

Reconfiguring South Asian Islam: From the 18th to the 19th Century¹

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ABSTRACT

Distinctive shifts in the character of South Asian Islamic culture took place between eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This article tracks these changes through two notable examples, Ghulam ‘Ali Azad Bilgrami (d. 1786) and Hajji Imdad Allah Muhajir Makki (d. 1899). Analysis of writings by and about these two figures demonstrates shifting models of what it meant to be a South Asian Muslim intellectual. The confident cosmopolitanism of Bilgrami, on the cusp of the British colonial conquest, yields to a much more defensive posture in Hajji Imdad Allah, who was indeed engaged in resistance against the ultimately victorious British rule. Loss of traditional Muslim patronage coincided with the decline of philosophical traditions and interest in Hindu culture, along with the rise of the scriptural reformism typified by the Deoband school, which addressed a broader Muslim public. The relatively short time during which these changes occurred emphasizes the significant cultural gap between the pre- and post-colonial periods of South Asian Islam.

Keywords

South Asia, Islam, intellectual traditions, philosophy, Deoband, reformism, Sufism

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference on “Religion and Civil society—Germany, Great Britain, and India in the 19th century,” at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, May 10–13, 2006.

What does it mean to define or inflect Islam in terms of a regional identity? Region and locality clearly have a definitive role in creating particular cultural expressions of any religious tradition, including Islam. The tendency to ascribe a default Arab identity for all Muslims is unrealistic; the Arabian peninsula is, after all, only one of many cultural situations that refract Islamic religious texts and doctrines into different regional contexts.² Then again, focusing on one particular region such as South Asia may end up postulating unchanging and essential characteristics of a particular region as a location of Islamic culture, regardless of change over time. An even more typical error is to view the history of religion in a particular region in terms of teleological political outcomes of local identity. Perhaps the most common narrative concerning South Asia defines the region in terms of religious identities that culminate in the formation of modern nation states; thus India is seen as a Hindu state, while Pakistan and Bangladesh uneasily aspire to be the Islamic equivalents. Ascribing a definitive identity to South Asian Islam begs the question of historical change, particularly with respect to massive transformations such as the experience of European colonialism.

An alternative way of approaching this problem is to examine a region like South Asia diachronically, by examining notable figures from the periods just before and after the onset of European colonial rule over the South Asian subcontinent. A convenient medium to explore for this purpose is biographical literature, which tends to portray its subjects in terms of ideals widely accepted in society. The two cases proposed for study here—the eighteenth-century scholar, Azad Bilgrami, and the nineteenth-century reformist Sufi, Hajji Imdad Allah—share many common characteristics, including literary skills, training in the Islamic sciences, and engagement with Sufi networks. But in a number of key respects they lived in altogether different worlds. Since the bulk of recent scholarship on Islamic culture in South Asia has focused on the colonial and postcolonial eras, I would like to emphasize here the period just prior to European colonialism, precisely because it has been to a great extent eclipsed and forgotten. Bilgrami's biographical dictionary of Indian Muslim scholars furnishes an extensive baseline for the precolonial period, and I will try to summarize its leading characteristics in the remarks that follow. Two biographies of Hajji Imdad Allah from the

2. Bruce B. Lawrence, "Islamicate Civilization: The View from Asia," in *Teaching Islam*, edited by Brannon Wheeler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 61–76.

colonial and postcolonial periods provide a remarkable contrast suggestive of the new cultural dynamics that followed from British domination and its sequels. The narrowing of intellectual perspectives that were sacrificed with the loss of Muslim power and patronage was countered by a broadening of the social base through new religious institutions.

The first example to consider is the 18th-century Indian Muslim scholar and poet, Ghulam 'Ali "Azad" Bilgrami (1704–1786), a scion of an important family from North India who traveled widely in the Middle East before he established himself in the Deccan.³ Bilgrami was one of the last Indian Muslim scholars to express himself at length in Arabic as well as in Persian; he was an accomplished poet in both languages. His Persian works include three notable anthologies of poetry as well as a hagiography devoted to Sufis of the Deccan. In a strikingly original Arabic treatise entitled *The Coral Rosary of Indian Traditions* (written in 1763–1764), Bilgrami provided a snapshot of his concept of the world, seen from the perspective of an Indian Muslim.⁴ What was Bilgrami's concept of Islam in South Asia? This book presents a vision of the world in which Arabia is the ritual center, but where networks of religious scholarship and humanistic culture are firmly based in India. Bilgrami's world definitely included local political rulers whose sphere of power and patronage was important. But the key elements in his intellectual formation, as nourished by contemporary social organizations, ranged through a variety of disciplines, including the study of authoritative Islamic religious texts, logical and philosophical treatises, the humanistic traditions of Arabic and Persian poetry, plus the rich resources of non-Muslim Indian ("Hindu") literature and aesthetics.⁵ All this activity was sustained by charitable foundations (*waqf*), especially those associated with the Sufi orders.

Bilgrami's notion of civility and culture is worth examining as an example of pragmatic pluralism that soon would go out of fashion. When one briefly considers comparable Indian Muslim figures from the height

3. A.S. Bazmee Ansari, "Azad Bilgrami," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1960), I: 808a–b; C.A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey* (London: Luzac and Company, 1972), I: 855–867.

4. Ghulam 'Ali Azad al-Bilgrami, *Subhat al-marjan fi athar Hindustan*, ed. Muhammad Fadl al-Rahman al-Nadwi al-Siwani, 2 vols. (Aligarh: Jami'at 'Aligarh al-Islamiyya, 1976–1980). The curious may have access to some pages from this rare publication online at <http://www.unc.edu/courses/2006spring/reli/179/001/>.

