



## ***Ghair-chiragi: The Poetics of Erasure and the Language of Desolation of Mahua Dabar Massacre narrative***

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### **Abstract**

*The paper will look at the colonial order of Ghair-chiragi, which means without lamp, of the village of Mahua Dabar in the Gorakhpur district after the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Based on the proceedings of the North Western Provinces Judicial (Criminal) Department (1860) in October it is argued that Ghair-chiragi was not only an administrative method of punishment but a performative linguistic action which created a legal and symbolic erasure of a community. The paper applies the theoretical ideas of speech-act theory and deconstructive legal philosophy to the interpretation of the decree as a type of colonial performative violence: a speech act which turned inhabited space into an administratively blank terrain. The analysis places the word in context of the larger symbolic and literary culture of South Asia poetics wherein the chiragh (lamp) is a symbol of continuity of the home, of spiritual enlightenment and of the community living in the house. The colonial decree brought an ontological dislocation to the village by rejecting this symbol using the prefix ghair, which turned the village into a place of nothingness. The work also incorporates archival witnesses, names of suspects, and documentation of dispersion as a kind of unintended elegiac fiction that is more reminiscent of the Urdu classical form of shahr-ashob that is poetry about the ruin of cities and communities. By contrasting two concepts of colonial law, terra nullius and the theory of waste land, the paper shows how linguistic names were used as a tool of spatial erasure of imperial rule in the world. Finally, the article concludes that the colonial archive is an unwitting archival of the same community that it was aimed at destroying. The study is based on reading of both legal records and literary traditions of lamentation to construct the repressed historical presence of Mahua Dabar and the paradox of erasure that creates traces of remembrance at the same time.*

**Keywords:** *Mahua Dabar Massacre, Ghair-chiragi decree, Colonial performative violence, Urdu literary poetics, Archival memory and erasure*

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### **I. Introduction: The Decree as Literary Act**

Of the punitive measures of colonial vengeance that

were used after the Indian Rebellion of 1857, scarcely any could be more violently laden with

language than the term *ghair -chiragi*. The term was literally translatable to mean without-lamp or lampless, and served as a legal decision and an administrative sentence at the same time, which ordered all domestic fire in a village found guilty of aiding rebellion to be put out. The document being considered in this paper is the North Western Provinces Judicial (Criminal) Department Proceedings of October 1860, which documents the application of the rule to *Mahua Dabar* (also spelt Mahua Dabar), a small village in the Goruckpore district, whose inhabitants were discovered guilty of jointly murdering five British officers in the uprising of 1857.

In this paper, it is argued that *ghair -chiragi* is not only a penal term. It is a performative utterance in the original sense of this term that can be defined by J. L. Austin: a speech act that does not describe a state of affairs but creates one (Austin 5 cases). In particular, it achieves in three syllables the legal obliteration of a human community- something that legislation will take paragraphs to put into effect. In order to appreciate the full gravity of this linguistic gesture, one has to be a member of the figurative tradition of the *chiragh* (lamp) of South Asian literature, where the lamp is not merely a source of light but a metonymy of domestic life, Sufi spiritual presence and the living beloved, and even the continuation of civilization itself. The suppression of it, to make it *ghair*, radically other, categorically without the defining light of it, is to say an ontological sentence just as it is to say a legal sentence.

It is the unintentional record of human consequences, however, that the 1860 Proceedings is read in this paper. What under their surfaces of procedure are the roots of a community passing through the very experience that *Ghair-chiragi* was fashioned to achieve: dispersal, erasure and the loss of place. Reading these texts together with the literary tradition they reverberate without realizing it, this paper is engaged in a recovery act that is to say a private effort to revive the lamp that colonial authority put out, and in the process to show that the poetic tradition and the legal archive are not parallel instances but two interlocutors on an unconscious conversation about the meaning of desolation.

