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Letters, prison sketches and autobiographical literature: The case of Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi in the Andaman Penal Colony¹

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For a long time, the Indian revolt of 1857 was known as the 'Sepoy Mutiny'. This of course was from the perspective of colonial historiography, which later was challenged by nationalist historians of various camps, who considered this event as a marker of the 'first war of independence' in India against the British. It is, however, astonishing to note that in both major narratives of the history of 1857, the life and works of Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi (1797–1861) gains no attention. He was one of the first political prisoners of colonial times, who not only resigned from the post of kutchery chief and is said to have issued a fatwa-e jihad against the British, but also drafted the first constitution of Independent India based on the 'principles of democracy'. Besides being a scholar of Islamic studies and theology, he was also a literary personage, especially in Arabic literature. On account of his deep knowledge and erudition he was called 'Allama and later was venerated as a great Sufi. Khairabadi was not a marginal character in the history of 1857, yet somehow his presence in history has been undermined, if not totally ignored, by mainstream historians. Though Khairabadi remains alive in Urdu and Persian literature, we hardly find vernacular voices being heard in historical accounts that are important to ascertain the nature of the 1857 revolt. In order to establish this argument, this article relies heavily upon sources such as letters, autobiographical notes, prison literature and vernacular literature as the basis for a reconstruction of history that assists us in understanding whether the revolt was aimed at restoring the old order, or whether traditional historiography follows 'traditionalisation' that ultimately corresponds to the politics of colonial restoration. Indeed, it is important to mention here that the case of Khairabadi helps us in understanding mutual perception at the cross-section of European and non-European encounters.

¹ This is an updated and extended version of Malik, 'Briefe, autobiographische Aufzeichnungen und Gefängnisliteratur', pp. 52–66.

I

The Indian-Muslim scholar Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi (1797–1861) hailed from a prominent ‘*ulama* family of the Awadh region. Just like the ‘*ulama* of Farangi Mahal² and Allahabad, the Khairabadis were inclined to the idea of rational sciences (*ma‘qulat*) and of ‘the unity of being’ (*wahdat al-wujud*), expounded by Ibn al-Arabi (died 1240). From the seventeenth century onwards, this scholarly tradition largely rejected the Islam of the Mujaddidiyya branch of the Naqshbandis. Fadl-e Haqq, belonging to the Qadiri order, can be thought to be the last great ‘*alim* of his line, as his son ‘Abd al-Haqq (died 1899), a teacher at the Delhi College, was a much inferior scholar than him. Fadl-e Haqq’s own father Fadl-e Imam (died 1828) was a very prominent writer. There were also major debates and polemics between the ‘*ulama* of Awadh such as the Khairabadis and prominently Fadl-e Haqq on the one hand and the better-known ‘*ulama* of Delhi, descended from Shah Waliullah (died 1762), on the other, even if there were familial relations between them. The latter were definitely closer to Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s (1703–92) position on the question of reform, while people such as Fadl-e Haqq who were representatives of the service elite were hardly reformist. In fact, the Khairabadis were closely linked to the Mughal dispensation, and this explains why, despite accepting the patronage and employment of the East India Company, they nevertheless were critical of British rule.

After putting down the Rebellion of 1857, British authorities sentenced the Indian-Muslim scholar Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi to deportation to the Andaman Islands on charges of instigation to murder and high treason.³ Subsequently, the English language historiography forgot about this scholar for the next half a century.⁴ It was not until a few decades later that his many-faceted life was reconstructed, be it as an aggressive freedom fighter or as a conservative scholar. Lately, he has become an icon for both the freedom struggle and Islamic scholarship. Hence the Chairperson of the waqf-board of Andaman and Nicobar Islands points out in a rather opulent signpost on the graveyard of the scholar in South Point, Port Blair (which in fact has become a major shrine and centre of pilgrimage (*mazar*) for Muslims and Hindus alike):

The Mazar of Allama Fazal-Haq-Khairabadi is located on the Foreshore Road in the outskirts of South Point Village at Port Blair and is popularly known as the Dargah [*shrine*, tombs, holy place] of Mazar-Baba. He was born in 1797 in

² On the Farangi Mahallis see Robinson, *The ‘Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*.

³ During colonialism deportations of delinquents were intended to reduce the costs of the prison apparatus. For example, France made it possible to create penitentiaries on her islands through the law of 1854; see Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*, p. 358.

⁴ Such as Mohammed Mujeeb, Shaikh Ikram, Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, Mushirul Hasan, as well as the subaltern historians, though Khairabadi is still known among Urdu-reading circles and amongst the religiously learned in South Asia.

a noble and affluent family of scholars in Khairabad (Old Oudh), Sitapura District in Uttar Pradesh. A renowned scholar of Islamic studies and theology, he had also excelled in Arabic languages and literature. He was equally an accomplished scholar of Urdu and Persian language. On account of his deep knowledge and erudition he was venerated and called as 'Allama'. Allama Fazal-Haq Khairabadi was also a great Sufi saint of that time. The forefathers of Allama had come from Iran who were renowned scholars of Islamic theology. Shah-Wali-Ullah who is known as Mohaddish (muhaddith; scholar of prophetic tradition—the hadith) Dehelvi was also from the same family who is buried in Menhdiyan in Old Delhi. Allama's hierarchy reaches to Ameer-ul Momeneen, Hazrat Umar-Farooq 'Raziallahutala-Anhu' with 32 generations. He was twice honoured with the post of kutchery chief once at Delhi residency and second time at Lucknow. Later, he resigned from these posts to take part in freedom struggle against British rule. He drew up a constitution for running the administration of liberated Delhi. He roused the Mughal princes and the people of Delhi alike to take up arms against the alien ruler and to bring an end to their hegemony from Indian soil.

During the period of turmoil and upheaval in 1857, he had issued 'Fatwa-E-Jehad' (a religious sanction) for initiating war of independence to liberate India from British yoke. He was later rounded up on a charge of inciting sedition. At the trial before the court of judicature at Lucknow, he confessed his guilt without fear or fret and was sentenced to imprisonment for life and transported to Port Blair on 8th October 1859.

He has to his credit many books written on various subjects in vernacular and Arabic languages. Among his creative works are two of his important political treatises i.e., 'Alsuratul Hindia' and 'Alfitnatul Hindia' which he wrote at Port Blair while in confinement on cloth pieces and papers with soft coal and pencil. He sent these manuscripts secretly by hand to his son in Khairabad through another political sufferer Mufti-Inayat Ahmed-Kakaurvi. The former piece of work, which is in Arabic prose, is a historical narration and gives the account of the past events of 1857 uprising that he had witnessed from his own eyes. The later piece of work consists of two political satires in Arabic verse form (Qasayads) ending up lastly in admiration of prophet Mohammad by way of prayer. These two works reflect his life and appalling condition in prison and the treatment meted out to him during confinement at Port Blair prison house.

He died on 12th February 1861 at Port Blair and was buried on a piece of land located at short distance from Seashore Road on way to Corbyns Cove in the outskirts of South Point Village at Port Blair.

It is said that a person used to graze his cattle in the vicinity of Mazar one day at noon having been tired due to hot day, slept on a mound under the shadow of a pipal tree. He dreamt while asleep and heard the Muazzin call in his dream. When the call was over he saw a white bearded faqir asking him for water for purpose of ablution. He then suddenly, got up and performed Zohar Namaz [midday prayer] after doing his ablution on the spot. Since that day onward he

started visiting that place daily out of reverence to that great bearded person whom he had dreamt. He started burning an oil lamp during night on the same spot under the pipal tree. Perhaps this man was a prisoner released from confinement and was freely settled down in that village.

The Dargah is visited by hundreds of persons regardless of caste, creed or religion everyday. It is also very dear to non-Muslim brothers who visit the Dargah in large numbers. The people of the Andamans have the belief that on visit to Dargah of Mazar-Baba, their miseries are taken care of. On fulfilment of their desires, they happily arrange feast at Dargah and invite friends and poors to enjoy the feast. Fact remains that the Mazar of Allama Fazal-Haq-Khairabadi exists as a true symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity in these islands.