5. On the difficulties of defining Hinduism, see David N. Lorenzen, *Who Invented Hinduism?: Essays on Religion in History* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006).

of the colonial period, at the end of the nineteenth century, the contrast is stark. An overall assessment of the impacts of British colonial rule on Indian Islam is beyond the scope of this article.⁶ But a comparison between Bilgrami and a leading figure of Indo-Muslim culture from the 19th century indicates major changes. In India as in other regions, colonialism led to the breakup of scholarly networks previously supported by Muslim patronage, with a consequent abandonment of the higher curriculum of philosophical study, and a deliberate rejection of cultural practices that were considered overly Hinduized, in favor of a focus on authoritative Islamic texts. Such is arguably the case with the second figure under discussion here, Hajji Imdad Allah (d. 1899), the renowned Sufi and religious scholar whose students became the founders of the reformist academy of Deoband in 1867.⁷ While his successors may have moved further in the direction of authoritarian reformism than he anticipated, Imdad Allah continued to play a guiding role in the biographies that they devoted to his memory. A contrast between Bilgrami's biographies of his contemporaries, and the narratives of Imdad Allah written by his successors, is suggestive of the changing landscape of cultural possibilities for Muslims in the transition from precolonial to colonial India. Hajji Imdad Allah's biographers showed no interest in any non-religious intellectual disciplines nor in any poetic references to Hindu culture; they were initially interested in his credentials in core Islamic religious texts and saintly virtues, though later on they became absorbed in his heroic leadership in jihad against the British infidels. From the eighteenth to nineteenth century, the concept of Muslim culture in South Asia shifted from a local inflection of universalist Islamic learning under aristocratic patronage to a defensive posture of authenticity articulated by a new class of religious scholars under the pressure of foreign colonial rule. While this comparison is not symmetrical—I am comparing Bilgrami's biographies of his contemporaries with accounts of Imdad Allah by his successors—the striking thing is how difficult it would have been to find any equivalent for Imdad Allah among his eighteenth-century predecessors.

For a survey of Islamic learning in South Asia in the eighteenth century, it is hard to improve upon *The Coral Rosary*, a composite work

6. The scope of the problem is indicated by Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University press, 2006).

7. For Hajji Imdad Allah and the Deoband school, see Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

that Bilgrami wrote separately in four parts, later combined together. The first part is devoted to the statements of the Prophet Muhammad (*hadith*) regarding the sanctity of India as the place where Adam landed on Earth after his expulsion from Paradise.⁸ The second part, from which I draw primarily in this paper, is a biographical dictionary containing accounts of 45 Indian Muslim scholars who wrote in Arabic, ranging from the eighth century to the author's own day. The third and fourth parts are concerned with rhetoric and the categories of lovers found in Indian literature, illustrated in part by Arabic verses of the author's own composition. Bilgrami subsequently translated the third and fourth parts into Persian, substituting examples of Persian poetry to complete this comparative study of Arabic, Persian, and Indic rhetoric and poetics.⁹

While each of the four sections of *The Coral Rosary* is important for Bilgrami's concept of Indian Muslim culture, the second biographical section is of particular significance in the way it presents the Arabic Islamic intellectual tradition as received by the author. Part two begins abruptly with a lengthy quotation from the Ottoman bibliographer Katib Chelebi (d. 1657), taken from his immense survey of Arabic writings, the *Kashf al-Zunun*.¹⁰ The brunt of this passage, which is clearly marked by the technical vocabulary of the famous North African historian Ibn Khaldun, is a diatribe on the lack of artistic and scientific contributions by the Arabs, whose nomadic existence has led them to concentrate their

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8. I have translated excerpts from this section in "India as a Sacred Islamic Land," in *Religions of India in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Princeton Readings in Religions, 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 556–564. There I translated the title of the text as *The Coral Rosary of Indian Antiquities*, but "traditions" is probably better than "antiquities" as a rendering of the original Arabic term *athar*, in terms of its premodern meaning. For comparable material from an early Islamic source on Adam's descent to India, see *The History of al-Tabari: General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).
 9. Mir Ghulam 'Ali Azad Bilgrami, *Ghazalan al-Hind: Mutala'a-i Tatbiqi-i Balaghat-i Hindi va Parsi*, edited by Sirus Shamisa (Tehran: Sada-yi Mu'asir, 1382/2004). The title of this printed edition is a mistake for *Ghizlan al-Hind* (Gazelles of India), which is a chronogram for the year of the book's composition (1178/1764–1765).
 10. This extraordinary compilation is, remarkably, available in a bilingual Arabic-Latin edition. See Kâtip Çelebi, *Lexicon bibliographicum et encyclopaedicum ... ad codicum Vindobonensium Parisiensium et Berolinensis fidem primum edidit Latine vertit et commentario indicibusque instruxit Gustavus Fluegel*, Arabic text with Latin trans. by Gustav Lebrecht Fluegel, 7 vols. (Leipzig: Published for the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1835–1858).

genius exclusively in the realm of eloquence, especially poetry. Thus he laments the fact that the Arabs of his day know little of books because of their concentration on their immediate needs, and he describes the very development of scholarship—largely by non-Arabs—to the fear of the loss of Islamic sacred texts and the need to transmit them to future generations. So it is primarily the non-Arabs (especially the Persians) who are responsible for preserving the Arabic literature of Islam, because of their civilized habits and their cultivation of the arts and crafts. Thus the chief masters of Arabic grammar, hadith, Qur'an, Islamic law, and in short all intellectual disciplines, were non-Arabs. Bilgrami concurs with this judgment, and he celebrates the creativity of the non-Arabs in all fields of intellectual endeavor. He furthermore observes that the height of intellectual achievement in the Islamic sciences has been in the lands of Iran, Central Asia, and India.

Fortunate are the non-Arabs, who are the riders of the racetrack of the sciences and the knights of the battlefield of terms and concepts; they pour from the jugs of wisdom the purest of wine, and they attain from the secrets of the sciences that which lies in the Pleiades.... When Islam approached India through Iran and Turan [Central Asia], and its perfect light unveiled the curtain of darkness from these lands, the Islamic sciences originated first of all in those lands, and the branches of this blessed tree flourished there.¹¹

This is far from the situation we observe since the twentieth century, when linguistic nationalism and notions of Arab authenticity have become the norm. Indeed, the relatively recent ascent of the Arabs to a cultural pinnacle may be an anomaly, as far as these Indian and Ottoman intellectuals are concerned.¹²

Bilgrami then describes the advent of Islam in the Indian subcontinent beginning in the first Islamic century, with the Arab conquest of Sind in 710, the Ghaznavid conquest of the tenth century and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the twelfth century, dwelling on the dominion of Muslim rulers as nearly synonymous with Islam itself. But then, he remarks, despite the presence of outstanding Islamic scholars and writ-

11. Bilgrami, I: 60–61.

12. For the modern tendency to equate the Arabic language with Islamic authenticity, see A. Kevin Reinhart, "Fundamentalism and the Transparency of the Arabic Qur'an," in *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, edited by Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 97–113.