## II. Theoretical Framework

### *II.i. Austin and the Felicitous Decree*

The initial input to the theory of speech acts was made by J.L. Austin who realized that some utterances do not describe but are part of reality. He has contended in his work, *How to Do Things with Words*, that performatives are sentences; in appropriate circumstances, and under the mouth of persons who possess the appropriate authority, these sentences cause the very states of affairs that they describe (Austin 5-7). The colonial ordinance that *Mahua Dabar Ghair-chiragi* is declares fulfils every criterion of a performative, which is felicitous, with disturbing accuracy. The authorities in the Northwestern Provinces lie in the hands of the speaker, who is the Lieutenant Governor; the institutionally qualified individual Austin is searching for. The traditional process exists in the shape of a tri-year court process. And the speech is

never renege or disputed in any of the registers the colonial structure holds.

What Austin fails to investigate, and which becomes very critical in a colonial society, is the category of the performative by which felicity depends on the silence of the names he refers to. What makes the *Ghair-chiragi* decree felicitous is the fact that no one has a standing to contest the same, as the community that it annihilates. The imbalance of power does not happen to be a part of the speech act but rather an internal phenomenon of what Austin refers to as the accepted conventional procedure (Austin 26). To the colonized subject there exists no process whereby an infelicitous designation can be contested. Once it is announced to be absent, the lamp is absent in the legal record irrespective of whether it is continued to burn.

### **II.ii. Derrida and the Violence of Unnaming**

The analysis of performative speech is applied to the field of foundational violence with Jacques Derrida involvement in having a conversation with Austin in *Signature Event Context* (1972) and his broader meditation on the power of law. Derrida in the book, *Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority*, defines the moment of legal institution as something necessarily involving performative and interpretative foundational violence (Derrida 242). Founding of law, he says, cannot be justified in turn by some prior law; it is based upon an originary act of force which hedonism enlightens without being able to dissolve.

When applied to *ghair -chiragi*, the framework by Derrida will show the particular violence of the

term, to strip the village of its qualifying mark (or feature), its lamp, which in the Urdu figurative tradition amounts to stripping it of its identity as an inhabited, domestically warm, spiritually present place. The violence is not only physical, the burning and leveling mentioned in the Proceedings, but a language one: the reorganization of symbolic reality by a term that connotes and contradicts at the same time. According to Derrida reading of the violence of categorization in *Violence and Metaphysics*, to put an object into the name that characterizes it by negation is to carry out a kind of exclusion on the ontological level itself (Derrida 117-18).

### **II.iii. Colonial Dead Zones: A Comparative Grammar of Erasure**

*Ghair-chiragi* is a part of a worldwide grammar of colonial spatial erasure, which cuts across continents as well as jurisdiction. The negation of human presence in land law that Mabo achieved in the 1992 case of the same name is achieved in the negation of light in penal law by *Ghair-chiragi* (Benton 809). The same habitation was legally absent in Bengal when constructed in habeas corpus, similarly discussed by Ranajit Guha in *\*A Rule of Property for Bengal\** (1963) as the waste land provisions of the Permanent Settlement. The same logic is used in both the disturbed areas of British emergency law and the cleared areas of counterinsurgency policy in Vietnam, Malaya and Palestine: The administrative construction of inhabited space as void space, allowing it to receive the same kind of physical treatment.

What makes distinction between the word *Ghair-*

*chiragi* and these similar words is that it intentionally employs metaphor. A legal fact is given, but fallacious, terra nullius, and a condition, which is also an effect of the decree, and its justification, *Ghair-chiragi*, which is a lamp-less condition. The name is therefore a performative metaphor: it does all that an ideationally legal formulation could merely do incompletely.

### III. Etymology and Metaphysics: The Deep Reading of Chiragh and Ghair

Chiragh (Persian: چراغ) (classical Persian: چراغ) is a word that was borrowed into Urdu and has many figurative associations within it which no legal gloss would trigger. Literally a chiragh is an oil lamp, the cheapest device of domestic lighting in pre-industrial South Asia. However, the symbolical life of the lamp in classical Persian and Urdu poetry is much more than the material aspect.

The emblem of continuance of the family is the chiragh, the hearth-fire taken on portable. A family without a *chiragh*-ghar mein chiragh na hona - is the symbolic image of the desert and destruction and is used idiomatically to refer to a family that has no children, no future, no warmth of human life. The fact that the colonial decree takes advantage of this idiom is not a mere coincidence, it name gives the state of what it causes.

