

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology
of Egypt / Egyptology

COURT LIFE OF THE NAWABS OF AWADH DURING THE TIMES OF NAWAB SHUJA UD DUALLAH & NAWAB ASAF UD DUALLAH

Dr. Sabzaar Kak

Lucknow University, Lucknow, India

Dr. Sabzaar Kak, Court life of the Nawabs of Awadh during the times of Nawab Shuja ud Duallah & Nawab Asaf ud Duallah-Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(9), ISSN 1567-214x

Awadh has been romanticised down the centuries. It's often used as a backdrop in popular cinema, feted by wordsmiths, and endlessly hailed by connoisseurs of fine things and good food. It is known that Nawabs of Awadh used to live their life in luxury and debauchery. the Nawabs were also known for their unparalleled taste and passion for food which remains unmatched till date.

The topic of this paper addresses an essential period in the history of the Nawabs of Awadh during Shuja ud Duallah who played a crucial role in the Battle of Panipat and the Battle of Buxar and his son Asaf ud Duallah. Through this paper you will get to know the glimpse of their daily life, their court life and how they used to receive their guest and other things.

Keywords: court life, ceremonies, investiture, food, Nawab

Introduction

The nawabs of Awadh were luxurious in their ways of living. They were fond of pomp and show and their court set the example of grandeur and splendour, they made their court etiquette and ceremonial impressive and elaborate. Immense sums of money were spent on the festivities and decorations. Their ceremonials were in the most cases similar to those observed at the court of Delhi.

The investiture

The court of Awadh was in spirit a reflex of the cultural traditions of Persian and in outward grandeur a replica of the imperial court of Delhi. The Mughal court had retained most of its prestige and much of its power down to the neck of Delhi by Nadir Shah in 1739 but since then its decline became patent to the world. The centrifugal tendency was manifest in different parts of the empire where the provincial governors had made themselves independent of the titular emperor for all practical purpose, merely pretending to own a theoretical allegiance to his nominal authority.

Awadh was an offshoot of the Mughal empire where Sadat Khan found a new ruling dynasty under the shadow of Delhi. Under his successors the court of Awadh, Faizabad and Lucknow rose to rival Delhi in wealth and magnificence. Nawab Shuja ud Duallah built Faizabad and Nawab Asaf ud Duallah made Lucknow were both dazzling capitals.

The Nawabs of Awadh in theory owned allegiance to the Mughal emperor and refrained from adopting the visible symbols of Muslim sovereignty like the inclusion of their names in the Khutbah and minting of the coins of their names but in actual practice behaved like independent rulers. In the words of Macaulay, **“the prince of Awadh though he held the power, did not venture to use the style of sovereignty. To the appellation of the nawabs or Viceroy, he added that of wazir of the Mughal empire. Just as in the last century the Electors of Saxony and Brandenburg, though independent of the ruler and often in arms against him were found to style themselves his grand chamberlain and grand marshal. Indeed, the Gangnam of Nawab Wazir Ali speaks about Nawab Asaf ud Duallah’s authority that, “you may call him Nawab but in fact he was the king of the land.”**

No detailed descriptions of the investiture ceremony of any of the rulers either of Nawab Shuja ud Duallah or Nawab Asaf Ud Duallah were available but we have a certain account of the Darbar of Prince Ali Gauhar at Allahabad by Mir Kindersley and few others of the later rulers of Awadh which must have been similar to those under review.

According to these accounts, on this occasion the Darbar hall was decorated tastefully. The Masnad which was the seat of honour used to be about the size of a small bed sheet, it was covered with embroidered cloth of gold with jewelled fringes. On three sided of it there was a railing. A square canopy supported on the poles of gold and set with precious stones was attached to the four corners of the masnad. The canopy above and cushions below were of crimson velvet with gold and pearls. A thick fringe of pearls of a good size hung from the borders of the canopy. over his head was the Chatr(umbrella) of crimson velvet and gold grained with red pearls. On either side of the masnad stood a nobleman with a morchhal in his hands as it was in fashion. The ruler sat cross- legged on the masnad. His magnificent appear consisted of a vest of white and delicately flowered satin with a silk and gold embroidery of the finest texture. The turban made of cloth of gold had an aigrette whose base was composed of diamonds of an extra – ordinary size and value. He was wearing valuable garlands of diamonds, pearls, rubies, and emeralds in many strings. The functions arise of the court, the Sayyids and the theologians, magnificently attired were present to congratulate and offer their nazars to the new king Nawab. The rest of the hall was thronged with all classes of people who participated in the investiture in a cheerful spirit.