ers, their story has not yet been told, because the Indians have been nearly exclusively concerned with the lives and teachings of the Sufi saints. In this way they have neglected the lives of Muslim religious scholars, but this deficiency is precisely what Bilgrami's book is designed to remedy.¹³ While most of the subjects described in this biographical section are closer to the author's own time, he begins with a member of the first Arab military expedition to Sind, a certain Rabi' ibn Sabih (d. 776–777), who has been described as “the first one to write [books] in Islam.” Whatever the merits of that historical claim,¹⁴ the argument for the superiority of non-Arabs, made by an Indian author with support from an Ottoman scholar, is not a new phenomenon. This belongs to the well-established tradition of ethnic contestation known as the *Shu'ubiyya*, which includes numerous literary efforts to demonstrate the virtues of non-Arabs over Arabs, by using the medium of classical Arabic.¹⁵ Bilgrami's purpose is more than simple patriotism, however, since he makes the claim for Indian Muslim achievement in the name of Islamic universalism. In other words, it is not simply the case for him that Indian Muslims are more clever than other Muslims. He views India as a unique repository of Islamic values. In this respect he echoes claims made by earlier writers going back to the days of the Delhi Sultanate, like Minhaj-i Siraj (d. after 1260), who wrote that, during the Mongol era, “the kingdom of Hindustan...became the focus of the people of Islam, and the orbit of the possessors of religion.”¹⁶ It may be added that, while Bilgrami's audience may have been in good part other Indian Muslim scholars, he clearly had in mind a broader transregional readership. As he records at the end of the first part of *The Coral Rosary*, certain scholars of Bukhara and Samarqand registered objections to the centrality of India in the first draft of his presentation, arguing that India was rather the object of divine wrath; but he effectively refuted them—since Adam first landed in India, therefore all of his descendents are Indians!¹⁷

While Bilgrami's concept of Indo-Muslim culture doubtless can be

13. Bilgrami, I: 58–63.

14. Yohanan Friedmann, “The Beginnings of Islamic Learning in Sind—A Reconsideration,” *BSOAS* 37 (1974), 659–664.

15. S. Enderwitz, “Shu'ubiyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam* IX: 513b–516a.

16. Minhaj-i Siraj-i Juzjani, quoted in Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics in the South Asian Sufi Center* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 25.

17. Bilgrami, I: 56–57.

ascertained throughout this series of biographies, the last half of this section is of special interest, since nearly all of the figures mentioned there overlap the lifetime of Bilgrami himself (and he concludes with his own biography). The political environment of India during the early eighteenth century was still in theory that of the Mughal empire, which technically held hegemony over most of the Indian subcontinent, despite a massive decentralization that in effect meant independence for a number of regions, including Bengal and the Deccan. Thus the author's grandfather 'Abd al-Jalil Bilgrami (d. 1725) received a bureaucratic appointment from the court of the Mughal emperor Farrukhsiyar (r. 1713–1719), a position that was inherited by his son Sayyid Muhammad (Azad Bilgrami's uncle). The grandfather had also written Arabic panegyric poems in honor of political figures such as the Barhi Sayyids, as well as a congratulatory poem for the victory of the emperor Aurangzeb in Satara in 1699.¹⁸ Azad Bilgrami had visited and studied with his grandfather in the capital Shahjahanabad (Delhi) in 1721–1722, and then later stayed with his uncle Sayyid Muhammad for several years while the latter held administrative posts in the towns of Bhakkar and Sistan (Sind), even serving as deputy for two years (1730–1732) while the uncle took leave in the family home in Bilgram.

But the political networks cited here extended outside of the Mughal realm in northern India. So we hear of the fortunes of the philosopher Sayyid 'Ali Dashtaki of Shiraz (d. 1705), who was born in Medina, escaped political turmoil in the Deccan kingdom of Golkonda, and received an imperial appointment from Aurangzeb, for whom he served as a military governor and treasurer before departing to perform the Shi'i pilgrimage and retire to Iran.¹⁹ Likewise in the biography of the hadith scholar 'Abd Allah al-Basri (d. 1726), a resident of Mecca, there is a detailed description of the floods that took place in 1630, requiring an extensive renovation of the holy shrines by the Ottoman Sultan Murad IV.²⁰

Bilgrami himself, however, is at some pains to dissociate himself from close proximity to political power. Although by his own account Bilgrami was a close friend of Nasir Jang, the second Nizam of Hyderabad, until the latter's murder in 1750, Bilgrami stipulates that the two lines of poetry he dedicated to the Nizam were the only verses that he ever

18. Bilgrami, I: 208–209.

19. Bilgrami, I: 217–223.

20. Bilgrami, I: 250–254.

composed for the rich and powerful. He further maintains that, despite the urgings of many people, he refused to take an official government position, though he may well have had some kind of stipend.²¹

The political sphere is for Bilgrami only a background, however, for the intellectual attainments that are the principal subject of his narrative. He spends considerable time documenting the contributions of Indian scholars to the central textual traditions of Islam, particularly hadith. There are specialists in the Qur'an as well, such as Nur al-Din al-Ahmadabadi (d. 1742), among whose 150 writings are rhymed commentaries on the first two suras of the Qur'an amounting to over 40,000 verses.²² But it is clearly hadith that forms the preferred field of religious study. This becomes evident in the biography of Muhammad Hayyat al-Sindi (d. 1750), a famous scholar who trained numerous outstanding figures in this field of study, including the eminent Indian thinker Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762).²³ Bilgrami studied hadith with al-Sindi in Medina in 1738, becoming one of many Indians participating in the network of pilgrimage and scholarship between Arabia and India.²⁴ It is evident that hadith study was a key element of the ethical and devotional practices that formed the backbone of the intellectual and religious networks of many Muslims during this era. Bilgrami also had a great deal of respect for 'Abd Allah al-Basri, whom he describes as the renewer of hadith studies in Mecca; he was said to have completed two full recitations of the famous *Sahih* of al-Bukhari in Mecca in 1709 at the age of 72. 'Abd Allah's commentary on the latter text was preserved in a valuable autograph manuscript owned by an Indian scholar named Muhammad As'ad, who sent it for protection with the rest of his books to a library in Aurangabad (quite possibly the library associated with the Sufi retreat of Shah Musafir where Bilgrami later resided for seven years). Muhammad As'ad was unfortunately killed along with the third Nizam, Muzaffar Jang, in a battle in 1752, and Bilgrami said the prayers at his funeral.²⁵ Scholars like Bilgrami took hadith for granted as a central and important field

21. Bilgrami, I: 305–308.

22. Bilgrami, I: 241.

23. John Voll, "Muhammad Hayyat al-Sindi and Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, an Analysis of an Intellectual Group in 18th-Century Medina," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38 (1975): 32–39.