The lamp is the Noor or the divine light that the mystic has in his heart, and that the master has transferred to the disciple. We see the figure of the *chiragh-e Sufi* the lamp which lightens the soul, which fills up its verse, in every verse of Rumi, Hafiz, and their Urdu heirs. It is not just to put off

this lamp so as to blacken a room, but to remove the chain of transmission of a spiritual life, to pronounce a place empty of the sacred.

The topos of the desolate lamp, the viran chiragh, that burns pointlessly in a deserted area, is one of the most commonly used images in the classical ghazal tradition in the elegiac register. The laments by Mir Taqi Morning on the devastation of Delhi after the invasion of Nadir Shah allude exactly to this image: to a lamp that burns without spectators, to a place where all men have been chased out of. The lamplight that burns in a deserted house is, instead of a comforter, is an exaggeration of desertion; it is a quantification of lack in the light with which it illuminates.

The prefix ghair is more radical in its operation compared to a pure simple negation. The not-self, the stranger, the categorically other is denoted in Urdu and Persian by the term, ghair. It is a prefix in ghair-Muslim (non-Muslim), ghair-mulki (foreign, literally - of another country), and ghair-qanooni (illegal, literally- of another country). In being attached to chiragh it does not simply state that this is without a lamp--it states that the lamp-condition is alien to this place, that a place has been made constitutively other to itself in the defining quality of it. The village is thus called by *Ghair-chiragi* as a place, which has grown other to itself: a village that is not a village, in any significant meaning of the word.

### IV. The Lamp in South Asian Literary Tradition

#### IV.i. The Viran Chiragh Topos in Classical Urdu Poetry

The dimmed lamp is one of the most intractable topos of classical Urdu poetry; the desolate lamp, the \*chiragh\* which burns in an empty or uninhabitable location. It is related to the Persian custom of the \*marg -e -chiragh\* (death of the lamp) of which the extinguishment of the lamp is coincidental with the loss of the beloved one or the spiritual crisis of the poet. The topos in Urdu was radically changed: the lamp does not go out as the loss of the individual but the lamp burns as the bearer of the waste land. The burning lamp in the viran (ruined, desolate) space is not a comforting one; it, on the contrary, accuses. It defines the place of residence that has been forcefully cleared out.

#### **IV.ii. Shahr-Ashob: The Genre of the Ruined City**

The shahr-ashob, translatable as city-disturber, can be described as a genre of literature that can be traced back to the poetics of the Persian and Turkish literature, but in its Urdu literature has taken its most powerful form in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Ahmad 9 -10; Petievich 99-100). Historians like C. M. Naim have shown that in its original Persian-Turkish form, the shahr-ashob played a satirical role, and represented the occupations of urban residents as figurative expressions of erotic excitement. The collapse of Mughal rule and the subsequent invasions of Delhi, however, provided the Urdu tradition with a jump-start: genre was shifted onto the course of communal lamentation, where the socio-economic fabric of a city was taken as the tool of lamentation over its own destruction.

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The characteristic aspect of the shahr-ashob is the methodological classification of professional and social types. The goldsmith (sonar), the water-carrier (bhistee), the dyer (rungroz), all these and many others make up the municipal fabric, each being in a way a thread, the cutting of which is lamented in turn. The directness of the following occupational entries, viz. Tehul sonar, Kulloo bhistee, and Ally Bhaksh rungroz, in the *Mahua Dabar* Proceedings, proves, what I call an unwitting shahr ashob: a colonial archival document, which, ironically enough, takes the very form of lamentation which it was meant to keep down.

Mohwa Dabur is a tragedy of sorts because it does not have an endogenous shahr-ashob. Being called a village, not a city, its people are mostly cultivators and craftsmen and officials of the administration, not the courtly poets who normally represent the genre. The most appropriate elegiac tradition could therefore be available only to those educated in a literary idiom, which the village itself was able not to provide. This paper thus attempts to dig its mourn out of the colonial prose that is adversarial.

