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Muslim Culture and Reform in 18th Century

South Asia

JAMAL MALIK

Usually the European perception of South Asia and, related to it, academic research into this region, is informed by specific, powerful images and metaphors that establish a dichotomisation of the world. The reasons for this development cannot be analysed in detail here. Suffice it to say, however, that this organisation and designation of the world has deep roots. Until the Reformation, Europe was basically perceived only in terms of geographical boundaries. But the dichotomy between “Europe” and “Asia” acquired a new dimension in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when, in the wake of a change of paradigm into modernity, European self-consciousness gradually developed into a sense of European intellectual superiority. Just as a new form of collective identity had developed within the boundaries of Europe, based on the idea of “nation” in the late eighteenth century, and just as the members of the early nation-states forcibly dissociated themselves by definition from members of other societies in order to be able to establish their own identity¹, now, with the same intention, though on a different level, Europeans dissociated themselves from “Asia”, the “Orient” and “Islam”. The political recollection of important master narratives kept the mythical fictions in mind and imbued the nation-building process with enormous real power. This development towards a modern European identity was based, as can be deduced from many travellers’ testimonies, on the history of reception, reciprocal perceptions, and the development of enemy images. In this process, the Orient and the Orientals were also used by Europeans as a didactic background for the critique of their own (European) urban societies. The literary technique of contextual alienation and distancing, such as can be found in Montesquieu’s “Persian Letters”, was born in this period.² These and following processes of projection were connected among others things with the fact that Europeans, as colonial masters, advanced to confront the world outside Europe. There they were faced with attitudes and norms that forced them to question their own perceptions. In doing so, they also tended to accept some of these strange and different ideas, and, thus, exposed themselves to cultural hybridisation which could then only be overcome by the reconstructing of their own culture as something “pure”, in contrast to the “degenerate” culture of the colonised. In this way, collective antagonisms developed. Even the Oriental crusades that had been critically evaluated by European academicians,

¹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).

² J. Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens. Europa und die asiatischen Reiche* (Munich, 1998), pp. 68ff, 275–296 *et passim*.

were now for the first time perceived in terms of cultural clash.³ Analogously, Europe and Asia were constructed in the eighteenth century and very predominantly in the nineteenth century in terms of arenas of power politics. For instance, it was during this time that the eastern borders of Europe were conceptualised, with the Balkans and Transoxania being considered as buffers or gaps between the two.⁴

Based on various practical-philosophical ideas, nineteenth century colonial politics were legitimised as evolutionary and modern. The starting point was the construction of the “Orient” as a cultural space diametrically opposed to the societally constituting values and norms of the West, which were considered to be inherently universal. This uni-dimensional social evolutionism proclaimed “Europe” as embodying hegemonic power, and, as a result, various discourses about the “Other” became popular: the Orient as an area of societal decline, dogmatism, despotism, irrationality, and so on.⁵ Eventually, the need for a consistent colonial hegemonic stand favoured the development of sciences specialising in the “Orient”, such as Oriental Studies, Anthropology and Religious Studies whose underlying premise was derived from nineteenth-century natural sciences. In this way an authoritative definition was created for the object “Orient” – not only for the “Occidentals” but also gradually, through reciprocal perceptions, even for the “Orientals” themselves. Subsequently, this authority was derived from the instrumentalisation of the Weberian call for “value-free” social sciences which had now become “objective” in so far as they were considered to be not ideologically biased, but unquestionably “true”.⁶

In these processes of transfer and projection of ideas, the colonial masters did not shrink from selectively appropriating the achievements of the Orient and thereby obliterating all traces of Oriental agency and creativity. For example, European studies in textual criticism and comparative religion of that time relied heavily on the intellectual achievements of Mughal India. Cases in point were Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805) and Sir Williams Jones (1746–1794), who operated at a time when Orientalism was still not a discourse of domination but one of reciprocal relations: Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Khān Arzū (1689–1756) had already ascertained the affinity of Persian and Sanskrit a few decades before Sir Williams Jones, and Anquetil-Duperron was highly influenced by Dara Shikoh’s (1615–1659) Persian translations. Both Europeans, however, appropriated the works of their Indian informants without even mentioning their contributions. And this happened at a time when authorship was emerging as a prime principle of textual attribution and accreditation.⁷ In this way, agency was taken away from Indians, and developments calling for emancipation gradually fell into oblivion. This blurring culminated in the idea that the eighteenth-century Orient was a place of chaos whose sources, it was proclaimed, were illegible. Then the Europeans excluded the Orient from world-history and made it clear how far they wanted to “Europeanise” the world.

³ Osterhammel, *Entzauberung*, pp. 54f.

⁴ Osterhammel, *Entzauberung*, pp. 30–31.

⁵ Osterhammel, *Entzauberung*, pp. 15–37.

⁶ Compare M. Weber, ‘Der Sinn der ‘Wertfreiheit’ der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften’, in M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 489–540.

⁷ Compare Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, ‘Orientalism’s Genesis Amnesia’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, XVI/1 (1996), pp. 1–14.

It is at this historical juncture that we encounter the dialectical relationship between “Orientalism” (in Edward Said’s sense of the term) and the claim to power. Against the backdrop of a postulated universal evolutionary history, the Orientalist sciences analysed the object “Orient” in its historical development, making use of the Hegelian categories of alienation and reconciliation. In this way, colonial administrations were provided with a “scientifically proven” image about the stage of development attained by the Orient, which was seen to be alienated from its classical high-culture. On the basis of this construction, colonial measures to “reconcile” the Orient with its “alienated” tradition were to be implemented – as an export of progress.⁸ This Orientalist image, which achieved dominance through a constant process of translations and projections, had far-reaching consequences. For one thing, it informed the prevailing perception of the Orient and Islam in the West, but it also affected the self-statement of the Orient and consequently changed non-western life-worlds in concrete ways.⁹ Thus, it is in this context that Aziz al-Azmeh speaks of a “strange alliance” between western orientalism and Muslim fundamentalism, through which one side satisfied the essentialising fantasies of the other.¹⁰

Hence, the idea was firmly established that the eighteenth century in the Orient in general, and in South Asia in particular, was an era of political and societal decay and intellectual stagnation.¹¹ Bearing this in mind, the following article aims to re-read and re-visit the sources and, thus, attempt to provide an answer to the question of whether or not there were the beginnings of something like a change in paradigms¹² even before colonial penetration. This might expose important aspects of an indigenous or alternative modernity, aspects that ushered in far-reaching developments in societal and political, formative and normative spheres,¹³ but then, subsequently, passed into oblivion. Certainly, in dealing with such complex developments, the contexts in which they took place have to be taken into account. It is, therefore, conceivable that this process, to be outlined in what follows, can be valued in terms of a wide-ranging emancipation. It received its impulses through the growth of trans-regional market interests,¹⁴ the encounter of South Asia with Europe,¹⁵ the disintegration of the Mughal Empire into territorial princely states, and the attacks of the Afghans and Marathas on the Mughal capital of Delhi, as well as through the

⁸ See R. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 9 *passim*.

⁹ See C. Breckenridge and P. van der Veer, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 189–214.

¹⁰ Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Die Islamisierung des Islam. Imaginäre Welten einer politischen Theologie* (Frankfurt a.M., 1996), p. 202.

¹¹ Compare R. Schulze, ‘Das Islamische Achtzehnte Jahrhundert; Versuch einer historiographischen Kritik’, *Die Welt des Islam*, 30 (1990), pp. 140–159.

¹² In the sense of T. S. Kuhn, *Die Struktur wissenschaftlicher Revolutionen* (Frankfurt a.M., 1973), p. 2.

¹³ Compare Dargah Quli Khan, *Muraqqa’-e Dehli: The Mughal Capital in Muhammad Shah’s Time*, foreword by S. Nurul Hasan, transl. and introduction by Chander Shekhar and Shama Mitra Chenoy (Delhi, 1989).

