 1930, BL/IOR/L/PJ/7/305: 11 January 1932–15 June 1933. Thanks to Tariq Omar Ali for sharing this source with me.

21. On caste sanctions, see Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, 110–125. On Gandhi's acquiescence to the nonviolent application of caste sanctions, see Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, 55–60.

22. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1929–30*, 15.

23. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1932–33*, 1, 5–6.

24. Proceedings/BLC/25 March 1935/XLV (2), 501–2.

25. Proceedings/BLC/27 March 1935/ XLV (2), 592–93.

26. Revenue (Excise) Proceedings, 15 April 1936, BNA/A&I/Coop/List 1.3/April 1936.

27. A sole French farmer in Chandernagore had given up cultivation in 1917. Proceedings of the Excise Department, BNA/Finance/Excise/Progs 21–22/27 November 1917.

28. Annual sales fell to an average of 1,500 maunds (114,800 pounds or 50 tons) by 1941.

29. Proceedings of the Co-operative Department. BNA/A&I/Co-op/List 1.3/Progs 62-64/5 December 1939.
30. Proceedings, BLC/28 July 1941/LX (1), 153-54.
31. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1940-41*, 27-28.
32. *Report on the working of co-operatives, 1938-39*, 12.
33. *Constituent Assembly Debates*, vol. 7, 19 and 24 November 1948.
34. Mookerjee, *Why Prohibition?*
35. Chopra and Chopra, *Present Position of Hemp-Drug Addiction*.
36. Mookerjee, "Hemp Drug-Addiction and Physical Damage," 84-96; Mookerjee, "Hemp Drug-Addiction and Moral Damage," 1-12.
37. Mookerjee was paraphrasing N. N. Roy's IHDC testimony. Mookerjee, "Hemp Drug-Addiction and Moral Damage," 10.
38. Mookerjee, "Problem of Hemp Drugs Addiction in India," 401-14; Mookerjee, "Problem of Hemp Drugs Addiction in India (contd.)," 48-60.
39. Mookerjee, "Problem of Hemp Drugs Addiction in India (contd.)," 57.
40. Mookerjee, "India's Hemp Drug Policy Under British Rule," 446-54; Mookerjee, "Re-Orientation of Our Hemp drugs Policy," 444-50.
41. Mookerjee, "Re-Orientation of Our Hemp drugs Policy," 446-47.
42. Mookerjee, "Re-Orientation of Our Hemp drugs Policy," 450.
43. On the Single Convention, see Mills, "The IHO as Actor," 95-115.
44. "Madhya Pradesh Goes in for Bhang Cultivation," *Times of India*, 10 December 1982.
45. Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, Department of Revenue, Government of India, accessed 19 January 2025, https://dor.gov.in/files/acts_files/Narcotic-Drugs-and-Psychotropic-Substances-Act-1985_o.pdf (emphasis mine).
46. Farber, *War on Drugs*.
47. On the longer history of these interventions, see Pembleton, "Imagining a Global Sovereignty," 28-63. On neoliberalism, illiberal governance, and Reagan, see Corva, "Neoliberal Globalization and the War on Drugs," 176-93.
48. "India, Transit Point in Illicit Drugs," *Times of India*, 29 January 1982.
49. Cohen, "Right for Right Reasons?," 31-41.
50. "Law Against Drug Smuggling Soon," *Times of India*, 8 August 1985. On cannabis, childhood, and innocence elsewhere, see Klantschnig, "Origins of Cannabis Prohibition in Nigeria," 231-33.
51. "Parliament Okays Bill on Narcotics," *Times of India*, 29 August 1985.
52. "Fighting the Drug Menace" (editorial), *Times of India*, 30 August 1985.
53. "Agreement with US: Narcotics," *Times of India*, 21 September 1986.
54. Policing locally is arbitrary, with officials often complicit in violations of the law. See Rakesh Shukla, "NDPS Act: Should Vices Be Criminalized?," *The Wire*, 1 October 2020; S. Ghosh, *A Thousand Tiny Cuts*, 121-49; Tribhuvan, "Going to Work 'High,'" 55-63.
55. From profits of Rs. 31,000, it incurred losses of Rs. 35,166 between 1953 and 1954. *Annual Report and Statement on the working of Cooperative Societies in East Bengal, 1953-54*, 2.
56. Rahman et al., "A History of Cannabis (Ganja) as an Economic Crop in Bangladesh," 21-32.
57. Ahmed et al., "Revitalising Bangladesh's Economy"

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Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, Agriculture Branch

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