#### **IV.iii. Mir Taqi Mir: Witness to the Extinguishing**

Mir Taqi Mir (1722-1810) stands on the peak of the elegiac poetics in the period of the deterioration of the Mughal Empire. His famous couplet, the metatextual core of the desolation talk in Urdu, is the couplet *Dilli jo ek shahr tha alam mein intikhaab*: it describes a city once admired by the world as burnt to ashes, and thus forcing the poet, himself being outcast, to use it only in the past tense

(see Dawn.com). The poetics of Mir are not applicable to the MohwaDabur case not because he referred to that very place (which he could not have known) but because the symbolic diction, perfected by him, is used, unwontingly, as a lexicon with which colonial dictates are worked.

#### IV.iv. Ghalib's Political Elegy after 1857

A corpus of prose and verse in response to the resultant tragedy was written by Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797-1869), who was a witness of the British subjugation that followed the 1857 revolt in Delhi. His letters, in the Dastan-Bu collection, represent the empty streets of Delhi, with houses deprived of their inhabitants, trades disorganized, lamps put out, in a similar vein to the Mohwa depositions: houses whose descendants have fled, professions stopped, lamps put out. The political elegy is not a standard course of comfort; instead of leading to acceptance, his post-1857 poems are suspended in the unattainable, never-never impossible present of loss, and list examples of absences in the same meticulously, like an inventory. The discursive overlap between the Proceedings and the poem by Ghalib is dramatic: both are systematic lists of what remains in the wake of the colonial violence.

#### Faiz Ahmed Faiz and the Stained Light

Subh-e-Azadi, or Dawn of Freedom, a 1947 poem by Fais Azmed Faiz, is a good example of post-colonial lamp imagery. The glorified first line, Ye daagh ujala, ye shab gazeeda seher (This stained light, this night-bitten dawn) puts independence not in the form of a pristine light but in the form of a

deformed glitter (Scroll.in). Even the very beginning of freedom in this reading remains traumatized, but soaked in the leftover darkness of the colonial night that came before it.

In the case of Faiz, the lamp which should be the portent of emancipation is instead a much-stained radiance, the light of which is contaminated by the very bloodshed it was supposed to put out. The most politically charged formulation of the tradition of the chiragh is accomplished in this paradigm: the lamp is not a symbol of success but rather an indicator of the loss it is going to be.

#### IV.vi. The Hindi Viraha Tradition: Place as Beloved, Dispersal as Death

A parallel register is provided by the Hindi tradition of viraha those who lived in the Bhakti, through the classical era, the lamp is used as the sign of the presence of the beloved. In this case the absence of the beloved can be felt: the lamp in the house which was left unattended is a burner of the person who has not come back. The movement of the inhabitants of *Mahua Dabar* to Bhyropoor, Kulwaree, Bahadorpore, Runwapoor, Gobindgunge, Nuggur, Gai Ghat, and Coosowry, as was testified by Badal Khani, realises what the poetry of the \*viraha\* idealises symbolically, the annihilation of the beloved site by the forced displacement of its inhabitants. Place is not just setting in the tradition of the viraha, but is the hero; its disappearance is a kind of death.

#### V. The Archive of Dispersal: Three Close Readings

### **V.i. Mehurban Khan's Compressed Participial Clause**

One of the most notable linguistic incidents on the Proceedings is a single clause of the participial form in the deposition of Mehurban Khan before the Special Commissioner 17 August 1860. In the defence of the accusations of his being implicated in the murder of British officers, Mehurban collaborates with the statement that, he visited his family at Burhumpore, *Mahua Dabar* thrown to the ground. The term is a truncated participial absolute; it makes the ruining of the village a lesser priority to the reappearance of the speaker. It is not the destruction but the action of the speaker. But the servant clause, Mohwa -Dabur levelled to the ground, summarises the entire history of the effect of the decree.

The passive form of the sentence - being levelled as opposed to which the British levelled - produces another erasure: the instigator of the destruction is not mentioned in the structure of the sentence. The village was brought down, and no specific actor is named. This is prose of power performing the violence it has acted upon, in the language of Guha, even to its victim the destruction itself is grammatically stateless, predetermined, and part of the landscape instead of a colonial punishment (Guha 14-15). Thus, the clause by Mehurban Khan takes into account the whole ideology of the ghairchiragi: the village turns into a grammatical moment, but not a historical wrong.