This representation of the scholar is full of admiration and memorisation, rooted in devotion for his person and tied to a concrete place, similar to *tadhkirah* (the classic hagiography).⁵ This semiotisation of memory therefore needs some explanation. This is even more the case since a vivid debate about Fadl-e Haqq has flared up recently between two warring factions that emerged in the nineteenth century: the first is the movement called *Ahl-e Hadith* which is said to have found its way to South Asia from Yemen from the 1830s onwards. It harboured some of its activists in the Jihad movement most of whom quietened down after 1857, while its reformism drew inspiration from Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), Shah Waliullah and the Yemenite scholar Muhammad al-Shaukani (1760–1834) in particular. Any acknowledgement of the authority of legal schools (*madhahib*) is refused, Sufism and folk religious practices as well as pilgrimages connected to shrine cults and visits to the grave of Prophet Muhammad are rejected and considered as heretical innovation (*bid' a*). At the same time *ijtihad* is allowed for members of the educated elite as well, rather than concentrating Islamic agency purely in the hands of the '*ulama*. Known as *ghair muqallid* (those who reject, even oppose, *taqlid*) they found their social basis primarily among trading communities, including Muslim notables, landholders and '*ulama*, from whom they also obtained patronage by means of different intellectual and social networks. One of their leading personalities was the administrator and financier Siddiq Hasan Khan al-Qanauji (1832–90), who was married to the powerful Begum of Bhopal, while the intellectual leadership was provided by various emigrant scholars from Yemen.⁶

In a reaction to this rather urban, mercantile movement, the *Hanafite* movement at Deoband, a qasbah near Delhi, was established in 1867, on which much has been written.⁷ The Islamic discourse was complemented by a third important group, the second of the warring factions: the Hanafite *Ahl-e Sunnat wa al-Jama'at*

⁵ For the identity-giving role of *tadhkirah*, see the illuminating article by Hermansen and Lawrence, 'Indo-Persian Tazkiras as Memorative Communications'.

⁶ The movement has been analysed by Preckel, *Islamische Bildungsnetzwerke und Gelehrtenkultur im Indien des 19. Jahrhunderts*.

⁷ See for example Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860–1900*.

(the people of the tradition of the Prophet and the community), also called Barelwis, after Bareilly, the birthplace of their central figure Ahmad Rida Khan (1855–1922). The movement was primarily active in the agrarian society of northern India. While the scripturalists (Deobandis and Ahl-e Hadith) were inclined to the Naqshbandi order and appreciated the idea of the ‘unity of testimony’ (*wahdat al-shuhud*) as propagated by Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624), the Barelwis tended towards the Qadiriyya and towards popular Indian interpretations of Ibn Arabi’s complex philosophical idea of the ‘unity of being’. They attach great importance to the idea of a living and present Prophet Muhammad, who possessed knowledge of the unseen (*‘ilm al-ghayb*) and was omnipresent, being invested with God’s preeminent light. Barelwis organise and take part in popular festivals, and consider themselves true Sunnis (ahl-e Sunnat wa al-Jama‘at), their ritual practice being centred on Sufi shrines, particularly the periodic observance of the death anniversary (*‘urs*) of the founder of the Qadiri order, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir Jilani Baghdadi (d. 1166). They claim that individual believers need the Prophet’s intercession with God if they hope for His forgiveness.⁸

The vivid debate about Fadl-e Haqq between Ahl-e Hadith and the Barelwis, however, goes back to the tensions between representatives of the service elite and reformers in the 1820s. Hence the reconstruction of Khairabadi’s biography helps to lay open internal Islamic disputes between reformists (the so-called Indian ‘Wahhabiyya’), the descendants of Shah Waliullah, on the one hand and the upholders of tradition and the service elite—the Khairabadis—on the other.

The bone of contention pertained to the unique position of Prophet Muhammad in the wake of the publication of Shah Isma‘il’s (d. 1831) polemic, *Taqwiyat al-Iman* (The Strengthening of Faith).⁹ In this book—more like an Urdu edition of *Kitab al-Tawhid* written in Arabic by the eighteenth-century Arab reformer and Hanbalite, Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhab—Shah Isma‘il is very particular about traditional or transmitted sciences (*manqulat*), focusing on Prophetic tradition, the *hadith*, and radically rejects any sort of veneration of holy men and adherence to law schools which he calls *bid‘a*, heretical innovation. Moreover, he argued that God can create another Muhammad—the Seal of prophets (*khatm al-anbiya’*)—but would not make him appear on earth. With this latter argument he attacked the traditional prophetology, which had developed from the mystical idea of the pre-existent Muhammadan light and a pre-existent Muhammad (*imtina‘-e nazir*). Fadl-e Haqq, in contrast, maintained that it was impossible that the Prophet should have a match.¹⁰ The creation of a peer of the Seal of Prophets was beyond even God’s power. And, in doing so, he also instrumentalised his friend, the famous

⁸ The Barelwi movement has been portrayed by Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India*.

⁹ The book was published first in 1824. See Ismail, *Support of Faith*.

¹⁰ In his reply, *Tahqiq al-Fatwa fi Abtal al-Taghwa*—finished in 1825—he also declared Shah Isma‘il a *kafir*.

Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib (d. 1869), for whom he got some princely stipends. Apparently, Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi also wrote a Persian pamphlet against the *Wahhabiyya*, signed by several contemporary *‘ulama*.¹¹

The Barelwis tried to style the scholar as a solidarity-creating figurehead by, for example, expensively re-publishing all of Khairabadi's works,¹² and in this way inventing a genealogy for themselves which goes back to the first half of the nineteenth century in an attempt to monopolise the heritage of Fadl-e Haqq and his family. Even contemporary Deobandis acknowledge his achievements and impact;¹³ Fadl-e Haqq's father Fadl-e Imam's *Mirqat* was taught approvingly for long years at Deoband, and the celebrated Deobandi historian Muhammad Miyan praised Fadl-e Haqq's academic and political achievements quite extensively.¹⁴ Ahl-e hadith, on the other hand, while acknowledging Khairabadi's expertise in the field of rational sciences and literature, criticised him on account of his worldliness, his creating neologisms based in vulgar language and his fanaticism (*ta'assub minhu*) against knowledgeable people (*ahl al-haqq*). Due to his ignorance in traditional sciences (*‘ulum al-salaf*), he tended towards heretical innovation (*bid'a*), which became a bone of contention for the *ahl al-haqq*.¹⁵

Both positions, Barelwis and Ahl-e Hadith, refer to sources dating from the colonial period which were substantial respectively, in creating the myth surrounding Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi and de-constructing him. The placket ('Mazar of Allama Fazal-Haq-Khairabadi, by Chairperson, WAKF Board, Andaman & Nicobar Islands') quoted above is as important in this context as the plan to mobilise popular and renowned people such as the famous Indian lyricist and filmmaker Akhtar Javed—demonstrably a descendant of the Khairabadi family,¹⁶ to help commemorate the death anniversary of the scholar. For the *‘urs* perfectly provides for the (re-)production of a specific group's cultural identity and secures its coherence in time and space.

This controversy of the 1820s and 1830s in which well-known men of letters like Mirza Ghalib were involved, or rather instrumentalised, is still *en vogue* and reflects the different religious identities and heterogeneity of Islam in South Asia.

¹¹ Mirza Ghalib writing to Mirza Rahim Beg Merthi, Aug. 1865, in Da'udi, ed., *Majma'ah-e Nathr-e Ghalib*, pp. 170–73; Mihr, ed., *Khutut-e Ghalib*, p. 560f; cf. 'Aqil, Mu'in al-Din, 'Maulana Fadl-e Haqq. Aik kitabiyati Ja'izah', in Muhammad Sa'id al-Rahman 'Alawi, ed., *Allamah Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi awr Jihad-e Azadi*, p. 190.

¹² See the Arabic dissertation by al-Nisa, *Al-'Allama Fadl Haqq al-Khairabadi: hayatuhu wa ma'athiruhu ma' tahqiq kitabih al-thaura al-hindiyya*, and Muhammad, *Imtiyaz-e Haqq*.

¹³ See the positions in Qarshi, ed., *Maulana Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi*, and 'Alawi, 'Allamah Fadl-e Haqq.