¹⁴ For indigenous presuppositions of the world market in South Asia see D. Washbrook, ‘Progress and Problems: South Asian Social and Economic History, c. 1720–1860’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 22/1988, pp. 57–96; D. Washbrook, ‘South Asia, The World System, and World Capitalism’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 49/3/1990, pp. 479–508; C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire (The New Cambridge History of India, II.1.)* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. Chapter I; K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean, An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 221. For the development of a world economy as a marker for the distinction of the early modern period see F. Braudel, *Sozialgeschichte des 15.–18. Jahrhunderts: Aufbruch zur Weltwirtschaft, Der Handel* (Munich, 1990).

¹⁵ See the seminal work of W. Halbfass, *Indien und Europa: Perspektiven ihrer geistigen Begegnung* (Basel and Stuttgart, 1981).

emergence of new social formations, especially in the new residential cities and towns of the semi-autonomous succession states of the Mughal empire, such as Lucknow in Awadh.

It is now quite difficult to reconstruct the eighteenth-century discourse of this world, not least because of the supposed illegibility of the sources of that time, but also because of a lack of specific historical and material contextualisation and heuristics. However, its starting point can be found in the passionate debates culminating in the criticism of contemporary reformers – who were, more or less, pietists – of their own South Asian society. Parallels can be found in other regions of the heterogeneous Islamic world in phases of deep historical transition – for instance, at times when society was in a far-reaching process of socio-economic and cultural transformation. Centres for new ideas were, among others, Mecca and Medina, which may, in effect, have served as a kind of emporium where they circulated and were exchanged.¹⁶ The dynamics referred to here can be recognized in the various debates between, on the one hand, Islamic scholars and functional elites, who legitimised state interests and followed a standardised syllabus (*dars-e nizâmî*), and, on the other, newly emerging societal formations, which stood for a radical societal change. While the first tended towards the study of what have been called the rational sciences (*ma'qûlât*), sympathised with philosophical theology (*kalâm*) and law, and adhered to folk-religious popular mystical orders such as the Chishti-Qadiri orders, the latter criticised the standardised syllabus and postulated – obviously paradoxically – the study of what have been labelled traditional sciences (*manqûlât*). The latter, who were mainly to be found among the more puritan Naqshbandi order, also called for a Sufi reform and were in overall charge of the use of a new linguistic medium, the literary Urdu language (*rekhta*) and its fora of articulation.¹⁷ Indeed, these debates were reflections of the interests of different social groups, as is evidenced by the fact that these effects on the interpretation-system theology can also be traced in the Shi'ite Akhbârî-USûlî encounters in the Safavid Empire in the same period.¹⁸

Of utmost importance at this time, therefore, were traders and businessmen,¹⁹ who were able to establish themselves along the borders of the new territorial states, in the wake of the expanding world market and political instability. In garrison towns and administrative centres (*qasbahs*) as well as larger cities, they organised themselves in Islamic pietist movements to counter the new political, cultural and material conditions with their specific characteristics and challenges. All these representatives – traders, mystics and pietists – began to pillory decadent mores, such as shrine cults and failing morality. And they advocated unity between the sacred and the profane, calling for re-conversion and a return to faith. This re-invention of tradition, this renewal of ethics and, hence, of society, rejected the legalistic scholasticism that had developed around scholars of the Farangi Mahal in Lucknow and their *dars-e nizâmî*,²⁰ but, at the same time, it was based on the past, that is on the tradition of the Prophet

¹⁶ See N. Levtzion and J. O. Voll, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse, 1987).

¹⁷ For details, see Jamal Malik, *Islamische Gelehrtenkultur in Nordindien. Entwicklungsgeschichte und Tendenzen am Beispiel von Lucknow* (Leiden, 1997).

¹⁸ J. R. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859* (Berkeley, 1988).

¹⁹ See Braudel, *Sozialgeschichte*, pp. 56ff.

²⁰ See now the much awaited work by F. Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (New Delhi, 2001).

Muhammad and the science of *hadīth* (*hadīth*: the report, the new, the news). However, since the term *hadīth* also conveys the notion of new, it seems to be problematic to equate the science of *hadīth* with traditional sciences. As will be shown, these traditional – transmitted – sciences (*manqūlāt*) also had reformist potential – especially since they became the vehicle of reform.

The idea of a new world-order, thus, stood at the centre of this discourse,²¹ in a similar fashion to what had been the case with the Christian pietist movement in the Protestant church. As in the Christian-dominated world, informal study circles gradually emerged that called for a wider framework of action. In fact, it was a time of *hadīth* meetings with a social agenda. This kind of meeting was not new: it can be traced in twelfth-century Damascus. But what was new was the clientele – in particular traders – as well as the separation of *hadīth* from the strict scholarly establishment, the shortening of the chain of transmission, and, in particular, the possibility of acquiring critical and receptive competence through cultivated discourse to provide and receive cultural and social capital. In this way, the study of *hadīth* became no longer the exclusive domain of well-known and accepted traditionists. Other scholars, and also laymen, could now enter the limelight, and their own legitimate position as *hadīth* scholars – that is also scholars of the new(s) – was stressed. The scholarly monopoly was broken. This development did not only take place in South Asia. In other Muslim dominated regions such as the Hijaz, Egypt and Africa, similar tendencies, that all ran parallel to the disintegration of Muslim empires, can be discerned.²²

The invitation to appropriate God's message individually and independently through the revealed text certainly meant, on the one hand, the emancipation of the self from immediate and direct ties of authority, and, on the other hand, the reconstruction of Islamic society by laypersons, something that harked back to early Muhammadan times. This was *ijtihād* in the widest sense,²³ and it expressed a desire for newness. However, the past to which they referred was not conceived in terms of a heroic era that would return. Instead, it was envisaged as a political and social utopia, which was to be lived and translated into reality. Thus, memory was to be transferred into powerful expectation.²⁴ The recurring rituals around the *hadīth* were proven devices to monumentalise this expectation. Needless to say, this sort of re-discovery of tradition stood in contrast to the traditionally bound compliance with state/law and the dependence on authority – *taqlīd*. *Taqlīd* lived on jurisprudence and philosophical theology, based on logic. This logic was, again, a logic of the administration, that is the logic of the state, where philosophical theology and law flourished: “kalam was most congruent with state domination”.²⁵

²¹ These and following reforms have much in common with the Christian pietist movements in the Protestant church that began in the last quarter of the seventeenth century and that called deliberately for a change in the relationship between man and God, a religious renaissance so-to-speak, which was to establish a unity of divine message and human practice, hence *pia desideria*, the title of the work of Jakob Philipp Spener (1635–1705).

²² See J. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Boulder, 1982), pp. 72ff; P. Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760–1840* (Texas and London, 1979), pp. 49ff, 112, 139.

²³ Compare R. Peters, 'Ijtihad and Taqlid in 18th and 19th Century Islam', *Die Welt des Islams* 20 (1980), pp. 131–145. See also W. B. Hallaq, 'Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?', *International Journal for Middle East Studies* 16 (1984), pp. 3–41.

²⁴ J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich, 1992), p. 80.

²⁵ Gran, *Roots*, pp. xvi, f. 50, 96.