### **V.ii. Badal Khan's Catalogue: The Shahr-Ashob** Knowledgeable Research (KR) 2026, vol,5, Issue,02

### **of the Absent**

When asked, Where did the inhabitants of Mohwa<sup>3</sup> Dabur, viz. the Cazee, end others, go, after it was burnt, by the Rajah of Gopalpore, and by the Mr. Peppe? the spy Badal -Khan answers with a catalog, which amounts to an unconscious shahr-ashob of dispersal: Other wise the Cazee went to Bhyropoor, and the Rajah of Nuggur, and the Bullee-Singh. To put it briefly, both of them made their escape to the location they sought refuge. The Cazeo fled to Secon " -Bursa in the neighborhood of Ruhwaree, and hid him with Bullee " Singh. And again, in querying about the shopkeepers, in particular: "Some at Kulwaree, some at Buhadorpore, some at Runwapore, some at Gobindgunge, some at Nuggur, some at Gai Ghat, some at Coosowry.

This catalogue, which as it were plays the primary convention of the \*shahr-ashob\* the absent community is now present, by the list of its dispersal. The shahr-eshod normally enumerates professions to lament a city; here, it is towns that are being enumerated to lament a village. All place-names are fragments of a formerly-unifying population, one which has lost the commonality of place-location, that is, the commonality of place-chiragh, which is the commonality of community. Grammatical form - some, some, some - breaks down a singular, they, into a plural, individuals, individuals alone, and all of them finding shelter in whatever place they find it.

### **V.iii. The Human Inventory: Sonar, Bhistee, Rungroz**

The lists of accused in the *Mahua Dabar*

Proceedings are at face value lists of murder suspects. However, when read in the prism of the shahr-ashob tradition they form a human catalog of a community proclaimed null. Some of the names include: Tehul sonar (Tehul, the goldsmith), Kulloo bhistee (Kulloo, the water-carrier), Ally Baksh rungroz (Ally Baksh, the dyer), Buffata bhat (Buffata, the performer/entertainer), Goodun barber (the barber of Mahomedpore). These are the occupations which make up an operating village economy, the occupations which the shahr-ashob convention appeals to to lament the loss of the city. They are included in a murder indictment, and the genre they belong to becomes a list of those convicted.

A rungroz (cloth-dyer) is a very sounding character. Cloth-dying is a collective business where vats are shared and neighbourly collaboration takes place; it is, strictly speaking, the art of putting colour into that otherwise colourless. The banishment of the rungroz is the banishment of color out of the village. The sonar (goldsmith) introduces the luxuriousness of the decorative; the bhistee (water-carrier) introduces the simple element of existence. By stating the village *Ghair-chiragi* the decree not only expels these people, but also the social functions they carry out: the possibility of adornment, water, color, and nourishment which is a human settlement.

## VI. Comparative Survey: Colonial Dead Zones and Their Grammars

The *Ghair-chiragi* logic has structural similarities within legal history of the colonies. The same

mechanism worked through terra nullius the principle that proclaimed Australia legally empty, whether or not it is inhabited by the Aborigines, the administrative repurposing of inhabited space as empty (Benton 809). It was, of just this reason, that the British treated Australia as ownerless: the relationship of the Aborigines to land failed to fit the European concepts of property, and generated, as Stuart Banner has demonstrated, a doctrine that was not a description of legal fact but a performative statement that made the image of a fact of its own.

The waste land provisions in Bengal used by the Permanent Settlement operated in the same way. Fallow land, forested land, land occupied by pastoral peoples who lacked title was denominated as waste and was put on sale as a source of revenue-generating settlement; a term which swept away actual utilization and settlement by using the sovereign power of name. Ranajit Guha, in his book, *A Rule of Property on Bengal* records the role this classification played in the interests of the colonial revenue system at the expense of those it rendered invisible.

The British thirty years later, with their disturbed areas under British emergency law in Malaya, Cyprus and Kenya; their strategic hamlets and free-fire areas in Vietnam; their cleared zones in British Palestine; all join the same grammar. Both of the designations create the zone as a place where normal protections are inapplicable since the normal relationship between population and space has been

broken or proclaimed null. There is no structural difference between the *Ghair-chiragi* and the free-fire zone: they are all instances of performative designations that achieve legal erasure through naming it.