¹⁴ Miyan, *‘Ulama-e Hind ka shandar madi*, pp. 446–55, relying on Sherwani, 'Abd al-Shahid Khan, transl. and ed., *Al-Thaurat al-Hindiyya*.

¹⁵ See al-Qanauji, *Abjad al-'Ulum, I–III*, I, p. 347, II, p. 245; al-Hayy, *Nuzhat al-khawatir wa bahjat al-masami' wa al-Nawazir, I–VIII*, ed. by S. Abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Hasani al-Nadwi, p. 413f, quoting from Siddiq Hasan Khan's *Abjad al-'Ulum*.

¹⁶ Indeed, it might be interesting to see what the family's own take on the legend and myth of Fadl-e Haqq has been over the past decades. An inquiry into this issue would, however, go beyond the limits of this article.

This most acrimonious debate in Islam also forms the background of the recently emerging critique on Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi. The critique helps, though, to unveil the myth developed around his person in the context of the Rebellion. The critics maintain that he was not so much a representative of scholarship as rather worldly inclined and a bon-vivant. They also argue—in contrast to his admirers—that the scholar of Khairabad was neither conspicuous in the affair about the mosque and the Hanuman temple in Ayodhya, when in 1855, he assumed a pro-British attitude—which finally led to the death of hundreds of Muslim zealots¹⁷—nor was he active in the Rebellion. The material collected so far does not, however, provide any definite evidence about the degree of Khairabadi's alleged participation. Historical analyses, especially Western and Russian, are unanimously of the view that Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi was one of those to spearhead the Rebellion. At the same time, the critical comments about his participation mentioned above are hardly taken into account. Even the latest contribution on Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi by Iqbal Husain (1988) from the Aligarh University does not consider them. This may be an indication of a missing 'cognitive interaction' between Indian scholars as well as among Indian and non-Indian ones.

The basis for our historiographical reconstruction of Fadl-e Haqq's biography, then, are his unpublished works in Persian, Arabic and Urdu, which were discovered and made accessible to researchers,¹⁸ rather than standard works on the nationalist and colonialist discourse. In the present case, it is mainly letters, autobiographical literature and prison sketches left behind by the scholar from Khairabad—an important qasbah near Lucknow in the United Provinces in India, which had been a major weaving and textile painting centre. The critical examination of these textually rich 'relics' is significant because they offer unconscious and non-deliberate verdicts of historical events in the form of certificates, acts, coins, letters and scientific works, etc., which were by nature immediate and contemporary. They were not designed to teach the following generations.¹⁹ Hence, it is through these relics that hitherto proven historical perspectives can be interrogated.

The early biography of Fadl-e Haqq can be reconstructed through the odd available letter. Some of his unpublished notes—such as letters to his father, the celebrated scholar and the Company's first *sadr al-sudur* in Delhi, Fadl-e Imam Khairabadi (d. 1828),²⁰ illustrate the period between 1234 (1818) and 1237 (1822), and provide some knowledge about his entry into the British service around 1815. To some extent they underline his ambivalent relations with British politicians,

¹⁷ Cf. al-Ghani, *Tarikh-e Awadh*, Vols. I–V, p. 202f. Also see Qarshi, 'Allamah Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi. Jihad-e Azadi aur Shah Isma'il Shahid', in 'Alawi, *Allamah Fadl-e Haqq*, p. 60f.

¹⁸ Some of these precious sources are reproduced in al-Nisa, *Al-Allama Fadl Haqq al-Khairabadi*.

¹⁹ In contrast, 'tradition' means written works particularly and consciously designed for the historical teaching of contemporary and following generations. For a division of sources into 'relics' and 'tradition' see Droysen, *Historik*, p. 37f; also see, von Brandt, *Werkzeug des Historikers* (10), p. 53f.

²⁰ Cf. Khan, *Ilm o 'Amal, I-II (Wiqā'i' 'Abd al-Qadir Khani)*, pp. 255–56; 'Ali, *Tadhkirah-ye 'Ulama'-ye Hind*, p. 376ff.

such as during his voyages around Delhi in the capacity of a chief record-keeper (*sarrishtahdar*) accompanying his superiors.²¹ However, such letters can also provide important hints regarding the processes of mutual perception and colonial relationship on the spot. In a letter in Arabic dated 5th Dhi al-Qa'ada 1231 [September 1816], Khairabadi states that he had to copy too many texts and to constantly repeat the same tasks against his will while standing in front of the authorities. He complains about colonial arrogance and about the British dishonouring him by not respecting his being a member of the Muslim noble class. The only reason for his staying on in Company service was the fear of losing face if he resigned.²² In 1818 his opinion was almost the same, as he wrote to his father, again in Arabic, stating that he had to obey orders even if they were against common sense, and that his work wore him out.²³

His concern about the situation in colonial India in general and the decline in the prosperity of Khairabad in particular finds expression, among others, in a statement from 1827 at the latest—but which unfortunately is incomplete and was published for the first time almost 100 years later, in 1926. This statement gives an interesting account of the economic and social decline of Indians, which he addressed to the ruler on behalf of the citizens of Delhi.²⁴ Therein he criticised the economic situation, which had declined since the beginning of British influence, especially in the wake of imported British manufacture goods:²⁵ the native inhabitants—Hindus and Muslims alike—having hitherto worked in administration, trade and crafts as well as in agriculture were now suffering from unemployment while the British were dominating trade and confiscating land. The burden on farmers did not allow them to pay their taxes any more, while the artisans were suffering as well. Women who had been working on the looms and selling their products were rendered unemployed because of the government (*Company*) monopoly which had replaced manually working looms with mechanical ones. Additionally, the governor of Delhi, Charles Metcalfe (d. 1846), had ordered the introduction

²¹ See his Arabic letter dated 20 Dhi-l-Qa'ada 1234/Sept. 1819, from Djina to his father, who stayed in Delhi. He calls himself '*al-mamluk*', the slave; see the copy of his handwritten letter reproduced in al-Nisa, *Al-'Allama Fadl Haqq al-Khairabadi*, pp. 516–22.

²² Letter reproduced in al-Nisa, *Al-'Allama Fadl Haqq al-Khairabadi*, p. 511. For colonial arrogance see Fischer, *Indirect Rule in India*, p. 328f.

²³ See Barakati, *Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi awr sann satawan*, p. 21f; Sherwani, *Al-Thaurat al-Hindiyya; baghi Hindustan*, p. 151. For this book see Riyasat 'Ali Nadwi's review 'Baghi Hindustan', pp. 310–18.

²⁴ Published by Faruqi, *Nawa-ye Adab*, pp. 40–46. His statement is not, as expected, addressed to Bahadur Shah Zafar (d. 1862), who came to power later, but to Akbar Shah II (d. 1837), as Charles Metcalfe, who was the governor of Delhi from 1811–19 and again from 1825–27 and who introduced changes during his second period in power, is mentioned in there. Thus this statement was noted down before 1827.

²⁵ For the general situation see also Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, p. 358f; and Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, pp. 180–90.

of a surveillance tax (*chaukidari tax*). Furthermore, each lane in Delhi's downtown would have to have an entrance door (*phatak*),²⁶ which would generate enormous logistical problems for trade. A further control measure was the constitution of an equally numbered jury of five Hindus to five Muslims per district.²⁷

Interestingly, followers of Fadl-e Haqq draw attention to a similar Persian statement that was issued by the Mughal emperor in Delhi as a rallying call for the insurrection on 25th August 1857, and which was published in translated form in the *Delhi Gazette* and commented upon as 'the first manifesto in the European sense which has been published in India, the first list of grievances, the first step to stir up the people by promises unconnected with religion.... The grievances of each class are specified, and a remedy promised if they will but fight boldly for the old regime.'²⁸ The call sought to mobilise affected social groups: the Mughal emperor promised to support the zamindars, who had been suffering under high taxes, and to regulate their disputes according to the *sharia* and *shastra*. Traders, who bore high taxes and suffered under British monopoly, were also to be supported. The Indian civil servants were incited to resist while the army was to receive higher pay in the case of a British defeat. Craftsmen, who stood at the edge of ruin, were to be elevated as well if they joined the freedom fighters (*mujahidin*), and Islamic scholars were promised tax-free land if they joined the combat. On the other hand, supporters of the British were to be killed and their properties confiscated. It is essential for the subsequent process of making the myth of Fadl-e Haqq in contemporary sources that a connection be drawn between the events of 1827 and those of 1857.