A famous representative of these pietists was the reformer and social critic Shâh Walî Ullâh (died 1762). He considered his mission to be an attempt to integrate the various fragmented and contradictory articulations of the Muslim history of ideas; he looked for a way to bring together the deliberations of the philosophers and theologians as well as the mystics. He, therefore, arranged these ideas in theoretical treatises, in the style of the discipline of religious studies, as in the “The Conclusive Argument for God” (*Hujjat Allâh al-Bâligha*). He also developed a kind of theory of stages, according to which the development of human societies was characterised by four stages (*irtifâqât*): 1) compliance with the laws of nature, 2) establishing of family-life and societal relations, 3) development of one local political system, and 4) the internalisation of this system, hence the Islamic caliphate.²⁶ In addition, he criticised the hereditary prebendal system and its representatives, the landed gentry (*ashrâf*), and fought for a new educational system appropriate for the new social forces that were emerging. To this end – after his return from the Hijaz in 1733 where he had studied at the feet of well-known *hadîth* scholars – he replaced many of the books on logic and philosophical theology taught in the *dars-e nizâmî* with books on *hadîth* and mystical treatises, although he did not call for blind usage of the *hadîths*.

In Shâh Walî Ullâh’s view, rational, human knowledge – as represented in the studies of logic by the functional elites – was only a preliminary truth while prophetic knowledge was more reliable; his presupposition was that *ijtihâd* was the means by which to establish coherence between transmitted and rational sciences (*tatbîq al-manqûl bi al-ma’ qûl*), in order to strengthen faith through rational proofs and to call for unity among Muslims – especially against the Marathas.²⁷ Rational sciences were merely a means by which to establish the authenticity and inimitability of the Sharî‘ah (*i’ jâz al-sharî‘ a*), which was more complete than (temporally limited) human rational deductions because of its divine inspiration (*wa li kaum al-nabî sallâ Allâh‘ alaihi wa sallam‘ awthaq‘ indanâ min‘ uqûlinâ*).²⁸ In this way, Shâh Walî Ullâh succeeded in drawing a distinction between revelation and reason as well as relating them to each other and harmonising them. By not placing rational sciences directly into the service of profane authorities, but apparently using them as an auxiliary device for the sacred, he was able to legitimise his social critique islamically, and to consider himself a reformer (*mujaddid*) in a new era.

Shâh Walî Ullâh was supported by the emerging dynamic urban traders whose profit-thinking and credit-worthiness called for moral behaviour and action that required legitimation.²⁹ These deliberations and ideas seem to be based in the “idea of performance with its revolutionary, anti-traditional explosive effect” which would contrast with the “aristocratic patrician thinking in terms of privileged hierarchy based on birth related estates”.³⁰ Therefore there were polemical discussions and debates between him and his view that the study of *hadîth* was the only source of knowledge, and the representatives

²⁶ See M. Hermansen, trans., *The Conclusive Argument from God. Shah Wali Allah of Delhi’s Hujjat Allah al-Baligha* (Leiden, 1996).

²⁷ For Shâh Walî Ullâh’s *ijtihâd*-concept see Daud Rahbar, ‘Shah Waliullah and Ijtihad: Translation of Selected Passages from his “Iqd al-Jid fi Ahkam al-Ijtihad wa’l-Taqlid”’, *The Muslim World*, 45/4 (1955), pp. 346–358.

²⁸ Shâh Walî Ullâh, *Hujjat Allâh al-bâligha*, 2 Vols., (Karachi, s.t. (reprint)), Vol. I, pp. 20ff, 32f, 36ff.

²⁹ Shâh Walî Ullâh, *Tafhimât-e Illâhîya*, 2 Vols., ed. Ghulâm Mustafâ al-Qâsimî (Islamabad, 1970), Vol. I, pp. 282–288.

³⁰ H. Wehler, *Aus der Geschichte lernen?* (Munich, 1988), p. 222.

of the so-called rational sciences – *ma‘qûlât*.³¹ The latter were criticised for leaving little space for independent reasoning and autonomous discourse. And, hence, something like an anti-canon gradually developed.

This process of emancipation from the old order led to further creative arguments on various levels. Parallel to the renewed enthusiasm for *hadîth*, the mystical system was reformed. As we know, mysticism was inherently connected to societal reality, Sufi orders traditionally being an important part of the local social fabric, through artisan groups and guilds, among others.³² In addition, the demand for increasing recourse to *ijtihâd* and *hadîth* corresponded to the theoretical elaborations on the spiritual attitude of what became known as the *Tarîqa Muhammadîya*. Out of these early urban pietist ideas of a *Tarîqa Muhammadîya*, there soon developed hierarchically structured mass organisations all around the Muslim world, which had their base primarily in nomadic and agrarian societies. In the South Asian context of the nineteenth century, this movement was – because of its puritan tendencies – wrongly called Wahhabi.³³ It should be noted, however, that the concept of *Tarîqa Muhammadîya* had first emerged in the sixteenth century in a book entitled *al-Tarîqa al-muhammadiyya wa al-sîra al-ahmadiyya* written by Muhammad b. ‘Alî al-Birkawî alias Birgili (1523–1573). This was a compendium of ethical rules for a life according to the prophetic tradition: inner-worldly, ethical responsibility, catharsis and the rejection of folk-religious cults and commercial practices.³⁴ In the ethical framework of *Tarîqa Muhammadîya*, mankind was to receive a new meaning and function, for now the mystical annihilation in God (*fanâ fî allâh*) seemed to be replaced by the concept of annihilation in the mystical leader (*fanâ fî al-shaikh*); in other words, “mystical piety” was replaced by “prophetic-” or “action-piety”.³⁵ The human being was to become the sole agent, the subject so-to-speak, the centre of universe. Apparently, social deliberations were not to be the prerogative of state and religion. On the contrary, the human being alone was to create a new teleological order. And, as the words *Tarîqa Muhammadîya* and “prophetic-piety” suggest, the position of the Prophet was pivotal – hence to the growth in *hadîth* studies. What was called for, then, was symmetry between the humane life-world and the prophetic Sunna – a “Sunnatisation of life”. As in the thinking of the fifteenth-century al-Suyûtî, the Prophet was resurrected, his spirit became the logos of the universe.³⁶

Interestingly, in this period one can also observe an increasing shortening of the accepted chain of tradition, be it through Uwais al-Qaranî,³⁷ or through the legendary Khidr, the

³¹ See for example Shâh Walî Ullâh, *Tafhimât-e Illâhiyya*.

³² A connection between mystics and handicrafts, that is mystical orders and guilds, can be recorded in the Islamic Middle East – see F. Taeschner, *Zünfte und Bruderschaften im Islam* (Munich, 1979). A study which would elaborate on this correlation for the region of South Asia would be most welcome.

³³ For *Tarîqa Muhammadîya* in general see R. S. O’Fahey and B. Radtke, ‘Neo-Sufism Reconsidered’, *Der Islam*, 70/1993, pp. 52–87; for the ethical concept of the Muhammadan Path in the Indian context see A. Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger* (Lahore, 1987), esp. Chapter XI; A. Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen im Islam* (Munich, 1992(2)), passim. W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Muslims* (London, 1871).

³⁴ Mehmed Birgili, *Exposition de la foi musulmane, traduite du turc de Mohammed ben Pir-Ali Elberkevi*, transl. by Garcin de Tassy (Paris, 1822). Compare also M. C. Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age, 1600–1800* (Minneapolis, 1988), pp. 129f, 143ff.

³⁵ See Schimmel, *Dimensionen*, pp. 288ff.

³⁶ See also F. Meier, ‘Eine Auferstehung Mohammeds bei Suyûtî’, *Der Islam* 62 (1985).