24. Bilgrami, I: 244–247.

25. Bilgrami, I: 250–256.

of study, and they commonly used it for reference and to clinch arguments, as Bilgrami did when he justified the use of his name Ghulam ‘Ali (“the slave/devotee of ‘Ali”) to his old teacher Muhammad Hayyat al-Sindi, when the latter had doubts about the idolatrous implications of the name.²⁶

Nevertheless, sacred Islamic texts were far from being the exclusive focus of study among these Muslim intellectuals in eighteenth-century India. There was in India a rich tradition of the study of logic and philosophy, drawing upon the heritage of Aristotelian and Platonic thought as mediated by Avicenna (d. 1037) and the Persian thinkers of the school of Isfahan in Safavid Iran. Most of the authors discussed by Bilgrami wrote commentaries on standard works in the rational sciences as well as in religious fields. An outstanding example was Mulla Mahmud al-Faruqi of Jaunpur (d. 1652); Bilgrami quotes at length from Mahmud-i Jaunpuri’s treatise refuting the doctrine of temporal origination proposed by the Iranian philosopher Mir Damad (d. 1616).²⁷ There are also commentators on the metaphysical works of Mulla Sadra of Shiraz (d. 1640), such as Nizam al-Din ibn Qutb al-Din (d. 1748), whom Bilgrami met in Lucknow.²⁸ In addition, we find philosophically minded legal thinkers like Muhibb Allah Bihari (d. 1707), appointed as the supreme judge in India by the emperor Aurangzeb; his original writings are especially noted for integrating logic into the principles of Islamic jurisprudence.²⁹ Bilgrami spends considerable time also in the account of his friend Qamar al-Din Aurangabadi (1711–1779), whose father was a disciple of a prominent Naqshbandi Sufi. It seems typical of his training that he studied the intellectual and religious sciences first, before learning the Qur’an. His principal work on the metaphysics of existence, *Mazhar al-Nur*, takes off from a debate between Avicenna and his student Bahmanyar, on the question of whether God’s continuous creation of the universe means that entities are indeed the same over time; it is quoted at length by Bilgrami, along with a commentary on it written by Qamar al-Din’s son Nur al-Huda.³⁰

26. Bilgrami, I: 248–249.

27. Bilgrami, I: 145–162.

28. Bilgrami, I: 242.

29. Bilgrami, I: 197–199.

30. Bilgrami, I: 262–298. When Bahmanyar challenges the notion that entities are the same over time, Ibn Sina caustically remarks that if that is the case, who is it who continues to argue this point?

Natural sciences were also part of the philosophical curriculum; a cousin of Bilgrami's, Sayyid Muhammad Yusuf Bilgrami, is singled out for his knowledge of astronomy, which he demonstrated when an incompetent navigator brought a ship bound for Bombay to Sri Lanka by mistake.³¹ Bilgrami relates these philosophical and scientific accomplishments as a matter of course; there was no need for him to justify the compatibility of rational sciences with traditional religious disciplines in the relatively open intellectual climate that sustained these enterprises.

The religious and philosophical traditions were in turn complemented in these circles by the belletristic study of Arabic and Persian literature. This is evident in the very texture of *The Coral Rosary*, which regularly shifts into the rhyming ornate prose (*saj'*) that is considered a hallmark of literary Arabic style. Many biographies record the completion of a standard sequence that includes lexicography, biography, metrics, and poetry, often capped ceremonially by recitation of a Fatiha (*sura* 1 of the Qur'an) to mark completion of the course of study. There are frequent digressions of Arabic poetry, including quotations from classical masters such as al-Hariri and al-Mutanabbi, not to mention Bilgrami's own poetry. Bilgrami's grandfather 'Abd al-Jalil was noted for his anthology of selections from the classic *al-Mustatraf*.³² One of the favorite recreations of Bilgrami is the chronogram (*ta'rikh*), an artifice made possible by the fact that each letter of the Arabic alphabet has a numerical value according to the ancient *abjad* or *hisab al-jummal* system. This means that clever writers can compose phrases or verses, the sum of whose letters will yield numerological equivalents indicating a particular year.³³ Bilgrami lavishes considerable skill and effort on this device, which provides the reader with a refined literary aesthetic of time, life, and death, not to mention a corrective to slips of the pen in transcribing numerical dates.³⁴ As an example, his departure for the pilgrimage to Mecca is

31. Bilgrami, I: 251.

32. Bilgrami, I: 223. This is the well-known collection of Arabic literature, *al-Mustatraf fi kull fann mustatraf*, by the Egyptian scholar Baha' al-Din Muhammad al-Ibshihi (d. ca. 1446); see "al-Ibshihi," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, III: 1005a–1006a.

33. See the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* articles "Abjad," I: 97a; "Hisab al-Djummal," III: 468a; "Ta'rikh. III," X: 301b.

34. This omnipresent feature of Islamicate historiography had a late colonial continuation in the Persian compilation *Miftah al-tawarikh* ("The Key to Chronograms") by Thomas William Beale, composed in 1849; see Sir H. M. Elliot, *The History of India as told by its own Historians, The Muhammadan Period*, edited by John Dowson (8 vols.,

memorialized by the phrase “a good journey” (*safar khayr*), which yields the date in question, 1150/1737.³⁵ He records lengthy and learned commentaries by scholars adjudicating the question of whether one should count the numerical value of the written form of a letter or its spoken form.³⁶ He demonstrates a method of composing chronograms using circular diagrams to facilitate addition.³⁷ A characteristic example of the attachment these scholars felt to the chronogram is the story of ‘Abd Allah al-Basri, who amazingly heard the chronogram of his own death while still living. This happened because Bilgrami was trying to write a chronogram for the death of his teacher Muhammad Hayyat al-Sindi, but the formulation that he came up with (which he shared with ‘Abd Allah) was excessive by one year. When ‘Abd Allah al-Basri died the following year, Bilgrami was able to dedicate the same chronogram to him instead.³⁸ It is fitting indeed that, for the death of Bilgrami, a suitable chronogram was composed yielding the date 1200/1786; it needs no translation (*ah! Ghulam ‘Ali Azad!*).³⁹

For the moment I will not go much further into Bilgrami’s engagement with the literatures of India, but it suffices to say that, as with most Indian Muslims, his mother tongue was one of the regional languages that have become the modern languages of South Asia, doubtless a form of what today is called Hindi. His detailed Arabic commentary on Indian rhetoric and the poetics of love was part of a long tradition of Indological study by Muslims in the subcontinent, going all the way back to al-Biruni and

London, 1867–1877; reprint ed., Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, n.d.), VIII: 441–444. On the basis of those poetic devices, an English epitome was created: *An Oriental Biographical Dictionary*, founded on materials collected by the late Thomas William Beale, edited by Henry George Keene (London: W. H. Allen, 1894), which, however, in providing dates dispensed with the poetic chronograms themselves, on the grounds that “when the result has been produced [it] is not of much more use than the scaffolding of a building when the building is complete” (p. vii). Beale’s collection has, however, come in for its share of criticism; Robert Skelton complains of “his normal practice of contriving at least one error per entry” (“Shaykh Phul and the Origins of Bundi Painting,” in *Chhavi-2: Rai Krishnadasa Felicitation Volume* [Benares: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1981], 125, n. 18).