After this statement, but not before the death of his father in 1828, Fadl-e Haqq quit the service in 1831. There are again epistles providing insightful information about his relationship with the British, such as a Persian note written by Mirza Ghalib from Rampur in early 1857: Ghalib writes that Khairabadi had left the civil service because of the rudeness and ignorance of the British rulers (*be tamizi wa qadr na shanasi-ye hukkam*), and subsequently had followed an offer from the

²⁶ For the different entrance doors within the oriental city see Wirth, 'Die orientalische Stadt: Ein Überblick aufgrund jüngerer Forschungen zur materiellen Kultur', pp. 45–94, here pp. 67, 81f. For the infrastructure in Old Delhi see Malik, 'Islamic Institutions and Infrastructure in Shahjahanabad', pp. 43–64.

²⁷ This may be contrasted with the statement of T. Fortescue in 1820, who was of the view that

Comparing, therefore, the former and present times within this territory, both merchants and inhabitants feel their condition greatly improved. Nothing new or burthensome has been imposed, while great vexations and risks have been obviated. They consequently have no novel cause of complaint, nor do they in any respect manifest such a disposition.

(Report by Mr T. Fortescue, civil commissioner, Delhi, on the customs and town duties of the Delhi Territory, 1820, pp. 131–214, here p. 172, *Records of the Delhi Residency and Agency*, Lahore, 1911).

²⁸ Quoted in Rizvi, and Bhargava, eds, *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh*, pp. 453–58, here p. 455.

prince of Jhajjar.²⁹ Probably there were also some contestations with other leading Muslim scholars working for the British, such as Mufti In‘am Ullah Gopamawi (1857–58), a high jurist nominated by the British in Allahabad. He also went to Saharanpur where his elder brother Fadl-e ‘Azim was Deputy Collector³⁰ and a special friend of William Fraser, who was Deputy Superintendent, Delhi, in 1820 and later became the Agent of Delhi until 1835.

This might be in contrast to the statement that Khairabadi was relinquished by the East India Company because of some corruption issues: he was not willing to support the politics of internegating gamblers as initiated by Thomas Metcalfe (1795–1853) in 1830, and which eventually also trapped Mirza Ghalib. Instead of imprisoning gamblers, he let them go.³¹

Although working for various princely states in the following period, writing several books in Arabic and Persian, and allegedly using his various contacts for the mobilisation of Muslims against British rule,³² the scholar from Khairabad managed to again hold a high position in the British administration of Lucknow just before the outbreak of the rebellion.

His early correspondence and statements are important witness accounts of a member of the Muslim service elite at a crucial time and show the existence of intensive reciprocal perceptions. This is one of the reasons why his unpublished works are of prime importance to historiography.

II

Fadl-e Haqq’s alleged role in 1857 offers an interesting insight into colonial history.³³ He is thought to have called upon all Muslims to participate in a Holy War (*jihad*) against the British, taken active part in the organisation of a subversive political institution, which was headed by ‘the highly accomplished Maulvi Fazl Haq as the director’,³⁴ and improvised a system of administration and constitution based on the principles of democracy. This legal opinion (*fatwa*) seemed to have

²⁹ Letter to Saraj al-Din Ahmad dated 31 Jan. 1832, ‘Abidi, ed., *Panj Ahang*, p. 355f; Barakati, *Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi awr Sam satawan*, p. 22f.

³⁰ On Fadl-e ‘Azim the poet Mu‘min Khan Mu‘min wrote a poem titled ‘Tadmin shi‘r Munshi Fadl-e ‘Azim’; see *Kulliyat Mu‘min*, Allahabad, 1971, pp. 235–37. According to Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey*, vols I–II, pp. 646, 689, Muhammad Fadl-e ‘Azim wrote the history of the Nepalese war (*Waq‘i-ye Kohistan*), and a *mathnawi* (*Afsanah-ye Bharatpur*) on the operation against Rajah Durjan Sai of Bharatpur in the year 1825–26. He held the office of secretary under W. Fraser in Delhi for 20 years. He was an acclaimed poet of Persian and historiographer. Cf. Storey, p. 1322 and Khan, ‘*Ilm o ‘Amal*, I, p. 257.

³¹ See British Library, London, Add. 22624 (*khulasa-ye akhbar-e atrafihi*), dated 23.5.1830 and 31.5.1830. I am grateful to Dr Margrit Pernau for sharing this information with me.

³² See also Gordon-Polanskaya, ‘Osvescenie Narodnogo rostanija 1857–1859 gg. v. indijskoj I pakistanskoj periodiceskoj pecati’, p. 173f.

³³ See also Husain, ‘Fazle Haq of Khairabad—A Scholarly Rebel of 1857’, pp. 355–65.

³⁴ See the National Archives of India, New Delhi: Foreign Political Cons. 13 May 1859.

made him a freedom fighter *par excellence*. Though he denied in his writings that he had ever killed anyone, Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi never denied that he had opposed British rule as such. However, apart from the claims of his followers, there is no definitive evidence about the extent of Khairabadi's alleged involvement in subversive activities, and no such claims could be supported on the basis of the available material, i.e., letters, poems, autobiographical accounts. The crucial *fatwa* was re-published in the *Sadiq al-Akhbar* in Delhi on 26 July 1857 with the title 'Copy of the *Fatwa* from the Akhbar al-Zaffar Delhi Urdu',³⁵ and duly signed by more than 30 'ulama, among them the high Company employee Sadr al-Din Azurda (d. 1868). It opined that in case the British attacked the city of Delhi, killed Muslims and appropriated their property, the *jihad* became personal obligation (*fard-e 'ain*) for those able to resist militarily. In case the inhabitants of Delhi were weakened by *jihad* the inhabitants of the surrounding regions were to support them.³⁶

However, at the time the *fatwa* was issued, Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi was not in Delhi (he arrived in Delhi only in mid-August), and logically his name does not figure in the list of those who signed the *fatwa*.³⁷ Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) later commented that this particular *fatwa* was fake (*be-asl*), and many of the 'ulama signed it only under pressure and threat.³⁸ Most of them were loyalists anyway, and only a few would really have gone for *jihad*.³⁹ In fact, the colonial sources report that in a battle at Harchandpur/Ettawah at the beginning of December 1858, '[A] rebel of high rank called the Moulvie was killed in the action of the 8th instant. This must be Fuzl Huq.' Similarly, 'In the fight of the 8th instant, a leader was killed supposed to be Moulavee Fazul Huq of Delhi.'⁴⁰ As will be seen below, there is a possibility of a namesake from Shahjahanpur with whom Fadl-e Haqq was confused.

The relevant court files, which would have given sound information about the legal case against Fadl-e Haqq in 1859,⁴¹ could not be found in the National Archives, similar to so many other documents pertaining to Muslim culture in the

³⁵ The *fatwa* was discussed in several issues of the *Dehli Urdu Akhbar*, Vol. 19/31, 32, 33, 34; cf. Muhammad 'Atiq Siddiqi, ed., *Atharah Sau Sattawan* (1857), p. 201ff.

³⁶ See Qadiri, *Jang-e Azadi*, p. 403ff.

³⁷ 'Maulvi Fazl Huq of Khairabad who was in the Alwar raja's service on a monthly salary of Rs. 450 now arrived in Delhi. As the Maulvi was celebrated throughout Hindustan for his wisdom and sagacity the King made him one of his aides-de-camp. His arrival was highly displeasing to Hakim Ahsanullah Khan as so well known a Maulvi would certainly influence the King. But Fazl Huq did not pronounce a [judgement] in favour of a [holy war] or in any way mislead the King, though he was known to be in his counsels. (Sayyid Mubarak Shah in Edwards, *Red Year: The Indian Rebellion of 1857*, p. 212).

³⁸ Khan, *Asbab-e Baghawat-e Hind*, p. 78f.

³⁹ Qadiri, *Jang-e Azadi*, p. 406ff.

⁴⁰ See Rizvi and Bhargava, eds, *Freedom Struggle*, V, pp. 820, 834f; Sinha, ed., *Mutiny Telegrams*, pp. 45f, 87f.