Following the traditions of the Delhi the Nawabs in Awadh maintained the etiquette of that court in all its vigour. They held the court on the great occasions such as the religious festivals, royal weddings, the celebrations of the investiture every year, the victory of the nawabs and few others often these occasions were celebrated by taking out the procession. With the nawab as the head, mounted on an elephant along with the princes, the nobles behind the cavalry and the infantry in front and rear accompanied by their bands and the colourful uniform of the soldiers indeed it was a scene worthy to be enjoyed.

The daily life

The nawabs followed the ordinary routine in accordance with the royal usage of the time. Details about the division of time are not available. still there are references scattered over several works to show that they had

fixed hours of works. Nawab Shuja- ud Duallah performed his five daily prayers and kept the fast in the month of Ramzan. It is said that he never abandoned these observances. Thus, he rose early in the morning after morning prayers, started his daily routine. He devoted almost all his time to state business. He set down a routine for himself which was later followed by his successors. Nawab Shuja- ud- Duallah used to go out with all pomp and ceremony every morning to inspect the newly – built city of Faizabad as well as the army parades in the cantonments outside. On the way whenever he noticed any unauthorized structure, he would order his side-men to dismantle it. At about nine o' clock he held his Darbar. Here nobles and high officials assembled and stood according to their ranks. The secretaries of the various departments read out notes on different subjects. One practice in the Darbar peculiar to Shuja ud Duallah is striking. He used to scrutinize the balance sheets submitted by his diwan rajah Surat Singh. Half of the total receipts were deposited with the Bahu Begam who after the debacle at Buxar had placed at his disposal all her possessions including her nose ring, to pay off a part of War indemnity to save their honour and prestige. One fourth was deposited with the treasury and the rest with Nawab Wazir himself.

Nawab Shuja ud Duallah took about three hours in the morning to transact the above items of business. From the Darbar, Shuja ud Duallah used to retire to the female apartments of bahu Begum for luncheon and prayers. In the dining hall dishes and delicacies were collected from six places. One was the main kitchen (bawarchi Khana-i- bururg). It was supervised by Hasan Raza Khan alias Mirza Hasan, minister of Asaf ud Duallah. The expenditure was two thousand rupees a day. The other was the minor kitchen managed by Mirza Hasan Ali. Later he was replaced by Amber Ali. Another kitchen was of Bahu Begam. There was another kitchen also of Mirza Ali Khan, Nawab Salar Jang. The slave girls in attendance at the luncheon were Dhaniya, or Paniya. The dishes of the main kitchen came from outside under the supervision of Fazal Azim. He knew very well the mischief of these slave girls might create on these occasions. He called themselves as his sisters and always tried to flatter them. Once a fly was

found in a dish sent by Fazal Azim. Shuja ud duallah enquired when the dish was served. A slave girl named Dhaniya knew that if she would tell the truth Mirza Hasan or Fazal Azim would be punished. She promptly replied that it came from Salar Jung's Kitchen. Nawab Shuja Ud duallah said nothing to him.

When the lunch was over the Shuja ud duallah tool a nap. After which he used to visit to his minor palaces (Khurd mahal or secondary wives' palaces). Shuja ud duallah was thus engaged in amusements in the lady's apartments till afternoon prayers. After these prayers he again appeared in the public hall of audience and attended to the various affairs of the state till sun set. This time Shuja ud duallah did not take his seat in the state cushion but instead on a

High cane seat covered with rich brocade. Nights he invariable passed in the palace of the Bahu Begum. If he failed to turn up, he would pay over 500rs to the Bahu Begum as a fine for his non cultural misbehaviour.

The daily life of Asaf ud duallah differed from that of his father Shuja ud duallah because of differences in temperament and nature. Unlike his father he became addicted to drinking in his early career. Asaf ud duallah usual conveyance during winter was an elephant riding and after morning ablutions he used to read Quran before Mullah (teacher) who used to correct his accent. Immediately reading Quran he drove out either to one of his gardens. The ladies sometimes accompanied the royal processions. After his return he used to hold the Darbar at 11'o clock with pomp and show like his father. Here till luncheon, he devoted all his time in the transaction of business connected with the state. He then took rest for a couple of hours and again he engaged himself in amusement. He also used to spend an hour or two in shooting at targets with arrow. Sometimes he used to watch animal combat and bird fight. He also had great passion for kite flying.