35. Bilgrami, I: 300.

36. Bilgrami, I: 247–248.

37. Bilgrami, II: 268–274; *Ghizlan al-Hind*, 108–112.

38. Bilgrami, I: 256. The chronogram in question was *qada nahbahu ‘alim majid*, “a distinguished scholar has expired” (1164/1751). Al-Sindi died in 1163/1750.

39. Bilgrami, editor’s introduction in English, I: 7.

al-Shahrastani.⁴⁰ This was a locally based cosmopolitanism, or cultural pluralism, that was fully compatible with the broader concept of *adab*, the urbane and cultured learning fostered in the early Arab caliphate, which is practically synonymous with the humanistic study of literature in Arabic and Persian. Moreover, it is worth noting that Bilgrami's chief disciple in Persian literature was a Hindu scholar, Lachhmi Narayan "Shafiq" Awrangabadi (1745–ca. 1808).⁴¹ The latter was of course one of many non-Muslim Indian authors who mastered Persian, often to enter the bureaucracy of the Mughal empire and other Islamicate regimes, but there were a significant number of Persian poets among them.⁴² Mohammed Arkoun looks to the humanism of Arab intellectuals of the tenth century as a time of aspiration for what the philosopher al-Farabi called the "Virtuous City," in a process of building civic culture.⁴³ It may be suggested that, in late Mughal India, intellectuals like Bilgrami shared comparable ideals.

From a social perspective, it is evident that the intellectuals described by Bilgrami belonged to networks of scholarship that were to some extent structured by family relationships, while at the same time they were sustained by patronage of local rulers. The long-range travel that included pilgrimage and scholarly study in the Arabian Peninsula must also have been linked to the Indian Ocean trade. Some of the academic achievements chronicled by Bilgrami were undoubtedly accomplished with the support of charitable endowments, which permanently alienated land, property, and wealth from the taxing authority of the monarchy. India does not offer the extensive archival documentation of charitable trusts that is available for the Ottoman Empire, probably because of the combined effects of climate, destructive insects, and political turmoil. Nor does Bilgrami provide any details on the financial support of scholarly circles on the part of rulers and other individuals. But from a circumstantial point of view it is noteworthy that, after completing his pilgrimage to Arabia, Bilgrami returned to India and spent seven

40. Carl W. Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Persian and Arabic Translations from Sanskrit," *Iranian Studies* 36 (2003): 173–195.

41. Storey, I: 476–478, and references cited in the index, I: 1416.

42. Stefano Pellò, "Hindu Persian Poets," *Encyclopedia Iranica* (<http://www.iranica.com/articles/hindu-persian-poets>).

43. Mohammed Arkoun, "Locating Civil Society in Islamic Context," in *Civil society in the Muslim world: contemporary perspectives*, edited by Aryn B. Sajoo (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2002), 51.

years in residence at the famous Sufi shrine established in Aurangabad by Shah Musafir, known today as the Panchakki (“waterwheel”). This is an extensive establishment featuring large tanks of water supplied by a network of canals that were constructed by followers of the Central Asian Sufi who established this center some decades prior to Bilgrami’s arrival.⁴⁴ It was clearly a center of Sufi activity and scholarship, and there are indications that the library there was of extremely high quality, as it must have been to attract a scholar like Bilgrami (this library was reputedly appropriated by the Nizam and must therefore form part of the formidable Asafiyya collection in Hyderabad). The shrine must also have provided other important local services, as indicated by the presence of a very practical waterwheel for grinding grain.

The other sustaining dimension for the scholarly networks described by Bilgrami is Sufism. While Bilgrami attempted to distinguish his biographical account of Indian Muslim scholars from the generality of lives of saints produced in South Asia, it is remarkable to see how frequently the Islamic religious scholarship and philosophical studies of these figures are framed by initiation into a Sufi order. This not only included the master-disciple relationships and spiritual training that is characteristic of the inner circles of the Sufi orders, but also academic study and commentary on the more metaphysical writings of the Sufi tradition, in particular the works of Ibn ‘Arabi. Bilgrami himself is the author of a Persian hagiography (*Rawzat al-awliya*) devoted to the Sufi saints of the Deccan, which he composed in 1740.⁴⁵ He was buried outside of the town of Khuldabad, which is a major regional center of pilgrimage particularly for the Chishti Sufi order.⁴⁶ While Bilgrami does not spend much time describing inner spiritual disciplines, Sufism unquestionably provides a central framework for the formation of character and ethical training in this precolonial Indian Muslim environment. His status was probably that of a pious devotee who fully accepted the guidance of Sufi teachers, though he did not live the detached life of an elite Sufi disciple.

Bilgrami in his survey of Indian Muslim culture paid no attention to

44. Nile Green, “Auspicious Foundations: The Patronage of Sufi Institutions in the Late Mughal and Early Asaf Jah Deccan,” *South Asian Studies* 20 (2004): 71–98.

45. Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, esp. xix–xx, 91, 138.

46. For a photograph of the threshold of Bilgrami’s tomb, see Carl W. Ernst, “Khuldabad: Dargahs of Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib and Shaykh Zaynuddin Shirazi,” in *Dargahs: Abodes of the Saints*, edited by Mumtaz Currim and George Michell, special issue of *Marg* 56/1 (2004): 104–119, fig. 13.

Europeans whatever, although he had recorded their military and political presence in India in his other writings. Recent research has indicated that the relationship between Indo-Muslim and European intellectuals of the eighteenth century contained far more engagement and interaction than was previously thought.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, one can certainly find other examples of contemporary Indian Muslim scholars who did not take Europeans too seriously on the cultural level. As an example, the Naqshbandi Sufi leader Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan (d. 1799) once wrote a letter to his disciples intended to curb their conceit, on the topic, “Any Sufi Disciple Who Does Not Consider Himself Worse Than a Frankish Infidel Is in Fact Worse Than a Frankish Infidel.” So it is possible that Bilgrami did not see Europeans as a challenge to the intellectual universe of Indian Muslims; he could have viewed them primarily as foreign mercenary forces, whose presence would have no lasting consequence. Alternatively, it may be that Bilgrami deliberately avoided referring to the Europeans in an encyclopedic work that was intended to preserve traditional culture against their potential threat. In the very twilight of Bilgrami’s life, however, at the age of 85, he did have contact with officials of the British East India Company, who referred to him with great respect as they mined his poetic anthologies for historical information, at the dawn of the era of Orientalism.⁴⁸ But the Europeans cannot be said to play any significant role in Bilgrami’s picture of Indian Islamic culture.