⁴¹ See 'Arshi, Imtiaz 'Ali Khan, 'Kya Maulana Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi ka 1857 ke fatwa-ye (sic!) jihad se ta'alluq tha?', *Tahrik* 1957. Reprint in *Naya daur* (Lakhna'u), Feb. 1981, pp. 4-12; Malik, *Tahqiqi madamin*, pp. 90-132.

nineteenth century.⁴² However, a translation of parts of these files in Urdu as well as an incorrect and incomplete duplicate of the original could be traced in the library of Rampur. Copies of petitions in Persian and Arabic, which Fadl-e Haqq had addressed to princes and representatives of the British Crown asking for his release, as well as petitions by diverse notables, are nonetheless enlightening.

Some archival data suggest that after his detention in the Alipur prison, Fadl-e Haqq wrote several petitions to the viceroy.⁴³ Local notables also supported him with petitions, but to no avail.⁴⁴ Even from Port Blair in the Andaman Islands where Khairabadi was detained, the scholar tried to send a request for release to the Empress of India on 9 January 1860.⁴⁵ His son 'Abd al-Haqq, who later was honoured with the title of Shams al-'Ulama' by viceroy Dufferin (d. 1902) and who was returned parts of the confiscated land of his father,⁴⁶ would eventually succeed in pushing through his father's release. Descendants of the Khairabadi family record that Fadl-e Haqq died on 20 August 1861 even before his pending release, just when his son 'Abd al-Haqq arrived at Port Blair to receive him.⁴⁷ However, as many important documents disappeared (i.e., were burned or destroyed) before, during and after the troubles of 1857, it is still not possible to claim with certitude that the Crown had agreed to the release of Fadl-e Haqq.

In order to shed more light on the career of Khairabadi, one has to turn to other source material, such as his prison writings, and to Khairabadi's grasp over the liturgical language Arabic. Similarly, the Arabic spatial context, for example, Mecca, is important because it helps to monumentalise the memory of his admirers. It is in this context that the meaning of poetry cannot be underestimated; this traditional medium of cultural articulation has ever since been a means to appeal to human emotions, to mobilise large masses and to revive their cultural memory.⁴⁸ In this context, documents that pertain to the genre of prison poetry (*habsiyyat*) dealing with the theme of imprisonment are especially informative.⁴⁹ The prison as a definite disciplinary apparatus influences the prisoner's everyday life, his predisposition and his moral. In the isolation that he experiences, the prisoner can

⁴² National Archives of India, New Delhi, Foreign Political Cons, 3 June 1859, Nos 387–89. They were said to be not transferred, N.T.

⁴³ See National Archives of India, New Delhi, Foreign Political, Dec. 1860, No. 557.

⁴⁴ See *Memorial of Calcutta Muslims to the Governor-General*, National Archives of India, New Delhi, Foreign Political, Sept. 1860, Cons. Nos 556–58; in Urdu in Malik, *Tahqiqi madamin*, p. 114f.

⁴⁵ See National Archives of India, New Delhi, Foreign Political, Sept. 1860; Sec. Cons. No. 556; Urdu in Malik, *Tahqiqi madamin*, p. 119f.

⁴⁶ Sherwani, *Al-Thaurat al-Hindiyya*, pp. 232, 328f.

⁴⁷ Barakati, *Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi awr Sann satawan*, p. 65; Shihabi, *East India Company awr baghi 'Ulama*, p. 55. Again, this version seems to add to the construction of the myth around Khairabadi.

⁴⁸ For the function of history, collective memory and identity see Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*.

⁴⁹ There is a long tradition of prison poetry, *habsiyyat*. See de Bruijn, 'Habsiyya', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, pp. 333f. For contemporary Islamist prison literature see Cooke, 'Ayyam min hayati: The Prison Memoirs of a Muslim Sister'.

give in to self-reflection. The silence of his wishes and desires and of his surrounding world provides him with the possibility of descending into his conscience, which he can interrogate and from where he can sense the emergence of a moral feeling. Probably the guard becomes his friend or even beloved, who looks after him and suffers with him, while the prison supports the organisation of a milieu of solidarity and hierarchy. Thus, prison literature has specific identity and solidarity-inspiring functions for the author as well as for his readers. Together with the mythical origins and whereabouts of the document, prison literature takes on a central meaning in the collective memory of people, here the Muslims, particularly in the wake of Indian independence in 1947. In prison literature a totally different world is conceived through the construction of another liminal space with its own laws pertaining to time and space—the *heterotopos* or ‘the other space’. Linked to it are insights and autobiographical elements of the other world.⁵⁰ The text, however, remains utterly internalised and deeply silent until it can be ‘heard’ from this other, imprisoned world. Thus, the text has to be somehow liberated or liberate itself from the constraints of this unique and dramatically constructed spatio-temporal setting. The smuggling of the text out of the place of the ‘Other’ is therefore the *Leitmotiv* of prison literature. Only then can the text start to create a link to the outside world, the world of its readers and public, and it is only outside that it can display its full and versatile meaning and become virulently active and alive. Through the subversive circumstances of smuggling as well as through the coding of the text, it achieves a very particular importance in the cultural memory of a certain audience; it creates curiosity and a specific, albeit biased and highly personalised, version of history. It obstructs the view for other historical realities but at the same time creates space for new insights. Furthermore, the enigma attached to reconstruction and non-publication of the manuscript for some time makes this work seem all the more important.

In addition to this, Mecca represents the imagined mythological ideal caliphate, the navel of the righteously guided world and *umma*, to which the son of the deported scholar (see below) is said to have sent the text at a time when Mecca was linked in many Indian Muslim minds with the Ottomans, who were emerging as more important after the Mughals had been definitively unseated.

Finally Arabic, as the holy language of the Quran, is a proven design for this imagined community. Thus historical memory can be used and mobilised for the reconstruction of history and reinvention of tradition confirmed in the form of a narrative.⁵¹ In this context the contribution of ‘Abd al-Haqq Khairabadi (the son) is worth mentioning, as it must have been him who allegedly pieced the scattered text together and decoded most of it, for which he must have had a key of some description. However, all the data accessible so far lack information regarding this important task in the re-creation, re-making and re-imagining of the text.

⁵⁰ See Foucault, *Überwachen und Strafen*, pp. 305, 342.

⁵¹ Cf. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*.

It is, however, claimed by Muhammad ‘Abd al-Shahid Khan Sherwani in his *Baghi Hindustan*⁵² that Fadl-e Haqq wrote with pencil and charcoal on shreds of cloth and paper coded Arabic notes in prose and poetry, notably qasidas, which were smuggled out of banishment by a prisoner released earlier—the well-known Mufti ‘Inayat Ullah Kakorwi (d. 1863),⁵³ one of the many Muslim scholars detained in the Andamans.⁵⁴ Hence, the notion of a local infrastructure with scholars, intellectual debates and discourses does not correspond to the popular image that the Andamans were barren islands and that the only intellectual source was that of memory.⁵⁵

Khairabadi’s notes are said to have been reconstructed afterwards by his son,⁵⁶ and a copy of this collection was sent to Abul Kalam Azad’s (d. 1958) father Maulana Khair al-Din in Mecca.⁵⁷ Known as *Tarikh Ghadr Hindustan* (Story of the Indian mutiny), the script was mentioned first in Rahman Ali’s famous biography of Muslim scholars in 1914⁵⁸ and allegedly used again by Mu’in al-Din Ajmeri (d. 1940) during the Khilafat Movement.⁵⁹ His copy was translated into Urdu by ‘Abd al-Shahid Khan Sherwani and was published with a copy of the original only in 1947 with the support of Abul Kalam Azad. It became known as *al-Thaura al-Hindiyya* (*The Indian Revolution*). Therein the reasons for the revolt, the misery of the prisoners and the situation on the deportation islands are pointed out.⁶⁰

For sure, the scholar from Khairabad was above all a great expert in the Arabic language—he is said to have written more than 4,000 verses in Arabic. Furthermore, he was well known for his various scholarly works, mostly on logic and philosophy, in Arabic and Persian. For his excellent knowledge in Arabic, he was well regarded by various writers, for example by Sayyid Ahmad Khan.⁶¹ He also had a number of critics, such as the group around the descendants of Shah Waliullah. Whether Fadl-e Haqq took active part in the revolt or not is still a matter of debate.