³⁷ ‘In the mystical tradition Uwais is the model of those who enter the mystical path without being initiated by a living master: an *uwaisî* (Turkish *veys*) mystic has no special teacher but is guided directly by God on the

immortal patron of travellers and Sufis, who could initiate the mystic into the way, and who increasingly played the role of a joker or trickster, as it were. It seems as if more and more Sufis began to receive their initiation through Khidr, as in the case of the Moroccan 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dabbâgh (died 1719), who is said to have had established the *Khidriya*, or like his student al-Lamatî (died 1742).³⁸ What is meant here, however, is a spiritual attitude modelled on Khidr, who had drunk from the source of life, rather than a mystical order,³⁹ for in this way a quick and immediate connection could be established with the source of perfection, the Prophet Muhammad, the perfect man (*al-insân al-kâmil*)⁴⁰ – hence *imitatio muhammadi*. Through the construction of shortened genealogy, the gap suspended between the present time and the source time could be bridged and a new claim and a new order could be legitimised. To be certain, this was a breaking off from tradition or a re-invention of tradition, which nevertheless re-produced the past, because new beginnings, renaissances, and restorations always occur in the form of recourses to the past. In this way the experiences of present and future could be re-organised and constituted a-new.⁴¹ At the same time exemplary individuals were to be created who would incorporate the whole universe. And, as we are about to see, there were also some traces of eccentricity and personal ostentation, specifically among those who wanted to establish economic independence and free themselves from received norms. Or was, it might be asked, the concept of *Khidriya* and *Uwaisiya* a kind of a competing idea to *Tarîqa Muhammadiya*?⁴²

It should be noted in passing that there were various positions with regard to Khidr, revealing the plural and polyphonous debates that reflected the diversity of social realities, as in the case of the Indian scholar and intellectual Muhammad Murtadâ al-Bilgrâmî al-Zabîdî (died 1791) who was active in Cairo. In his massive commentary on al-Ghazzâlî's *Ihyâ' 'ulûm al-dîn*, he did have some reservations concerning the functions accredited to figures such as the legendary Khidr. He perceived and summarised the discussion on Khidr as an important and lengthy controversy between scholars of *hadîth* and Sufis and in so doing questioned the authenticity of the traditionists' chain as well as the transmitted traditions themselves (*ru'yâ munâfiya*: incompatible vision).⁴³

mystical path, or has been initiated by the mysterious prophet-saint Khidr', see Schimmel, *Messenger*, p. 22. It seems important to mention that in the beginning of the eighteenth century a book was written by one Ahmad Chenabi entitled *Risâlah-ye Uwaisiya*.

³⁸ See J. S. Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 114, 277.

³⁹ Compare B. Radtke, 'Sufism in the 18th Century: An Attempt at a Provisional Appraisal', *Die Welt des Islams* 36 (1996), pp. 326–364.

⁴⁰ For *insân kâmil* see for example H. H. Schaeder, 'Die islamische Lehre vom Vollkommenen Menschen, ihre Herkunft und ihre dichterische Gestaltung', *Zeitung der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 79 (1925), pp. 192–268.

⁴¹ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, pp. 32, 42, 48f.

⁴² Here new research perspectives may be noted. While the concept of *Tarîqa Muhammadiya* was initially popular among urban traders, *Khidriya* seems to have been popular among nomadic societies such as the Berbers, and the *Uwaisiya* among the agrarian societies in the Punjab. Millenarian movements among the tribes of the Atlas and the people in the Punjab may show that they might have found themselves in a position to legitimise themselves vis-à-vis the Arabs or the *ashraf* and, therefore, developed a sort of anti-prophet-cult.

⁴³ Compare the debate in Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Husainî al-Zabîdî, *Ithâf al-Sadâ al-Muttaqîn bi Sharh Asrâr Ihyâ' 'Ulûm al-Dîn* (Beirut, s.t.), pp. IV, 379; V, 69f, 135, 143, 181; X, 300f.

Around this re-emerging prophet cult or the symbolism of centre,⁴⁴ a whole literary school gradually developed which was popular amongst the relatively sober Naqshbandi order⁴⁵ and played an important role in the development of a new literary medium, a medium that after the death of Aurangzeb replaced Persian and was to become the typical language of Indian Muslims: Urdu. A well-known representative of this branch was Nâsir 'Andalîb (died 1758). In his voluminous 1,600 pages, originally recited in Hindustani and later written down at the request of his followers in Persian as "Lament of the Nightingale" (*Nâla-ye 'Andalîb*), he presented a programmatic testimony. In 1734 he had already been graced with a vision of the grandson of the Prophet, Hasan ibn 'Alî, who had initiated him into the secrets of the true (*khâlis*) Muhammadan Path (*al-Tarîqa al-Muhammadîya*).⁴⁶ The "Lament" is a mixture of theological, juridical, mystical and philosophical treatises in the form of an allegorical story in which the nightingale symbolises the Prophet who had often been called the "nightingale of the higher spheres" by pious poets.⁴⁷ With this work, which deals in detail with Indian music, Yoga philosophy and other muses, and ideas and practices that stand in the local Hindu tradition, Nâsir tried to address quite a broad public – theologians, jurists, philosophers, musicians and mystics, urban traders and landowners – and to bring together various schools of thought and social groups. At the same time, he criticised the widespread tradition of the orthodox monism, the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujûd*) at the cost of the unity of becoming (*wahdat al-shudûd*) which had a social-revolutionary message. Thus, he says more than once in *Nâla-ye 'Andalîb*: "The faithful shall understand the spirit of religion in whatever way he can find. Be it through the purification of the body or the heart, through the outer way or the inner."⁴⁸ His son Khawâja Mîr Dard (see below) further developed 'Andalîb's early experiences on the Muhammadan Path in his *'Ilm al-kitâb*.⁴⁹ In the sixteenth century, monistic *wujûdî*-perceptions had already demanded sharp and exclusive identities that supported an idea of difference. Moreover, the religious decadence and political decay of the empire had become popular. In this situation, the Naqshbandi mystic Ahmad Sirhindî (died 1624) reformulated the ideas of Ibn 'Arabî (died

⁴⁴ For prophet-cult and the symbolic of the centre, see C. Geertz, *Islam observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven and London, 1968), pp. 36f; R. P. Werbner, ed., *Regional Cults* (London, 1977), esp. Introduction; C. E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions* (London, 1960); E. Waugh, 'Following the Beloved: Muhammad as model in the Sûfi tradition', in F. E. Reynolds and D. Capps, eds., *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion* (The Hague, 1976), pp. 63–85; Muhammad Hidayat Hosain, 'Translation of ash-shamâ'îl of Tirmizî', *Islamic Culture* 7 (1933) and 8 (1934).

⁴⁵ "One of the surprises in Indian cultural history around 1700 is, that members of the 'anti-artistic' Naqshbandiyya order were instrumental in the development of a new literary medium which was, after Aurangzeb's death, to supersede Persian and to become the typical language of Indian Muslims: that is Urdu." See A. Schimmel, *Pain and Grace: a Study of Two Mystical Writers of Eighteenth-Century Muslim India* (Leiden, 1976), p. 11. Naqshbandis were also most prominent in the expansion of Urdu prose; see Muhammad Ayyûb Qâdirî, *Urdû Nathr ke irteqâ' men 'ulamâ' kâ hissah* (Lahore, 1988); 'Abd al-Haqq, *Urdû kî ibtedâ'î nashû o numâ men sûfiyâ'-ye karâm kâ kâim* (New Delhi, 1988); B. Rihânah Fârûqî, *Dehlî ke mashâ'ikh kî adabî khidmât* (Delhi, 1988).

⁴⁶ Nâsir 'Andalîb, *Nâla-ye 'Andalîb*, 2 Vols. (Bhopâl 1309/1890, written in 1741). Originally this was delivered in Hindustani and, was at the wishes of his followers, written down in Persian. For Nâsir 'Andalîb see Schimmel, *Pain*, pp. 32ff et passim; S. A. A. Rizvi, *Shâh Walî Allâh and his time* (Canberra, 1980), pp. 343ff; S. 'Abd al-Hayy, *Nuzhat al-khawâtir wa bahjat al-masâmi' wa a'-nawâzir, I–VIII*, compiled and ed. by S. Abû'l-Hasan 'Alî al-Hasanî al-Nadwî, (Hyderabad, Deccan, and, Karâchî, 1956ff) (Arabic), VI, pp. 368f.