When we turn our attention a century later to examine the impact of British colonial rule, the figure of Hajji Imdad Allah provides an apposite comparison for Bilgrami, as a Muslim intellectual steeped in both the scholarly and mystical traditions.⁴⁹ While this comparison must be

47. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

48. Henry Vansittart, “History of Asof Jah,” *The Asiatick Miscellany* 1 (1785), 327–331; Henry Vansittart, “The History of Ahmed Shah,” *The Asiatick Miscellany* 1 (1785), 332–342; William Chambers, “Extracts from the Khazanah e Aamerah,” *The Asiatick Miscellany* 1 (1785), 494–511; Henry Vansittart, “A Short History of The Origin And Progress of the Marratta State, Extracted from the Khazanah e Aamerah,” *The Asiatick Miscellany* 2 (1786), 86–122. See Chambers’ remarks quoted in Storey, I: 857–858. These historical extracts from Bilgrami’s literary anthologies tended to skip over the poetry, however.

49. On Hajji Imdad Allah, see Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2002), esp. 118–121; Scott A. Kugle, “The Heart of Ritual is the Body: Anatomy of an Islamic Devotional Manual of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 17(1), (2003): 42–60.

brief, it is worthwhile to observe the contrast between the two figures. While all of Hajji Imdad Allah's followers acknowledge his engagement with Sufism, in the sources examined here it is recast in a reformist mold and placed in a political context of anticolonial resistance. The following remarks will focus on two presentations of his life, each of which raises important criteria for the definition of the religious world of South Asian Muslims in the colonial and postcolonial eras. While one cannot necessarily take Bilgrami and Hajji Imdad Allah as typical representatives of their times, the differences between these in some ways highly comparable figures offer useful indices of major changes in outlook that have taken place after the onset of British colonial rule.

To begin with, we have the hagiographic portrait of Hajji Imdad Allah by his leading disciple Ashraf 'Ali Thanvi (d. 1943), in an Urdu work entitled *Karamat-i Imdadiyya* (The Miracles of Imdad).⁵⁰ One of the preeminent figures of the Deoband madrasa, and the author of the famous reformist manual for Muslim women, *Bihishti Zewar* (The Heavenly Ornament), Thanvi nevertheless composed this collection in 1317/1899 (shortly after Hajji Imdad Allah's death) as a scholarly record of the miraculous events that occurred through his master's spiritual power.⁵¹ The title page introduces Hajji Imdad Allah as the embodiment of Sufism, "the form whose the meaning is expressed by the verses of the *Masnawi-i Ma'navi* of Mawlana Rumi." There is an echo of Bilgrami's literary aesthetic in the Arabic ode to the master that opens up the book, though to be sure it is accompanied by an interlinear Urdu translation. And it shares the sense of prodigious narrative possibility that suffuses not only the standard Sufi hagiographies but also Bilgrami's intellectual history of Muslim scholarship. The purpose of this work, in focusing on miraculous narratives, is frankly devotional; the author proposes to fill the hearts of the saint's adherents with joy and increase their love, while at the same time augmenting the satisfaction of the common people in the perfections of the master with miracles that confirm their hearts. One such example is the following account by a disciple:

Once this insignificant person was planning to travel from my home to

50. Ashraf 'Ali, *Karamat-i Imdadiyya, ma'a izafa: Zamima jadida* (Deoband: Kutub Khana Hadi, n.d.).

51. On Thanvi (or Thanawi), see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf Ali Thanawi: Islam in Modern South Asia, Makers of the Muslim World* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2008); *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar*, translated by Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

the holy cities. In Bombay, I was sleeping, and in my dream I saw that the master [i.e., Hajji Imdad Allah] was present. He told me, "This time you'll come to me in India, don't go to Mecca." I said, "Now you have come here, but I have got the fare for the ship, and every ship will go." He said, "It's not appropriate for us to go." I kept on talking, but his advice was, no—don't go this year. I opened up my eyes, and at once returned to myself, but that day was the departure of the ship. I did not comprehend the problem. The passengers boarded and the ship departed. That very day, such a storm came that the ship was damaged and the ship came back.⁵²

This seems to be a typical account of the miraculous intervention of the saint to save his disciple. Yet there is a curious rationalism in the laboriously argued answers to ten questions about the possibility of miracles, which serve as a preface to the sequence of miracle accounts; this argumentation downplays the importance of physical miracles and draws attention instead to the spiritual miracle of fulfilling the law.⁵³

Stylistically, it is surprising to see that this biography contains no chronograms whatever, a brusque approach in comparison to the luxuriant presentation characteristic of most Urdu lithographed books of this era. Indeed, in the temporal dimension a new element is present, when a date is unselfconsciously presented with its equivalent in the Christian calendar.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, we are not provided here with an integrated biographical account of the master, although his death is briefly described at the conclusion of the miracle stories. Instead, the presentation is fragmented and scholastic, organized like the more technical manuals of prophetic hadith sayings, grouped under the name of the transmitter; the accounts are likewise numbered in sequence, with 127 pericopes in the main body of the text. While Hajji Imdad Allah's world, like Bilgrami's, revolves around the holy cities of Arabia, the context here has changed dramatically; the miracle stories of pilgrimage ships rescued from the ocean by divine and saintly intervention now incidentally feature European Christian ship captains, a sign of colonial domination that either passes without comment, or else is turned to le-

52. *Karamat-i Imdadiyya*, 11–12.

53. See Ernst and Lawrence, 120–121, for a discussion of the way Ashraf 'Ali Thanvi rationalizes the religious significance of miracles through his selective interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi.