⁵² Without, however, references to source material.

⁵³ Kakorwi was interned because he had issued a *fatwa* in favour of Nawwab Khan Bahadur Khan; see Rizvi and Bhargava, eds, *Freedom struggle*, pp. 170–75. He wrote a number of books in the Andamans and was finally released because he translated Abu al-Fida’ Imad al-Din al-Aiyubi’s (d. 1331) *Taqwim al-buldan* (see Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, II, p. 46; S, II, p. 44; *El*(2), I, p. 118f), a standard book on geography in Arabic into English.

⁵⁴ Compare Qadiri, *Jang-e Azadi*, pp. 429–37, listing dozens of detained Muslim scholars.

⁵⁵ Compare, for example, Haq, ‘The Story of the War of Independence’, p. 23: ‘There were no books to study or refer to and every word had to be written from memory.’

⁵⁶ This was claimed by Muhammad ‘Abd al-Shahid Khan Sherwani in his *Al-Thaurat al-Hindiyya, Baghi Hindustan*, without references to source material.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵⁸ See ‘Ali, *Tadhkirah-ye ‘Ulama-e Hind*, p. 165.

⁵⁹ Mu’in al-Din Ajmeri met the famous scholar, sufi and activist ‘Abd al-Bari Farangi Mahalli (d. 1926) who went to Ajmer to attend the annual ‘*urs* and mobilise prominent scholars and sufis to the Khilafat cause in April 1919. See Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics*, p. 102.

⁶⁰ See also Malik, ‘Die “Erfindung” von Tradition’, p. 83f.

⁶¹ See Khan, *Athar al-Sanadid*, vols I–III, ed. by Khaliq Anjum, pp. 95–113; also see al-Hayy, *Nuzhat al-khawatir*, p. 414ff.

In fact, his autobiographical notes and poems permit no such conclusion, but they do play an important role in the reconstruction of history and thus in the narrative of the national and religious identity-making of Indian Muslims.

III

In the following, a prose text and two qasidas of *The Indian Revolution* will be analysed briefly. The text at hand is full of synonyms and antonyms and contains a large number of Arabic words of the same root, which certainly does not facilitate understanding. Furthermore, it is said that the scholar endeavoured to use utmost secrecy in writing these texts and also tried not to quote names—though one may presume that if the texts were written for an audience outside the prison, quoting names would have not mattered at all; in fact, name-dropping would have been totally understandable. Nonetheless, the works ascribed to Fadl-e Haqq are a difficult matter for translation, though they represent an outstanding and important part of Arabic literature.⁶²

Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi called the prose writing *Risala ghadariyya* or *al-Fitna al-Hindiyya*,⁶³ respectively *Risala al-thaurat al-hindiyya*⁶⁴ a *qissah* (narrative, story). By addressing a defined audience, he denounces the brutal reaction of the British after the rebellion, time upon time using new words.⁶⁵ He, who had been living a life of luxury, was betrayed and made a pauper, handed over to a tyrant who had taken from him his last amenities and bestowed harsh punishment upon him. This white skinned tyrant (the gaoler) with a black heart, blue eyes, a grim facial expression, red hair and a bad mood had taken away all his fancy clothes and instead had given him rags to wear. Khairabadi is now separated from his family, an accused without defence counsel and prosecutor (*bi la mudda'in wa munazi*). The reason this tyrant imposes unimaginable hardship on him is that the prisoner is a true Muslim and one of the greatest scholars. In other words, the tyrant is trying to eradicate all traces of Muslim scholarly tradition and knowledge.

After these introductory words, Fadl-e Haqq makes his position clear by analysing the intrigues of the British, whose aim it had been to play off the various groups against each other.

⁶² The texts, prose and poems are reprinted in Sherwani, *Al-Thaurat al-Hindiyya*, pp. 26–85, 86–105 and 106–19. An English translation of the full text is available in Haq, 'The Story of the War of Independence (being an English translation of Allamah Fadl-i-Haqq's Risalah on the War)', pp. 23–57. In addition to the text of the qasida, an Arabic—albeit biased—commentary was published by one of his admirers, 'Ali, Ghulam Mihr, *Al-yawaqiyat al-mihriyya; sharh al-thaurat al-Hindiyya*, Chishtiyani sharif: al-maktabat al-mihriyya, ca. 1964, stressing the Barelwi point of view.

⁶³ *Risala ghadariyya* and *al-Fitna al-Hindiyya* have pejorative meanings: in the first case it is a *Book of Mutiny*, in the second it is *The Indian Intrigue*.

⁶⁴ The script in prose has been 'a continuation of the defence campaign of Maulvi Fazl Haq who had not lost hope of his release and had intended thus to obtain it'. Cf. Husain, *Bahadur Shah II and the war of 1857 in Delhi with its unforgettable scenes*, p. 375f.

⁶⁵ [*fa inna kitabi hadha kitab asirin kasir khasir 'ala ka fata min hasir; muhtalan bi-kulli 'asir; la yutaq wa lau fi anin yasir; muntazirin li-farjin 'ala rabbihi yasir*]

It was only because of the lies and false promises of the Christian sovereign that he was detained and deported. The amnesty of Queen Victoria was ignored, Fadl-e Haqq lamented in his qasidas. Colonial politics and the religious conversion of Indians connected with it were, according to him, based on two strategies: (i) The destruction of the traditional Islamic educational system and the standardisation of religious diversity.⁶⁶ This would facilitate the Raj's goal of national integration. (ii) The introduction of cash crops and the monopolisation of the grain market with the objective of making Indians materially dependent and thus to subjugate them absolutely. The scholar from Khairabad also claimed that the British prohibited Indians from exercising their rites.

Religious restrictions were introduced at first in the Hindu and Muslim units of the British armed forces. The aim was that once the army had lost its religion, other citizens would not be brave enough to resist for fear of punishment. Therefore, Khairabadi reports, they had forced Muslim and Hindu soldiers to taste animal fat, especially pig fat, but both groups (*fariqayn*) had refused to do so. This subsequently led to a rebellion against their superiors (*tarkhan*), in which they had killed the latter, their wives and children. Once in Delhi, the troops proclaimed the former emperor their leader.⁶⁷ The frail emperor did not have any experience and was influenced by his wife [Zinat Mahall] and his Wazir, who loved and respected Christians and were in fact enemies of their opponents. The emperor lacked any authority whatsoever.⁶⁸ In this situation a group of courageous Muslims⁶⁹ obtained legal opinion (*fatwa*) from Islamic scholars, according to which a Holy War (*jihad*) was absolutely imperative.⁷⁰ This resulted in an insurrection in the form of a Holy War.

While all Hindus had been sympathisers of the British, Muslims had been divided into opponents and sympathisers. The Christians had killed and plundered villages with the support of the Hindus, or had isolated them from the outside world by hiding the wheat accumulated by *Banias*.

After the arrest of the emperor and the killing of his descendants, the British decapitated and hanged people mercilessly. The number of the dead, mainly Muslims, went into the thousands. Hindus were penalised only if their participation

⁶⁶ A diversity that had been the general position of the scholarship in Awadh from the time of the Qadiri sufi and *wujudi*, 'Abd al-Razzaq (d. 1724) of Bansa, the spiritual guide of the scholars of Farangi Mahall; this scholarship proved to be important when it came to appealing to a variety of social and religious groups living in north India at a time when internal feuds were hampering political and cultural integration. See Alam, 'Religion and Politics in Awadh society: 17th and 18th centuries', pp. 321–50; Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, pp. 98–112; see also Malik, *Islamische Gelehrtenkultur in Nordindien*, pp. 138–46.

⁶⁷ The insurrection troops entered the city on 11 May 1857. That same day, the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah was nominated as their leader.

⁶⁸ This judgment is in opposition to his reported closeness with the emperor before the troubles; see Metcalfe, *Two Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, pp. 196, 217, 223, 224.

