CHAPTER SIX

LAWLESSNESS AND LEGAL PLUNDER IN SAHARANPUR

We know nothing for sure about Sheikh Kallan’s ancestry. Perhaps he was the hereditary zamindār of several villages among which was Rajupur, the village he would leave to his descendants and in the Sheikh qasba, or quarter, of which he probably grew up. The rather grand and extensive ruins of the family haveli dominate the village to the present day. Rajupur was 40 kilometres to the southeast of Saharanpur, near the great Landhaura muqarrari from which, after its dissolution, he would as revenue farmer wrest some of the best prizes. He seems to have spent most of his life as a professional soldier; he commanded a battalion of irregular cavalry in an Indian brigade in the service of the Maratha leader Daulat Rao Shinde and was later employed by the English Company. With his companies he distinguished himself as a gallant soldier in the Bundelkhand campaign of 1803. Finally, in about 1808, when his corps was dismissed, he was given a monthly pension of Rs 90 in consideration of his loyalty and gallantry. With the rank of Captain, he retired to his home district of Saharanpur, which he had, in a way, helped to conquer for the Company. Thanks to his qualities as an organiser, his usefulness to the British functionaries at Saharanpur, and the favour they consequently showed him, “the Captain”, as he became commonly known, was soon recognised as a person of importance and influence.¹

In 1811, when Rivers Grindall arrived in Saharanpur to take over the magistracy, his predecessor, James Patton, had taken the Captain’s hand and, putting it into Grindall’s, had said: “You will find he has enemies in the district, but he is an honest, brave and worthy soul.” Grindall would also remember having been present when Robert Kerr, a judge of the Bareilly Court of Circuit, had promised the Captain a

¹ Petition from Sheikh Khuda Bakhsh, mukhtar of Sheikh Kallan, 21.4.1823; BRWPP 27.5.1824 no. 30C. Alan Cadell, Settlement Report of the Ganges Canal Tract of the Muzaffarnagar District, Allahabad 1878, 37. Grindall thought that the Captain was a commander of infantry, that he settled in the Saharanpur district in 1805 and, having some money, started farming; R. Grindall to BRWP, 1.11.1823; BRWPP 7.11.1823 no. 15.
provision would after his death be made for his family, if he would
educate his boys, which the Captain had subsequently done. Grind-
all, who, in addition to his magistracy, became judge of the district
in 1818, occasionally took the Captain, whom he described as “an
old soldier literally covered with wounds received in some desperate
enterprises in our service”, into his buggy while passing through the
bazaar. Whether this was really done “as a show and for awe”, as his
colleague Cavendish would suggest, it is difficult to say, but because of
such rides all the district was certainly left in no doubt as to the degree
of trust the judge and the Captain bore to each other. Sheikh Kallan
was also a frequent visitor to Grindall’s house and was more than once
allowed the facility of ḍāk travel to attend family weddings at his home
in Rajupur.2