54. *Karamat*, page 40; this date citation (1306 = 1889) admittedly occurs in the supplement, which seems to have been added in 1336/1917 (37).

gitimate the saint.⁵⁵ Despite the emphasis on miracles, this hagiography concentrates on the pedagogy of religious authority

A more recent Urdu work, entitled *Hajji Imdad Allah Muhajir Makki and his Successors*, portrays him in a strongly political light, in relation to the decisive crisis of the 1857 revolt against the British and the consequent exile of Hajji Imdad Allah in Arabia; this 1984 composition by Pakistani scholar Fuyuzurrahman (with a preface by Nafis al-Husayni) presents a brief biography of Hajji Imdad Allah, followed by accounts of 52 of his successors plus another 17 more peripheral followers.⁵⁶ Written during the era of the dictatorship of General Zia, the work reflects a more confrontational view of Islamic identity clearly related to the contemporary situation of Pakistan; indeed, one may say that the emphasis on jihad in this biographical collection is very much in tune with the anti-Soviet attitude by the Pakistan government and its American patrons at the time. Neither the introduction nor the main body of this biography pays any attention to miracles at all, focusing instead exclusively on the social and political realm. The chief epithet chosen here for Hajji Imdad Allah is “the Shaykh of the Arab and the non-Arab,” giving him a significance that aims to transcend any geographic limitation; the preface defines him in fact as one of the greatest saints, not only of the South Asian subcontinent, but of “the world of Islam” as a whole, so that he was the point of reference for both Muslim scholars and Sufi masters.⁵⁷ The preface is a kind of set piece for the book, describing the subject from the start in terms of a significant Sufi initiation in 1235/1819–1820 at the hands of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid (1786–1831), the martyred founder of the jihad movements in British India, who was under the guidance of an important Naqshbandi reformist figure, Shah ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Dihlawi (1746–1824). The fact that this “initiation of blessing (*bay‘at-i tabarruk*)” would have occurred when Hajji Imdad Allah, by his own account, was

55. Nile Green, “Saints, Rebels and Booksellers: Sufis in the Cosmopolitan Western Indian Ocean, c.1780–1920,” in *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*, edited by Kai Kresse and Edward Simpson (London: Routledge Curzon, 2008), 125–166.

56. Hafiz Qari Fuyuzurrahman, *Hazrat Haji Imdadullah Muhajir Makki aur unke khulafa’* (Karachi: Majlis-i Nashriyat-i Islam, 1984). This author specializes in biographical works on Muslim religious scholars, especially those connected with Deoband.

57. Other epithets given to Hajji Imdad Allah emphasize this combination of Islamic religious scholarship and mystical accomplishment. Ashraf ‘Ali Thanvi referred to him as Shaykh al-‘Ulama’, Qutb al-‘Alam (master of the scholars, pivot of the world).

only three years old, does not lessen its importance. Just a few days later, this momentous event was followed by Sayyid Ahmad Shahid initiating Hajji Imdad Allah's future Chishti masters into the jihad movement. Hajji Imdad Allah himself was brought into the movement later on by Sayyid Nasir al-Din Dihlawi (d. 1256/1840–1841), who had become the leader of the jihad movement after the founder's death. Thus through all of his teachers Hajji Imdad Allah was distinguished as the principal successor of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, and therefore he and his disciples were all deeply attracted to jihad; only his father's fatal illness prevented him from sharing in his teacher's martyrdom. When the 1857 revolt against the British took place, he thus raised the standard of jihad in Thana Bhawan, but without success, so that he was forced to flee to Mecca. It is worth noting that his epithet Muhajir invokes the prophetic model of *hijra* or departure from the nonreligious world in search of a divinely approved sanctuary (he had already taken the title Hajji after his first pilgrimage in 1845). He is described during his long residence in Mecca as being famed as a Sufi master and constantly visited by the Chishtis of India. It is reiterated that his service to Islam extended beyond India to the whole world, though his most eminent disciples were the founders of the Deoband movement, Muhammad Qasim Nanawtawi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi. He and his disciples disdained sectarianism and championed Muslim unity, influencing countless followers and reviving the example of early Sufis and pious scholars.⁵⁸

The biography proper by Fuyuzurrahman begins by identifying Hajji Imdad Allah as one of those saints who is universally recognized, describing his education in the Persian classics and his travel to Delhi to study with notable teachers, entering the Naqshbandi path, though eventually he became dedicated to the Chishti order. His participation in the 1857 revolt is described in greater detail, including his departure from India in disguise and his arrival in Mecca in 1860, where he lived a life of contentment despite all difficulties, combining the virtues of a pious warrior for the faith and the spiritual exercises of a Sufi adept. His tolerant outlook and lack of fanaticism is nevertheless stressed, along with his mastery of the *Masnawi* of Rumi, on which he indeed wrote an extensive commentary, along with a number of other titles in Urdu, mostly Sufi writings, many of them in verse. Further details of his life and writings are filled out with extensive quotations from standard Arabic and

58. Nafis al-Husayni, preface to Fuyuzurrahman, *Hazrat Haji*, 6–9.

Urdu biographical sources on Indian Muslim scholars ('Abd al-Hayy, Rahman 'Ali) as well as the leading academic historian of the Chishti order, K.A. Nizami; the latter highlights as the major achievements of Hajji Imdad Allah not only the creation of the Deoband academy and internal reform among Muslims, but also the advancement of Indian independence through the implementation of economic and military decisions. The excerpt closes with seven pages of Hajji Imdad Allah's Urdu poetry.⁵⁹

How may we contrast Bilgrami and Hajji Imdad Allah in terms of their visions of the world? In religious terms, both were immersed in the traditions of hadith study and Sufism; although Hajji Imdad Allah was not really a specialist in the field of hadith, it certainly emerges as the main reference for his successors, as the primary focus of Deoband. There is likewise a powerful literary engagement on the part of both figures, with Persian continuing as an important medium, although the shift of literary language from Arabic to Urdu in the nineteenth century is palpable. Yet there are significant differences. Hajji Imdad Allah was not interested in philosophy or the rational sciences, nor did he have any inclination towards the literary or religious traditions of Hindu India. Both of these shifts reflect a significant change of emphasis in the nineteenth century. There certainly was a sector of Indo-Muslim thought that continued to concentrate on philosophy, logic, and the rational sciences (epitomized by figures such as Fazl-i Haqq Khayrabadi, who was imprisoned by the British for his role in the 1857 revolt),⁶⁰ but in this splintered intellectual environment, it was becoming increasingly difficult to bridge the gap between the intellectual and traditional Islamic sciences. There are still Sufi-oriented cultural trends in South Asia that continue to embrace the poetic and musical legacies of Hindu India. But the reformist movement of Deoband to a certain extent defined itself in opposition to the rational sciences as well as in opposition to anything that could be considered similar to Hinduism. Rashid Ahmad Gangohi opposed popular practices associated with pilgrimage to Sufi shrines, despite their long acceptance in Muslim communities, precisely because they too closely resembled Hindu devotional observances.⁶¹ To be sure, one reason for the decline of

59. Fuyuzurrahman, *Hazrat Haji*, 10–25.

60. A.S. Bazmee Ansari, "Fadl-i Hakk," *Encyclopaedia of Islam II*: 735b.

61. See my article, "An Indo-Persian Guide to Sufi Shrine Pilgrimage," in *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam*, edited by Grace Martin Smith and Carl W. Ernst, (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1993), 43–67. It is still possible, however, for Deoband theologians to be well versed in their Rajput genealogies according to the Sanskrit epic, the

philosophical studies must have been the elimination of the class of elite patrons who made possible the specialized academic study chronicled by Bilgrami in the eighteenth century. Yet British dominance surely had ideological effects as well; the crystallization of Islamic identity in opposition to the British (and to the Hindus) now trumped the intra-Islamic rivalries that had permitted Bilgrami to view the Arabs as devoid of culture and religious knowledge. Hajji Imdad Allah's exile in Mecca valorized the Arab sanctuaries as the authentic home of Islam, making India into an abode of alienation, and prefiguring the concept of Pakistan as the religious realm to be reached by *hijra*.