⁶⁹ [*jam' min al-muslimin al-jilad; lil-jidal wa-l-jilad*]

⁷⁰ [*ba'd al-istifta wa-l-istishhad min al-'ulama' al-zuhhad wa ifta'i-him bi wujub al-jihad wa bi fatawa a'imma al-ijihad*]

was proven. The only Muslims being spared this fate were those who had emigrated, cooperated with the British, or denied their faith (*iman*). They should be considered spies like the servant of the king [Ahsan Ullah Khan], who had enabled the Christians to conquer the city.... Hindu chiefs were compelled to arrest all rebels and send them to Delhi where the Christians killed them. Thus the surrounding regions had been purged. Some of those found had committed suicide to save their honour, others had been killed or arrested and abused, yet others had been sold as concubines to disgusting men or for little money, while others disappeared without trace. Children became orphans, women became widows, and men lost their children. After that the Christians turned towards the east where another massacre took place.

As for himself, Khairabadi continues, he journeyed towards his homeland, Khairabad, although it was dangerous. The Christians had ordered the Jats to kill and plunder every traveller. It was hardly possible to cross the rivers. However, he eventually managed to reach his homeland.⁷¹ In Awadh, a few rebels chose the wife of a former king (the wife of Nawwab Wajid 'Ali Shah, Hazrat Mahal and her underaged son Birjis Qadr)⁷² as their leaders. The king (Wajid 'Ali Shah), was unreliable, a coward and politically ignorant, because of which the British had managed to annex all his territory. The royal family was besieged in their palaces (*qusur*) in the city (Lucknow). Thus everything had been turned into the exact opposite of what had been hoped for.

After this detailed narrative Fadl-e Haqq describes the dreadful massacre following the conquest of Lucknow, dwelling also on Hazrat Mahal and her greedy and incompetent leader, the '*amil* Nawwab Ahmad Khan alias Mummo Khan, who died on the Andaman isles. Another '*amil* Ahmad Ullah Shah (d. 1858) was a formidable man who revolted. However, as Khairabadi says, he was insidiously assassinated on the order of a Hindu zamindar.⁷³

After arguing that the queen of the Christians (Victoria) lured the Indians into a trap by issuing orders of amnesty,⁷⁴ Fadl-e Haqq recounts his own capture, in full belief of his amnesty. He also laments that two contentious apostates, who

⁷¹ This is probably a reference to the crossing of the river Ganges near Bhikanpur. There, Fadl-e Haqq spent 18 days with Habib al-Rahman Sherwani's father. See Sherwani, 'Murasalah be silsilah-ye madhmun Maulana Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi', pp. 53–54.

⁷² For more information on Zinat Mahal and Birjis Qadr see Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt 1857–1858. A Study of Popular Resistance*, pp. 125f, 131, 135f, 151ff.

⁷³ The order was issued by the Raja of Powain who received Rs 50,000 from the British.

⁷⁴ The proclamation of Queen Victoria on 11 Nov. 1858, in which she ordered that India be put under direct rule from the Crown, as opposed to rule by the East India Company, states, 'Our clemency will be extended to all offenders, save and except those who have been or shall be convicted of having directly taken part in the murder of British subjects. With regard to such, the demands of justice forbid the existence of mercy.' Hazrat Mahal issued a counter-proclamation warning all Indians not to accept the amnesty (see Edwards, *Red Year*, pp. 171–73). A discussion about the backgrounds and introduction of the *Ta'alluqdari Settlement*, 1858, which preceded the proclamation and introduced the policy of confiscation, can be found in Kumar, *Peasants in the Revolt: Tenants, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh, 1886–1922*, p. 7ff.

once disputed with him regarding a verse of the Quran, had given information about him to the British authorities.⁷⁵ The officer had condemned him to imprisonment and exile, and confiscated his property, books and house owned by his family. However, he was not the only one to fall victim to this intrigue: the Christians ignored and broke their promises, killing and arresting an indefinite number of people, and not even sparing the most distinguished families. Khairabadi claims this to be the true history of the war.

In dense style, Fadl-e Haqq also narrates his experiences of deportation to the Andaman Islands, the hardship in prison, his desperation, but also his faith which helped him live through these times of hardship: the Christians detained him by providing wrong verdicts and producing false evidence. They then transported him from prison to prison and tantalised him by means of different inquiries. They took off his shoes and clothes and instead provided him with some rough material to wear. They changed his soft bed with a hard mattress, which seemed to be covered with thorns. No cup was allowed to him and the meals were horrific. He was given warm water to drink, and in spite of his old age was humiliated. The hardhearted enemies then brought him to an island, i.e., the Andamans,⁷⁶ where the sun would constantly shine right on his head and where difficult hilly paths and dangerous roads made walking impossible. The air was extremely warm and amenities more bitter than poison. The food was worse than the taste of cucumber, the water worse than snake poison. The sky resembled one big looming cloud, which kept pouring out nothing but sorrows. The earth looked dotted with measles and pocks, and from the roofs of the houses there were only drops falling like the tears from his eyes. The air was contaminated and therefore a constant source of ailments. Often there were epidemics. The sick had no chance to be cured; the sane was bereft of security. The one who cured disease became ill, and the one who was sick was a definite prey for death. There was no empathy and pity whatsoever;

⁷⁵ The dispute was about Sura 5:51: 'Oh you who believe! Take not the Jews and Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who takes them for friends is (one) of them. Allah guides not wrongdoing folk.' In fact, this verse is made into an issue by Ghulam Mihr for it showed the struggle between the Wahhabis/Deobandis led by Ahmad Shah Bareilwi and Shah Isma'il (e.g., wrongdoing folk), both leading figures of the mujahidin movement in 1820s, and the Bareilwis/Khairabadis (the righteously guided). It can be speculated that the British wanted Khairabadi to re-interpret the verse for their purposes, which he might have declined and for which he was not released while other 'ulama such as 'Inayat Ahmad Kakori, were.

⁷⁶ For the Andaman islands see Government of India: Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Home Department No. XXV: *The Andaman Islands with Notes on Barren Islands*, Calcutta, 1859. According to reports of the census of 1881, there was a little autonomous world on the islands which was particularly designed for the detainees; see India Census 1881: *Statistics of the population enumerated in the Andamans, 1881*, Calcutta, 1883; also Shahjahanpuri, Khushi Ram, *Tarikh-e Jazirah-ye Andaman*, s.l., 1861; Thanseri, Muhammad Ja'far, *Kala pani ma'ruf beh tawarikh 'ajiba*, Delhi, written in 1879, reprint, Lahore, 1993; Qadiri, *Jang-e Azadi*, pp. 429–37. In Apr. 1859 there were 13,479 prisoners, cross-cutting all ethnic and social groups and nationalities. Their medium of communication was Hindustani, which every prisoner knew on the islands. Until 1922 the island served for deportation purposes.

no disease was not fatal. Every disease ultimately led to death, even Hypochondria and Pleurisy. There were diseases totally unknown and very dangerous. The doctor could not come up with a diagnosis; instead he gave medicines which wrecked the patient. If a prisoner died, an unclean person looking like a devil or monster (*shaitan khannas*) would come to drag the corpse away by the feet, take off his clothes and dig the corpse into a sand hill without a coffin and without performing ablution. As there was no grave and no burial, one did not wish to die. If suicide was not illegal all prisoners would have taken recourse to it. It was in such an environment that he fell ill and succumbed to depression. Moreover, he caught worms and other diseases and although his body was aching, he was made to walk and exercise in the mornings and evenings. Soon he would die, after a prosperous and enjoyable life, when he was old and insane, wounded and ulcerated. But still he thanked God for His mercy because next to him he saw sick prisoners in chains, who were brought to their daily working place by a terrible man who did not show any empathy whatsoever. Khairabadi thanked God for having saved him from these atrocities. Having full belief in God, he asked the creator in the name of Prophet Muhammad, to free him from that horrifying situation and fulfil the divine promise to listen to the destitute.