⁴⁷ See Schimmel, *Dimensionen*, pp. 434f.

⁴⁸ *Nâla-ye 'Andalîb*, I, p. 791.

⁴⁹ Mîr Dard, *'Ilm al-kitâb* (Dehlî, 1308/1889), pp. 85f. See also Jamil Jâlîbî, *Târikh-e adab-e Urdû*, 2 Vols. (Lahore, 1975–1987(2)), II, pp. 737–740.

1240) into *shuhûdî*-perceptions, perceptions in which the Prophet was endowed an even more prominent role. Certainly, this was a specific Indian purist answer to widespread heterodox Sufism. ‘Andalib’s harmonising ideas seem to correspond with those of his contemporary Shâh Walî Ullâh, though we do not have information about the intellectual interaction between these two Naqshbandis of Delhi.⁵⁰

Doubts and scepticism were important presuppositions for a developing anthropocentric world-view and an emerging consciousness of human equality. This change found its expression in various spheres of culture, such as music. Music was not only an esoteric art or a source of entertainment and inspiration, but it was also a powerful instrument for cultural integration and societal harmony, a perfect example of unifying people of different castes, classes and religions, as well as an expression of social reality. Thus, new forms and styles of music were developed, and in fact many books on musicology were written at that time.⁵¹ We know, for example, that during the reign of Muhammad Shâh (1719–1748) the new *khayâl* (lit.: idea, imagination) and *qawwâlî* (mystical songs) ousted the traditional, strict musical form of *dhrupad*; *khayâl* and mystical singing provided more space for individual improvisation and technical virtuosity, and were played and listened to and cultivated in *mahfils* (musical gatherings).⁵² Contemporary poetry also accommodated this kind of newness. Because of its inherent ‘manierism’, even heretical ideas could be expressed through poetry, where they could not be immediately exposed semantically due to the consciously exaggerated and artificial style. Now man was to abandon an unconsciously teleological God-centred view in order to become a self-conscious and free-acting individual. Among the early proponents of sceptical ideas, the poet ‘Abd al-Qâdir Bedil (1644–1721) is outstanding. He wrote in Persian and can be considered an important representative of the so-called Indian style, *sakb-e hindî*.⁵³

This poetry now increasingly used vernaculars – here the relatively young script-culture that was called Urdu. Urdu became very popular, not least through many collected *diwans*, and it stood in contrast to the canonical Persian monologue-empowered courtly culture. It was the growing popularity of Urdu that ideally, linguistically and socially expressed the process of cultural emancipation from the prestigious culture languages, Persian and Arabic, that transported courtly, canonical values.⁵⁴ Indeed, the eighteenth century was an era of revolt that was not only expressed through different texts but which also,

⁵⁰ It is interesting to note that no intellectual and personal connections seem to have existed between the Delhi reformer and ‘Andalib’s son Mîr Dard, who further developed his father’s ideas. A study that would highlight the interaction and reciprocity between these scholars and mystics in Delhi would be most welcome.

⁵¹ See Khan, *Muraqqa’-e Dehli*, pp. xxxii f.

⁵² Khan, *Muraqqa’-e Dehli*, pp. 75ff, 113, considered *dhrupad*-interpreters outdated; he opined that *khayâl* and also *qawwâlî* were *en vogue*; see also N. Jairazbhoy, *The Rags of North Indian Music: Their Structure & Evolution* (London, 1971, Islamabad (reprint)), pp. 18–21; Najma Perveen Ahmad, *Hindustani Music* (Delhi, 1984), Introduction.

⁵³ See A. Bausani, ‘Bedil as a narrator’, in *Yadname-i Jan Rypka* (Prague, 1969); Syed Yaqub Bazmi, ‘Mirza Abdul Qadir ‘Bedil’, a revolutionary Poet of India’, *Indo-Iranica*, 16/1963, pp. 36–54; Abdul Ghani, *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil* (Lahore, 1960); A. Schimmel, *Islamic Literatures of India* (Wiesbaden, 1973), pp. 42ff; W. Heinz, *Der indische Stil in der persischen Literatur* (Wiesbaden, 1973).

⁵⁴ For the history and development of Urdu literature see Jâlibî, *Târîkh*; Muhammad Husain Azâd, *Ab-e Hayât* (Lahore, 1907); Hakim S. ‘Abd al- Hayy, *Gul-e Ra’na’* (Azamgarh, 1342/1923); Ursula Rothen-Dubs, ed., *Allahs indischer Garten* (Frauenfeld, 1989); Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (London, 1984(2)); R. B. Saksena, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Lahore, 1975(2)); Schimmel, *Urdu Literature*; C. Shackle, ed., *Urdu in Muslim South Asia*; *Studies in the honour of Ralph Russell* (London, 1989); D. J. Matthews and C. Shackle, eds., *An Anthology of Classical Urdu Love Lyrics, text and translations* (London, 1972); M. Garcin de Tassy, *Histoire de la Littérature Hindouie*

and predominantly, took place in the minds of the people. Thus, Ahmad Ali, one of the founders of the Progressive Writers Association and an important literary critic later wrote:

“... the removal of restrictions placed on the mind, and the release of the imagination from the imposed religious beliefs rooted in orthodoxy ... led to a revival of the arts and mysticism, and the awakening of a critical spirit which refused to take things on mere authority ...”⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the Oriental world and history of ideas of the eighteenth century is usually equated with occidental Middle Ages, suggesting a constant time-lag: “Eighteenth-century English literature is already unmistakably modern; eighteenth-century Urdu literature is still *essentially* medieval ...”; the authors of this quotation quote the *essential* interpreters of Indian Muslim poetry.⁵⁶ Even Ahmed Ali seems to fall prey to some kind of Orientalism, when he draws comparison with the European Middle Ages: “... (these are) all characteristics of the Renaissance”.⁵⁷ In contrast, Schimmel opines that, “... the eighteenth century, politically perhaps the most saddening phase of Indo-Muslim civilisation, proves to be the most fertile period in terms of religious literature ...”⁵⁸ Urdu poets, thus, left behind many judgements that showed the intellectual struggle with the omnipotent power of traditional order: “it is the final choice of Urdu that marks the beginning and flowering of ... the emancipation of the mind from the darkness of didacticism and crude expression ...”⁵⁹ Parallel to enlightened Europe, ideas in India can be traced to that call for doubt, curiosity, criticism and rejection of the traditionally-received. Ahmad Ali writes:

“By the middle of the eighteenth century doubts begin to assail the mind, the spirit of enquiry awakens, curiosity raises its head, questionings are heard like rumblings of thunder, the critical spirit, the spirit that refuses to take things on mere authority, is born, and the modern age has already begun, which stands for the more recent of recent things ... It is now that the spirit of freedom awakens, surprisingly coincidental with a similar movement in Europe where the floodgates of Revolt and Romanticism were opened by Jean Jacques Rousseau whose dates, 1712–78, overlap those of Sauda, Dard, Mir and Nazir. Coequal with Rousseau’s doctrine of ‘man was born free and everywhere he is in chains’ Nazir proclaimed the equality of man in his Ode of Man, each stanza of which is steeped in contrast and anger at the fate of man at the hands of man ...”⁶⁰

et Hindoustani, I–III (Paris, 1870–71, rep. New York, 1965); ‘Ali Jawwâd Zaidî, *Dô adabî iskûl; nám nihâd Lakhna’û awr Dillî iskûl kî mushtarikah khusûsiyât* (Karâchî, 1988).

⁵⁵ Ahmad Ali, *The Golden Tradition* (New York and London, 1973), p. 73.