### VII. The Decree as Involuntary Elegy

There is a profound paradox at the heart of the *Ghair-chiragi* decree that this paper now addresses directly. The decree was intended to accomplish erasure: to render *Mahua Dabar* not merely abandoned but administratively non-existent, its name present only in the record of its punishment. And yet the very archive that contains the decree—the North Western Provinces Judicial (Criminal) Department Proceedings of October 1860—is the document that has preserved *Mahua Dabar's* memory for the century and a half that followed. The decree meant to extinguish the lamp has become the lamp.

This is not an irony peculiar to *Mahua Dabar*. It is structural to the colonial archive. As Guha argues in "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," colonial documents about rebellion are composed from the point of view of power, yet they cannot help but contain—in the form of testimony, of names, of the details that specificity requires—the traces of the lives they seek to suppress. The Proceedings, in recording the depositions of Badal Khan, Mehurban Khan, Hossein Buksh, Binda Pandey, and the rest, have preserved their voices alongside the legal machinery designed to silence them.

But the paradox runs deeper than archival preservation. In deploying the *chiragh* figure—even

as negation—the decree enters into dialogue with the poetic tradition it weaponizes. *Ghair-chiragi* is not a neutral legal term; it is a term saturated with literary history, a phrase that carries within it all the elegiac weight of the *viran chiragh* topos. In declaring the village lamp-less, the decree has acknowledged, through negation, that there was a lamp—that the village was, in the full figurative sense of the tradition, illuminated. The decree thus names what it destroys, and in naming it, preserves it in the very act of erasure.

This is the performative paradox that the present paper has been moving toward: a decree that accomplishes obliteration through a word that can only mean obliteration against the background of something that existed. *Ghair* requires *chiragh* before it can negate it. The erasure contains the erased. The lamp's absence is legible only because the lamp was present. And so the colonial archive, in preserving the decree, has preserved the light it sought to extinguish—not as fact but as the negative space from which the fact can be reconstructed.

### VIII. Conclusion: Recovery as Illumination

In the glorified song of Mir -Taqi -Mir -Dilli jo ek shahr tha alam mein intikhaab the poet claims his platform in a lost history. The elegiac echo of the line is all based on that backward tense: it brings to the mind Delhi as a superlative city which by annexation or even by the very mention of it is no more. The speaker is not allowed to go back to what was once the Delhi of old; he is only able to remember it, and in remembering it, he wants to

defend it in the face of the indifference of the present.

*Mahua Dabar* on the other hand, bears no resemblance to Mir. Its dwellers were illiterate workers, farmers, artisans, peasants, merchants, who spoke a language that could not be listed as part of the literary canon. The mourn with *Mahua Dabar* never made an appearance in ghazals or the shahrashobs, but it made an appearance in the dry, reprovng prose of colonial evidence, the names of which are only retained in the degree that they are useful to the prosecuting engine and the punishing engine. The mission that is performed in this paper is to get that lamp back through the enemy archive.

The discussion has revealed that the colonial decree and the poetic tradition are not only similar but they interact like interlocutors. Ghairchiragi derives its figurative strength on a tradition which knew more of what it was to put a lamp out than the law itself. using that tradition against a village, the colonial state entered the dialogue about loss, desolation, and continuance of memory, and in doing so had set itself against a long and ancient tradition of dialogue about loss, desolation, and continuance of memory.

The record of handing over, the records, listings, formalities of destinations, as read with this tradition, serves as an unintentional elegy of a people without poets. The catalogues, read as they are in most cases, with the coldness of bureaucracy, are, in such a light, the very lament the town had been so anxious should be.

Compressed clause by Mehurban upon which the destruction is explained *Mahua Dabar* being

levelled to the ground is an experienced expression of erasure, the time of destruction viewed inside, grammatically deprived of its agent, that syntactically relegated to the life of a person. But that larger tradition which has collected herein the research restores that provision, reconnects the names of the sonar, the bhistee, the rungroz; the names of the localities where they were scattered abroad; the lamp which until the word was issued to put out its fire burned in the house. Recovery in the sense assumed herein is itself an illumination, and is a revival of an existence the decree removed off the legal roll, but will still remain undecayed in the archive awaiting a discursive reading.