Thus Azad Bilgrami and Hajji Imdad Allah are separated by a gap in the pragmatics of Islamic polity. Bilgrami assumed the structures of aristocratic patronage as the basis of Muslim culture, though it must be remembered that his age, the eighteenth century, was one of extreme decentralization rather than high imperial power; in the eyes of the Europeans who eyed the subcontinent as a realm ripe for the taking, that decentralization was synonymous with civilizational decline. The conquest and overthrow of those aristocratic regimes by foreign infidels obviously caused an immense crisis for Indian Muslims. Ironically, the growth of Muslim associations in the colonial era (Deobandi, Bareilwi, Ahmadi, Tablighi) created a much larger public space in India for a civil society than the charitable trusts made possible by feudalism of the later Mughal empire. The very concept of the public was drastically redefined, as those Muslim charitable institutions were eroded by British colonial administrators and judges who, judging in the name of Islamic law but using principles of nineteenth-century England, considered the *waqf* system to be excessively oriented to private family benefit.⁶² Another irony of this period was the objectification of religion as a process which is instrumental to other ends. This concept, accentuated by post-1857 anxiety, underlay the question posed by British colonial official W.W. Hunter in his 1871 book, *The Indian Musalmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?*

Clearly the British brought a jaundiced eye to the inspection of Indian

Mahabharata; in other words, some of these Muslim reformists still identify with traditions associated with Hinduism. See Shail Mayaram, "Rethinking Meo Identity: Cultural Faultline, Syncretism, Hybridity or Liminality?," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 17 (1997): 35–44 (available online at <http://www.cssaame.ilstu.edu/issues/V17%2D2/MEO.pdf>).

62. Gregory C. Kozlowski, *Muslim endowments and society in British India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Islam. It is worth returning to the first translator of Bilgrami, William Chambers, who in 1785 provided a couple of historical extracts from Bilgrami's anthology of Persian poetry, *Khizana-i 'amira* ("The Royal Treasury," composed in 1762) in an attempt to provide "real fact or... intelligence drawn from original sources" that might provide "useful knowledge" about "Eastern affairs." Chambers felt it necessary to justify the effort of translating Eastern texts despite the difficulty of the task, especially in view of the meager results that can be expected:

But, so far as the intellectual powers are concerned, it seems vain to imagine, that nations who have ever lived under the influence of dark and confused superstitions, have constantly groaned under the yoke of lawless tyranny, and have never yet entirely emerged from a state of barbarism, could add anything considerable to the literature of Europe, furnished originally with all the lights of Grecian and Roman science, and sitting for centuries under the nurture of the mildest governments, and in the bright blaze of truth, natural and revealed; though, on the other hand, it must be allowed that they possess much, which, in its degree, deserves well to be known.⁶³

Chambers went on to praise Bilgrami's narrative for its eye-witness quality, and its potential to serve as a corrective in accounts of military and political events in which the French and British had been involved.⁶⁴ The European condescension toward Eastern culture and the astonishing lack of self-criticism displayed by these remarks scarcely need comment. British colonial scholarship displayed a deep ambivalence toward the civility of Persian literature, at times viewing it as superfluous to the acquisition of useful knowledge, yet nonetheless attracted to it; the title page of *The Asiatick Miscellany*, where Chambers's translation appeared, is adorned with an Arabic title in rhyming prose, plus the famous Persian verses from the poet Sa'di that introduced his cosmopolitan ethics.⁶⁵

63. William Chambers, "Extracts from the Khazanah e Aamerah," 494–495.

64. William Chambers, "Extracts from the Khazanah e Aamerah," 497. In this extract (500–501), Bilgrami refers once to the Christians (*Nasara*) of Pondicherry who participated in the assassination of his friend Nasir Jang; Chambers translates this term as "Europeans."

65. The Arabic title of *The Asiatick Miscellany* was *Jawahir al-ta'alif fi nawadir al-tasanif*, "Jewels of Compositions on Rarities of Writings," which is perhaps a good equivalent of the official subtitle of the journal: "Consisting of Original Productions, Translations, Fugitive Pieces, Imitations, and Extracts from Curious Publications." The lines from Sa'di are the opening to the "Reason for the Book's Composition" in his celebrated *Bustan*: "I traveled much to the ends of the earth/spending my

The study of Persian classics continued to form part of British colonial education, permitting better access to the tax and land revenue records that formed the basis of governance under the Mughals. But Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Indian Education" established English as the new language of administration, relegating Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit to the dusty shelves of Orientalist libraries. Indo-Muslim writers nostalgically lamented the loss of the culture of civility that had been associated with Persian literature. So one may construe the closing scene of the famous Urdu novel *Umrao Jan* ("The Courtesan of Lucknow," 1899), where the protagonist achieves her philosophical consolation by reading challenging Persian classics on ethics and philosophy (Sa'di, Tusi), pointedly excluding the courtly panegyrics of Anwari and Khaqani with their feudalistic resonance.⁶⁶

So what have been the major changes in Indian Islam from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries? The question requires a much more extensive investigation than can be attempted here. Nevertheless, Azad Bilgrami and Hajji Imdad Allah furnish suggestive indices for gauging the significance of the shifts that have taken place in Muslim culture over the course of the early British regime in India. Both demonstrate distinctive characteristics of a South Asian regional identity. Yet the substantial differences between these figures cannot be fully explained except in terms of the historical changes that India experienced under the British. The regional identity of South Asian Islam was indeed reconfigured in the light of new conditions.

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days with every person//I found enjoyment in every corner,/ gleaning fruit from every harvest" (Sa'di, *Kulliyat*, ed. Muhammad 'Ali Furughi [Tehran: Sazman-i Intisharat-i Javidan, n.d.], 222).

66. Mirza Ruswa, *The Courtesan of Lucknow: Umrao Jan*, trans. Khushwant Singh and M. A. Husaini (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1961), 230–231.

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