⁵⁶ See R. Russell and K. Islam, *Three Mughal Poets* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. xi; see therein also Chapter I, pp. 1–36.

⁵⁷ Ali, *Tradition*, p. 19.

⁵⁸ Schimmel, *Pain*, p. 27.

⁵⁹ Ali, *Tradition*, pp. 23f.

⁶⁰ Ali, *Tradition*, pp. 25–27. Nazîr’s *ode of man (âdamî-nâma)* is translated in Ali, *Tradition*, pp. 184–187; V. Salierno, *Antologia della poesia urdu* (Milan, 1963), pp. 44–61. For the famous satirist and social critic Saudâ’ (died 1781) (derived from the Arabic *aswad*: black; depressed, the one with black humour), see Matthews and Shackle, eds., *Anthology*, pp. 46ff. For the Naqshbandi Mir Dard (died 1785), see Matthews and Shackle, eds., *Anthology*, pp. 50–58; Schimmel, *Pain*, pp. 1–147, 263–269; Sadiq, *History*, pp. 139–142. For Mir Taqî Mir (died 1810), the famous love poet, see Schimmel, *Urdu Literature*, pp. 178–184; Rothen-Dubs, *Garten*, pp. 15–26, 86f. For the popular poet Nazîr Akbarâbâdî (1735–1830), see Mohammad Hasan, *Nazîr Akbarabadi* (New Delhi, 1973); Sadiq, *History*, pp. 154–165; Schimmel, *Urdu Literature*, pp. 163f, 185–188.

We cannot deal with the literature of that time at length. However, it seems quite plausible that the literature conveyed and expressed the versatile reform processes mentioned above in a refined manner. Thus the famous poet Mîr Taqî Mîr (died 1810) could postulate that “This age is not like that which went before. The times have changed, the earth and sky have changed.” Or, “Wherever you look, a poem full of apocalyptic sound appears; Every where in my works is found, A tumult like the Day of Doom.”⁶¹ With these kinds of apocalyptic verses, Mîr conjures the beginning of a new era that would question the old situation – a situation of impoverishment and depression in post-Mughal Delhi. Terms like ‘breach’ and ‘defeat’, ‘loss’ and ‘alienation’ (*shekast*, *qafas*, *wahshat*, *zulm*, *faryâd*) were prominent in this poetry and in scholarly debates of the day.⁶² This is clear in the poetry of Naqshbandi-mystics like Mîr Dard (lit.: pain), the son of the above-mentioned ‘Andalîb. Dard’s verses not only reflect his *weltschmerz* in the face of the political situation in Delhi. He also tried to trace the pains involved in his individuation process.⁶³ Increasingly one may detect references to personal impressions and feelings that call for a change in the social and ontological order. Similar features could be discerned simultaneously in other parts of the Islamic world, such as Cairo, where “the poet wrote about his own feelings with obvious sincerity.”⁶⁴ The complicated theoretical constructions of Shâh Walî Ullâh in the realm of mysticism also point to the emancipatory process which he seems to describe in terms of levels of spirituality (*latâ’if*) and ‘I-ness’ in the sense of a universal identity (*ananîya*),⁶⁵ that is, the creation of exemplary individuals who would bring the whole universe into themselves.

It seems that a new culture was on the point of developing, with its politically conscious and active members eager to take their destinies into their own hands. Therefore the poets also judged this culture to have the right to resist existing authorities. Probably it was new feelings or emotional differentiation, introjection, ego-centrism and inner experience – in short, discovery of the affections, or sensitivity – a spiritual trend of the eighteenth century – which were considered by sensitive people to be the criterion and which aimed at achieving equality in action and emotion. Perhaps this can also be read as an inwardly oriented enlightenment.⁶⁶ For example, through his verses Mîr Taqî Mîr expressed “autobiographical stories (*apnî dhât kî hikâyat*) . . . an important feature of contemporary Mathnawîs, that can be compared with self-studies (*khûd mutâla ‘ah*). Indeed, Mîr’s protagonists were not the kings, ministers and princes and princesses but simple people who were afraid (*wâllhânah-pan*) and were self-critical (*khûd-sapurdagî*) . . . and who would show their lives openly with all

⁶¹ Mîr Taqî Mîr as quoted in Ali, *Tradition*, pp. 23–25.

⁶² Compare Jâlibî, *Târîkh*, II, pp. 492f.

⁶³ Some principles of the Naqshbandî order such as *safar dar watan* – journey to homeland, e.g., to the soul, e.g., the Self – and the calm *dhîkr*, e.g., the inner recollection of God, may in fact have been vehicles for the process of self-discovery and introjection. For Dard the questioning of his own identity was in fact crucial (see Schimmel, *Pain*, pp. 41, 84f, 97f). Accordingly he was of the view that while man was created to feel the pain of (mystical) love, angels were merely obedient to God (see Schimmel, *Dimensionen*, p. 532).

⁶⁴ Gran, *Roots*, p. 57.

⁶⁵ See Shâh Walî Ullâh, *Tafhîmât-e Illâhîya*, I, pp. 229ff; M. Hermansen, ‘Shâh Walî Allâh’s Theory of the Subtle Spiritual Centers (*latâ’if*): A Sufi Model of Personhood and Self-Transformation’, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 47 (1988), pp. 1–25.

⁶⁶ For the literary expansion of sensitivity in the European context see K. P. Hansen, *Kultur und Kulturwissenschaft: Eine Einführung* (Tübingen and Basel, 1995), pp. 98ff; K. P. Hansen, ed., *Empfindsamkeiten* (Passau, 1990).

sorrows and fears.⁶⁷ Similarly, the eighteenth century was the time when childhood began to emerge as a distinct and significant part of human life. Just recall the revealing passages in Mîr Taqî Mîr's autobiography, when he talks with his nurse and his father, or remembers his father's affectionate ways with him.⁶⁸ This kind of reformism certainly underpins the emergence of individualism.

The genre of *shahr-âshûb*⁶⁹ (shattering the city) was also a proven "medium of expression for feelings of sensitive human beings (*hassâs insân*)",⁷⁰ especially since it was characterised by distinctions made along societal formations: while on the one hand the desolate situation of the urban aristocracy was deplored, on the other *shahr-âshûb* portrayed the irresistible emergence of new urban formations.⁷¹ Another popular medium of emotional expression in the eighteenth century was *wâsohkt*, in which the poet describes the unfaithfulness of his beloved. Notwithstanding the female emancipation process that may have found expression in this genre, the poet's separation from his beloved undoubtedly left him alone with himself in a world of sorrows, in a liminal state of mind.

Interestingly the Naqshbandi mystics of that time may be considered the *avant garde* of these movements. A literary critical analysis of the – canonical – diaries, such as the four stylistically beautiful spiritual diaries of Mîr Dard entitled *Chahâr Risâla* may substantiate this thesis.⁷² To the mystical poet Dard, poetry was "an expression of recent experiences that would move the heart of the poet. For him poetry meant, that the poet expresses his innermost feelings (*wâridât-e qalbîyah*) and experiences in such a way that the verses engrave deeply into the heart of the listeners."⁷³ Thus, this kind of poetry may well have been an inwardness based on subjective perceptions and their spiritual digestion.

These publicly articulated ideas not only needed a specific medium, Urdu, but also corresponding institutions with specific identity and rituals that gave a sense of solidarity, and where economic, social and cultural capital was transmitted, in parallel with social ideals such as sociability and communality. Such an institution was the *mushâ'irah* (Arabic: *mushâ'ara*), literary salons with poetry competitions, which acquired a new societal meaning.⁷⁴ Literary salons,⁷⁵ sensitive circles of friendship as it were, were not infrequently centred around a woman – usually a courtesan.⁷⁶ Because of their socially pluralistic character these salons were quite popular in residential cities such as Delhi and Lucknow, as well as in important garrison towns, the *qasbahs*.