*“Dilli jo ek shahr tha. Mohwa Dabur jo ek gaon tha.” Delhi was once a city. Mahua Dabar was formerly a village. The elegy is the same. It would now have to recover itself.*

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### Appendix A: Selected Primary Source Passages from the Proceedings

Passage 1 — Mehurban Khan's Participial Clause (Deposition before Special Commissioner, 17 August 1860):

"...that he returned to his family at Burhampore, *Mahua Dabar* being levelled to the ground; that deponent was about to make his appearance, when his putteedar caused him to be arrested."

Passage 2 — Badal Khan on the Dispersal of Residents (Deposition, 17 August 1860):

"Q. Where did the residents of *Mahua Dabar*, viz., the Cazee and others go, after it was burnt by the Rajah of Gopalpore and Mr. Peppe? A. Some went to Bhyropoor, some to the Rajah of Nuggur, and some to Bullee Singh. In short, each made his escape to the place where he found shelter... Q. Where have the *Mahua Dabar* shop-keepers settled themselves? A. Some at Kulwaree, some at Buhadorpore, some at Runwapore, some at Gobindgunge, some at Nuggur, some at Gai Ghat, and some at Coosowry."

### Passage 3 — List of *Mahua Dabar* Suspects with

### Occupations:

"Goodar Khan, Nubba Khun, Ameer Khan, Syfe Khan, Ruzza Khan, Sheikh Joommyn, Sheikh Mudara, Sheikh Durab, Sunundar Khan, Kulloo bhistee, Bulfata bhat, Sheikh Budloo, Mahomed Ully, Buffata rungroz, Tehul sonar, and Ally Baksh rungroz, residents of *Mahua Dabar*."

### Appendix B: *Chiragh Across Five Figurative Registers*

The following table traces the figure of the chiragh (lamp) across five registers of South Asian figurative tradition, demonstrating the cumulative weight of the term that *Ghair-chiragi* negates.

REGISTER | MEANING OF CHIRAGH | KEY TROPES | PRIMARY SOURCES | NEGATION (*GHAIR-CHIRAGI*)

Domestic | Household fire; family continuance; domestic warmth | Ghar mein chiragh na hona (house without a lamp = extinct family) | Urdu proverb; daily idiom | Community declared dead  
Sufi | Divine Noor; transmission from master to disciple; inner light | Chiragh-e Sufi; silsila (chain of transmission) | Rumi; Hafiz; South Asian Sufi poetry | Spiritual lineage severed

Ghazal | Beloved's presence; sign of life in the night | Viran chiragh (desolate lamp); lamp burning for absent beloved | Mir Taqi Mir; Ghalib; classical ghazal | Absence made permanent by decree

Urban/Shahr-Ashob | Civilization; market; trade; community | *Chiragh as* city-life; lamp-less city as ruined city | Shahr-ashob genre; Fughan-e Dehli (1863) | Village declared a ruin before its time

Political | Freedom; resistance; hope against colonial night | Ye daagh ujala (stained light) — Faiz; forbidden lamp of resistance | Faiz, "Subh-e Azadi" | Liberation foreclosed before it begins

### **Appendix C: Comparative Table of Six Colonial Erasure Designations**

DESIGNATION | REGION/PERIOD | LEGAL MECHANISM | TARGET POPULATION | LANGUAGE OF NEGATION

Terra Nullius | Australia, 1788–1992 | Property law; absence of European-recognized title | Aboriginal Australians | "Empty land" — people rendered invisible

Waste Land | Bengal, Permanent Settlement 1793 | Revenue classification | Pastoral/swidden communities | "Wasteland" — use rendered invisible

*Ghair-chiragi* | North Western Provinces, 1857–1860 | Penal designation; collective punishment | *Mahua Dabar* residents | "Lamp-less" — life rendered extinguished

Disturbed Area | British Kenya/Malaya, 1948–1960 | Emergency Regulations | Rural/forest communities | "Disturbed" — normality rendered absent

Strategic Hamlet | Vietnam, 1962–1964 | Counterinsurgency relocation | Rural Vietnamese | Displacement framed as protection

Free-Fire Zone | Vietnam, 1965–1972 | Military designation | Civilians in "hostile" areas | "Free" fire — humanity rendered absent