State Receptions

The first concern of the Nawabs had always been their dignity. The scrupulously imitated the emperors of Delhi whose love of luxury and

ostentation was phenomenal, whenever a distinguished guest was to come, no measures were neglected in impressing the visitors with glory and magnificence of the kingdom. If he was the governor general or the emperor the Nawab or their Naib, personally supervised the details of the reception. Their usual mode of receiving such a state guest was to advance a few miles from the capital to accord him initial reception with all the customary ceremony and respect due to his high rank.

The description of a few typical receptions as follows-

Reception to Prince Ali Gauhar

In May, 1757 the crown prince Ali Gauhar (later on Shah Allam II) fled from Delhi and on his way to Allahabad came to Awadh. On January 2nd, 1759 Shuja ud Duallah accorded initial reception at Mohan now district of Unnau, fourteen miles from Lucknow with all the customary ceremony and respect. He made his obeisance to the Prince, presented him with the nazar of 101 gold coins, a state conveyance. His officers and attendants likewise presented nazars which amounted to 72 gold coins. Shuja ud Duallah then took him to the spacious and newly prepared camp and lodged him there. A variety of entertainments were arranged in honour of the Prince who was presented further with one lakh of rupees a tray covered with jewels, several such trays full of precious stuffs and a set of tents and baggage carts. Prince having cast a glance at these offerings of the Nawabs. He was so impressed by this that he invited Shuja ud Duallah to his camp and gifted him his own turban.

Reception to Munir ud Duallah (Naib Wazir)

In March 1770 Munir ud Duallah started from Calcutta for the temporary imperial headquarters at Allahabad to take over again the office of Naib Wazir. He on his way he paid a visit to Faizabad where Shuja ud Duallah accorded him a befitting reception. The entertainments included a fight between two semi wild elephants on the sandy beach of Ghaghara. The vanquished animal fled and was chased by the victor.

On the flowing day a grand ceremony was held where about five thousand dancing girls, actor, actress, musicians of every calibre performed and display their wonderful skills.

Reception of Bahu Begum

After the order from London, Warren Hastings wrote to Asaf ud Duallah to take conciliatory steps towards his mother. Asaf ud duallah went to Faizabad and with utmost submissiveness requested the Begum to participate in the marriage of his adopted daughter, which was about to take place at Lucknow. She accepted his invitation and Asaf ud Duallah sent ten elephants, ten bullock coaches and fifty thousand rupees as the travelling expenses. He vacated the mansion known as Haveli Baoli for his mother and grandmother. He furnished the haveli with fine carpets and other furniture. He then issued a proclamation throughout the city. ***“Asaf ud Duallah vicegerent of his mother and grandmother of these dominance and cities small and great, they are rulers. The subject in this city are their subjects”***

Conclusion

To conclude apart from their luxurious ways of life and pomp and show, the nawabs of Awadh were very impressive and warm. They not only spend huge sums on the decorations of their palaces but also on their distinguished guests. No measures were neglected in impressing the visitors with the glory and magnificence of the kingdom. Their ceremonies and rituals were ell nurtured and developed.

References

Ali, Meer Hasan “observation on the mussalmans of India descriptions of their manners, customs, habits and religious opinions”. Edited by Crooke I.C.S Oxford University Press London.

Bhutt, Ravi, “Life and times of Nawabs of Lucknow.

Grier. C, “letters of Warren Hastings to his wife transcribed in full from the originals in the British museums”, William Black Wood and sons, London, 1905.

Sir Henry Lawrence, “the kingdom of Oudh”, Calcutta

Macaulay T.B, “Warren Hastings notes and appendices” Ed by Deighton Oxford press London 1897.

Spear T.G P, “the nawabs: a study of the social life” Oxford University Press 1932.

Srivastava A.L, “the first two Nawabs of Oudh”, India publishing house ltd, Lucknow 1933.

“Shuja ud Duallah Vol 1, Calcutta

William Harry, “A Contemporary history of Asaf ud Duallah” a translation of the Tafzih ul Ghafflin of Abu Talib 1885.