⁶⁷ Jâlibî, *Târikh*, II, p. 476, also p. 631.

⁶⁸ C. M. Naim, ed. and transl., *Zikr-i Mir. The Autobiography of the Eighteenth-Century Mughal Poet Mir Muhammad Taqî "Mir" (1723–1810)* (Delhi, 2000).

⁶⁹ See Sadiq, *History*, pp. 117ff.

⁷⁰ Jâlibî, *Târikh*, II, p. 484.

⁷¹ See for example the poet Hâtim (died 1781) quoted in Sadiq, *History*, pp. 104f.

⁷² Mîr Dard, *Chahâr Risâla* (Bhopâl 1310/1892–93).

⁷³ Jâlibî, *Târikh*, II, p. 472.

⁷⁴ For this see C. M. Naim, 'Poet-audience interaction at Urdu musha'iras', in Shackle, ed., *Urdu and Muslims*, pp. 167–173; 'Alî Jawwâd Zaidî, *Târikh-e mushâ'irah* (Delhi, 1989); B. Q. Silver, 'The Urdu Mushâ'irah', in A. Giese and J. C. Bürgel, eds., *Gott ist schön und Er liebt die Schönheit* (Bern, 1994), pp. 363–375; Farhatullah Baig, *The Last Musha'irah of Delhi*, transl. with an Introduction, Notes, Glossary and Bibliography by Akhtar Qamber (New Delhi, 1979). An academic work on this complex issue of *mushâ'ira* as a cultural and social institution has still to be written.

⁷⁵ For the conceptual views that follow I have borrowed much from P. Seibert, *Der literarische Salon: Literatur und Gesellschaft zwischen Aufklärung und Vormärz* (Stuttgart, 1993).

⁷⁶ The importance of courtesans for the development of Urdu in the eighteenth century has not been looked at so far.

The Naqshbandi Mîr Dard is considered the first poet to restore the popularity of *mushâ'irah*: "It seems that the institution of *mushâ'ira* . . . was developed during Dard's lifetime."⁷⁷ He elevated tenderness as a *leitmotif* for the ideal behavioural codex, a codex that combined sensuality with virtue and rationality. Considering these literary works, one may ask whether a new stylistic ideal was developed that might correspond to the emotional cult and how far immediacy, naturalness, emotional expression, etc. were reflected in new linguistic forms of articulation, and how far the specific experiential space of sensitivity was discussed and made a topic of discourse.

In the *mushâ'irah* it was not only "a middle class who was interested in Persian and Urdu poetry and literature and among whom one could count representatives of military, administration as well as notables and traders" that participated.⁷⁸ These new public spaces also provided a gregarious forum for communication and the perennial co-option of new members from the lower classes, including barbers, soldiers, perfume vendors, masons, weavers, tailors and carpenters,⁷⁹ presupposed permanent social openness. The equal status of those present in the literary salons ideally allowed dialogue and so made possible a new level of interpersonal relationship and disclosure. All this implied social equality. In such an environment the participants could articulate their interests freely so that these literary circles potentially provided an egalitarian arena for communication. And precisely because of the heterogeneous status and intellectual heterogeneity of the participants, these fora of exchange and expression, which also contributed to the processes of consensus forming and group building, gave rise to a new trend in taste and the formation of a moral institution alternative to the court. In these gatherings, which were structured according to rules (*âdâb*), religion and politics were left aside, so that confessional and political conflicts could be minimised. Emotion and sensitivity were of prime concern. The postulate of individuality and personality development, and hence of the ego, was pre-eminent. And because of the emphasis on self-definition and self-discovery, individual deficiencies could also be articulated as individually accountable human weaknesses, and so these poetry meetings could become the scene of polemics and did lead to real quarrels. The visibility of these publicly assessable spaces was a common feature with other institutions such as libraries, coffee houses, and baths,⁸⁰ the number of which increased rapidly during this period.⁸¹ In these places, "the nobles, irrespective of their status are unable to suppress their desire of taking a stroll here."⁸² It is no wonder, therefore, that contemporary Indian travellers to Europe, such as Abû Tâlib al-Isfahânî or Dean Mahomet, could perceive similar institutions in Europe within their own cultural categories.⁸³

⁷⁷ Schimmel, *Urdu Literature*, p. 171; Zaidî, *Mushâ'irah*, pp. 75ff.

⁷⁸ Zaidî, *Mushâ'irah*, pp. 109ff.

⁷⁹ Compare Mohammad Umar, 'Literature of a Declining Empire – Urdu Poetry in the Eighteenth Century', presented at the 52nd Session of the Indian History Congress, New Delhi, 1992.

⁸⁰ For coffee houses, see for example Khan, *Muraqqa'-e Dehli*, pp. 25, *et passim*.

⁸¹ It would be worthwhile to enquire into this aspect of material culture with the tools of urban anthropology and urban geography.

⁸² Khan, *Muraqqa'-e Dehli*, p. 25

⁸³ See the reciprocal perception in the case of Mîrzâ Abû Tâlib Khân Isfahânî, *Masîr-e Tâlibî fî bilâd-e afranjî*, completed in 1219 AH / 1804–05 AD, edited by Mîrzâ Husain 'Alî and Mîr Qudrat 'Alî (Calcutta, 1812), reprint edition with introduction by Husain Khadîvjâm (Tehran, 1352 AH), here pp. 181ff, 303ff, 355ff; transl. C. Stewart, *Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan in Asia, Africa and Europe During the Years 1797 to 1803, 2 Vols.* (London, 1811,

Along with the new ideas and institutions, the form of discourse seems to have changed too. The role of the teacher-student relationship (*ustâd-shâgird*) is a case in point: “One suspects that the extreme emphasis on an apprenticeship with an *ustâd* and the close identity between the *ustâd* and his *shâgird* were developments that took place in India, particularly in eighteenth century Delhi. It is a subject that deserves to be explored.”⁸⁴ It may have its roots in sufi *pirî-murîdî* relationships, upon which the Hindu guru-student pattern may have impacted increasingly. It is said that, besides the pure transmission of the poetic ideal, the master could now have an effect upon the learning process and correct the student immediately. And the teacher gave him a *nom de plume* (*takhallus*; lit: becoming free, liberation).⁸⁵ In turn, this metamorphosis of name implied liberation from received tradition.⁸⁶ At the same time, this liberation could establish a distance from the self: the self was, thus, objectified and a new – albeit temporary – identity suggested. And since this transitional identity, this artificial person, for instance, *takhallus*, could not be grasped socially, it provided for a vast field of potential desires and wishes, and reflections in particular resulting from socio-political compulsions and a situation of impotency. This method of self-articulation made it possible to trace innermost feelings and to find, observe and construct the subject or the ego anew through a process of reflection. For example Nâsir ‘Andalîb would talk about the man’s process of self-discovery in man, and said that he – on his way to cognition – broke the mirror.⁸⁷ And the poet Mîr Taqî Mîr agreed: “It is man, that inspires world with life! A mirror though it was, no doubt, before man existed – but a mirror unable to enable the vision.”⁸⁸

In fact, with this metamorphosis of identity it became possible to extricate oneself (*takhallasa min*) from feudal structures and received loyalties, and hence from *taqlîd*, and to establish a kind of anti- or alternative culture to the court, and probably to become an alternative perfect man, like the Prophet Muhammad. It is interesting to note that at that time multi-layered affiliations of individual and group identity also became quite popular, as can be seen in simultaneous memberships of multiple Sufi orders, with the changing and competing involvement of different loyalties and affiliations.⁸⁹

Mushâ‘irah as a means of self-liberation and self-statement of the individual, of satisfying curiosity and arousing new interests, naturally fostered an institutionalised literary criticism,

reprint 1972); M. Fisher, ed., *Dean Mahomet, Travels of Dean Mahomet: An Eighteenth-Century Journey through India* (Berkeley, 1997); S. Digby, ‘An eighteenth century narrative of a journey from Bengal to England: Munshi Ismâ‘il’s *New History*’, in Shackle, ed., *Urdu and Muslims*, pp. 49–66; Shaikh Lutfullah, *Autobiography of Lutfullah: An Indian’s Perceptions of the West*, ed. Edward B. Eastwick, reprint, ed. with an Introduction S. A. I. Tirmizi (New Delhi, 1985); R. Schulze, ‘Schauspiel oder Nachahmung? Zum Theaterbegriff arabischer Reiseschriftsteller im 19. Jahrhundert’, *Die Welt des Islams* 34 (1994), pp. 67–84.

⁸⁴ Naim, ‘Musha‘iras’, p. 173; Zaidî, *Mushâ‘irah*, pp. 151ff.

⁸⁵ See Zaidî, *Mushâ‘irah*, pp. 170–185; Schimmel, *Urdu Literature*, p. 174; Russell and Islam, *Mughal*, pp. 3f.

⁸⁶ The well-known lexicographer S. Muhammad Mirzâ Muhaddhab, *Muhaddhab al-Lughât*, (Lucknow, s.t.) Vol. 3, p. 240, prefers a different – albeit not very inspiring – explanation: *takhallus* (ending) is used because the poetry ends with the naming of the pseudonym.

⁸⁷ See ‘Andalîb, *Nâla-ye ‘Andalîb*, I, p. 790.

⁸⁸ As quoted in Rothen-Dubs, *Garten*, p. 20 (my translation). The Naqshbandi Mîr Dard was of the opinion that “The whole life long I have been listening to Him from far/Only whilst dreaming I dragged Him to my breast/Now, as I presented myself as a mirror in front of Him/He saw himself, not I saw Him.” Quoted in A. Schimmel, *Liebe zu dem Einen* (Zürich, 1986), p. 124 (my translation).

⁸⁹ An enquiry into the issue of multiple identities and identity-switching through multi-initiations would be worthwhile.

in the form of memoirs, biography and auto-biography. The compilation of anthologies of poetry (*bayâd*) and biographical collections of poets and scholars (*tadhkirah*) extending beyond the classical hagiographies and of lexicons and encyclopaedia also became popular. The three earliest (Persian) biographies of Urdu poets were written between 1752 and 1754.⁹⁰ In these and similar endeavours the aspiration of the time to intellectual universality became obvious, as well as its desire to summarise the accumulated knowledge systematically and popularise it.⁹¹ Similar tendencies can be discerned in other regions of the Orient: in Cairo we find encyclopaedists and historians such as the Indian Murtaḍâ al-Bilgrâmî al-Zabîdî and his student al-Jabartî (died 1825). There too an institution similar to the *mushâ'irah*, the *majlis*, the “literary salon”, became popular among scholars and mystics. This apparently corresponded to the needs and interests of urban traders and pietists, who were also organised in mystical orders and who supported the received, traditional sciences: “The revival of these studies (e.g., *hadîth*) among (Sufi) reformers turned their *majlis* into a religio-cultural institution, a literary salon.”⁹²

To be sure, the emancipatory approach of the urban traders was grounded in sound economic and societal interests: they wanted to get rid of the traditional social hierarchy and status and called for more morality and virtue. Increasingly, the personal value of the individual began to emerge in contrast to the value of status. This, in turn, implied equality, which was most important for these aspiring trading communities. They wanted to be credit-worthy and to organise their income in a precise and calculated manner. The organised control of capital stood in contrast to the unprofessional conduct of the gentry and their use of representative status-related wealth and opulence. Functionality, too, stood in contrast to enjoyment. It seems that the new norms reflected the changing social background: common and untitled property was earned by hard work: it was not inherited in a nonchalant way; it was not self-evident family tradition, and did not consist of secure landed property but of monetary and commodity assets, which, if they were to increase, had to be invested at risk, again and again. The commoner was eager to acquire and maintain wealth; the aristocrat was fixated on its waste and application.⁹³

The purpose of this article was to re-read and revisit history and, at the same time, to open up and draw attention to new scope for research. The approach of looking at connected histories – in another context also called shared knowledge – seems to be productive for this purpose.⁹⁴ In this context, the concept of modernity in pre-colonial South Asia and the question of the historiography connected with it are the centre of attention. Thus, the preconditions for the possibilities of *early* and *alternative* or *multiple modernities* are being examined.⁹⁵ In the process, the material aspects of various economic

⁹⁰ Mîr Taqî Mîr, *Nikât al-shu 'arâ*; Gardezi: *Tadhkirah-ye rekhtah-goyân*; Qâ'im Chândpûri, *Makhzan-e Nikât*; compare Farmân Fatehpûri, *Urdû shu 'arâ ke tadhkire avr tadhkirah nigârî* (Lahore, 1972); Jâlibî, *Târîkh*, II, pp. 496f.

⁹¹ Compare Urs Bitterli, *Die “Wilden” und die “Zivilisierten”*; *Grundzüge einer Geistes- und Kulturgeschichte der europäischen-überseeischen Begegnung* (Munich, 1991), p. 223.

⁹² Gran, *Roots*, pp. 57ff.

⁹³ K. P. Hansen, ‘Bürgerliche und unbürgerliche Empfindsamkeit in England’, in Hansen, ed., *Empfindsamkeiten*,

pp. 43–62, here p. 50.

⁹⁴ Compare Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia’, *Modern Asian Studies* 31/3 (1997), pp. 735–762.

⁹⁵ Compare the contributions in *Daedalus*. Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 129, No. 1, “Multiple Modernities” (2000).

areas such as industrial and commercial growth, and demography, are examined, but the main task is to analyse their underlying symbolic and ideological constructs that developed in a particular time in various regions. Examples of this are the simultaneous occurrence of messianism around the Mediterranean and in South Asia in the sixteenth century, and modern 'fundamentalisms' in the last quarter of the twentieth century. This parallelism can serve to rid us of European hegemonic discourse. We find an analogy in the eighteenth century. One part of the new culture of this period stood for *manqûlât* but not simply as a blind following of Muhammadan tradition. In the first place, *manqûlât*, and in particular *hadîth*, had a clear opening, emancipatory and rational-critical character that was also reflected societally, linguistically and institutionally in an esoteric reform. In the process of this reform, a number of systematisations were undertaken, in the spheres of theology and mysticism, literature and poetry, among others. So, we find at least two competing traditions. The first subjected the individual aspects of cultural practice to a generic and super-ordinate discipline of dogmatism and ideology as a principle of cultural heteronomy, as can be understood from the standardised *dars-e nizâmî* that supported *kalâm* and law, both based in logic and most congruent with state domination. In contrast, the second seemed to stand for cultural autonomy and fostered particular discourses, calling for independent reasoning and stressing the role of vernaculars. While the first relied on the hierarchy of state-power, the latter was based on evidence and consensus.⁹⁶ And all this happened against the background of the political collapse of the great empires.

Interestingly, in the subsequent decades, and even centuries, functional elites focused their syllabus (*dars-e nizâmî*) on logic and law and this gained acceptance among the structures of the regional princely territorial states. The syllabus also helped in reproducing the politics of centralisation of their new colonial masters. The reformers, on the other hand, fell more and more into oblivion through a complex process of colonial reception, appropriation, rejection and erasure, aggravated by Muslim urban reform movements of the nineteenth century.⁹⁷ This complex process resulted in Muslims being denied agency and excluded from world history. They are only gradually recovering from this ostensible slumber.

⁹⁶ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, p. 117.

⁹⁷ Compare Jamal Malik, ed., *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History, 1760–1860* (Leiden, 2000).