Khairabadi claims to have told his misfortunes in two qasidas. The first one, the *Hamziyya* (the rhyme ends on a *hamzah*), points to the satanic inspiration (which befell a tormented man; *hamazat al-shayatin*, or the satanic *waswasa*). The second qasida, the *Daliyya* (the rhyme ends in *dal*), recounts his hardships. Both qasidas were written in Rajab 1276/December 1859–January 1860⁷⁷ and end with a prophetic eulogy. Herein, he again laments that far away from his family, his only remaining friend would be water, and he mourns the loss of his identity as a nobleman, he who has been left defenceless against attacks by the vices of colonialism (*'uyyub*). Finally, he implores the prince of Rampur, Yusuf 'Ali Khan, whom he had served for some time, to support him.

Khairabadi also claimed to have had plans to write a third qasida ending on *nun*; however, this work, which would have had over 300 rhymes, could not be finished due to the circumstances.⁷⁸ If God should deliver him, he vowed to extend this qasida with the eulogy of a man who, because of his high moral standards and righteousness, would be noted among nobles (*makarim al-akhlaq*) (who this eulogy would have been addressed to remains a mystery).

However, it is interesting to note that in a letter to the Nawwab of Rampur, he reiterated that he was mistaken for Mir Fadl-e Haqq Shahjahanpuri, who was caught for his activities in Bareilly or Pilibhit, rather than in Bundi where Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi was trapped.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Sherwani, *Al-Thaurat al-Hindiyya*, p. 118.

⁷⁸ The fragment is printed in al-Nisa, *Al-'Allama Fadl Haqq al-Khairabadi*, pp. 234–46.

⁷⁹ The letter in question, dated 18 Feb., says that his namesake had been appointed Sarrishtadar of Pilibhit and also worked as Tahsildar of Anolah. In the early days of the uprising, Sayyid Fadl-e Haqq Shahjahanpuri had become Nazim Pilibhit and after the fall of Bareilly went to Awadh to be

IV

In the case of Khairabadi, one may suspect a judicial error on the part of the British administration. This is more likely, since there had been a namesake (Sayyid Fadl-e Haqq Shahjahanpuri) active in 1857.⁸⁰ This error would provide evidence of the profound ignorance or even vindictiveness of the British, especially since the release of the alleged insurgent is said to have been discussed sincerely by the Crown. It seems that the European conviction of its superior position hampered a deeper understanding of the independent character of Indian culture, and jeopardised their insight into the autonomy of other cultural forms. This might also be true in the case of an anti-British revolutionary council (*King Council* or *majlis-e mushawarat*), which is said to have been established during the revolt. Manned by 10 members from civil and military departments, Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi being one of them, this council worked towards a constitution, supposedly the first constitutional elaboration in Urdu for an independent India. These regulations used Arabic and Persian nomenclatures rather than British ones, and adopted many elements of European statesmanship. It is said that the Council produced 'a constitution based on the principles of democracy',⁸¹ curtailing the power of the monarch.⁸² Nonetheless, the rebels proclaimed Bahadur Shah Zafar as the Shah of

appointed Chakladar of Muhammadi. Later, he took refuge in Jaman along with the rebel forces of Ferozshah. His close relatives were serving the Company as senior officers, his brother Maulvi Mubeen being Deputy Collector Saharanpur. He therefore requested that Ismail Khan Rais-e Balagarh, who was fully aware of the affairs of the culprit, as well as of 'Maulvi Fadl-e Haqq Shahjahanpuri', may please be approached to write down the details to Mr Tarab, Commanding Officer Bareilly, and Mr Tarab sends his comments on this report to the Department of Special Commissioner Lucknow, so that the difference between the affairs of the two may be proved, and the most grateful servant may be released. See Malik, *Tahqiqi madamin*, pp. 130–31.

⁸⁰ For Sayyid Fadl-e Haqq Shahjahanpuri see Shauq, *Tadhkirah-ye Kamalan-e Rampur*, p. 320f, and Qadiri, *Jang-e Azadi*, pp. 566–68. He was active in Rampur at the time of Sayyid Ahmad 'Ali Khan (1200/1775–1256/1840), who ascended the throne in 1794 but held power only in 1810 when he became mature. It is said that Fadl-e Haqq Shahjahanpuri was extremely modest and introverted though he held high offices such as Na'ib Sarishtahdar in the *Mahkamah Sadr* of Rampur, then Sarishtahdar in the Commissionary of Bareilly; during the rebellion he was Tahsildar in Pilibhit or Bheri, participated in the jihad of Mirza Firoz Shah and died as a martyr (shahid) in Jhansi, leaving behind no children. Rizvi and Bhargava eds, *Freedom*, p. 501, quotes an officer of the court of Shahjahanpur, who reports about the army of rebels in Shahjahanpur: One leader of rebels was Fadl-e Haqq of Shahjahanpur, stationed in Pihani and Padroah near Muhammadi. He had the control over 4,000 sawars and 900 Najibs as well as three canons, and also collected revenue. According to this statement Fadl-e Haqq was one of the six rebellious leaders, besides Khan 'Ali Khan of Shahjahanpur, Loni Singh Raja of Muthauli (see also 'L/P+S/6/466, Collections 59: Trial of Rajah Lonee Singh and Moulvee Fuzl Huk'), Khan Bahadur Khan of Bareilly, Wilayat Shah and Begam of Lucknow (Hazrat Mahal).

⁸¹ See Mahdi, *Bahadur Shah II*, pp. lii ff. Parts of the 'Constitutions' are reproduced by Mahdi, *ibid.*, pp. 182–92, 389.

⁸² Compare also Barakati, *Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi awr Sann satawan*, pp. 52–59, 82, citing, among others, a number of *Mutiny records*.

Hindustan, most probably to use the legitimacy of the Mughal crown as a symbol for unifying different groups. In this context the *farman* issued by the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar is mentioned, in which he complains of British liberal ideas such as equality of education. In contrast to the emancipative endeavours of the rebels suggested above, the imperial *farman* seems to be rather reactionary. In the case that similar constitutional ideas existed in Indian rows, to germinate and push through constitutional notions, one may ask whether the revolt really aimed at restoring the old order or whether traditional historiography follows the 'traditionalisation' which would, indeed, correspond to the politics of colonial restoration. Any other perception of the upheaval would have meant appreciating progressive forces. The Emperor's *farman* also stands in contrast to one of his letters addressed to the Nawab of Tonk, asking him for some dozens of camels with which he planned to proceed to the shrine of Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1230), buried in the Mehroli subdivision of Delhi, before embarking for Madina, because he considered the *jihad* to be senseless.⁸³ Moreover, we hardly know the view from the margins, such as the story of Umrao Jan Ada, a courtesan from Lucknow. Her portrayal by Mirza Hadi Ruswa (1858–1931) in the supposedly first Urdu novel tells a completely different story, as she views the so called 'revolutionaries' as nothing more than troublemongers. Similar revealing information about the uneasy situation during the siege is provided by people in other different professions such as the sweet and wood-seller, moneylenders, cobblers as well as some hungry sepoys, as can be read in the various Mutiny Papers, which, however, have not been used by historians for the reconstruction of the historical narrative so far.⁸⁴ It is astonishing to note that we find few vernacular voices in Urdu, and particularly in Persian, being heard in historical accounts of 1857.⁸⁵ In the light of these quite different views, it becomes indeed a problem to definitely ascertain the nature of the 1857 revolt.

A documentation putting together such material lying in the dusty State and National archives is of utmost importance, since these 'relics' do provide an important and palpable insight into the variety of collective and individual decisions at a vital cross-section of colonial history. They also allow for the creation of a distinct colonised identity, and highlight the process of inventing tradition as well as of mobilising collective identity for a variety of reasons.⁸⁶

The account of Khairabadi's alleged participation in the revolt is as important to the construction of collective reality as are the doubts about the authenticity of his authorship of *The Indian Revolution*. The historical memory creates the sources

⁸³ Personal communication by Professor Aziz ud-Din Husain, New Delhi, 2005, referring to Persian archival material in the Haryana State Archives.

⁸⁴ I am thankful to William Dalrymple for sharing this insight with me.

⁸⁵ Therefore, it seems to be too early to state whether there were upheavals in other areas as well, such as the Deccan and Bengal.

⁸⁶ It may not be out of place to state that since independence, only one M.Phil thesis has been written on 1857 in the many universities of Delhi.

it needs for its own reproduction. Thus the importance of historiography and validity of sources such as letters, autobiographical notes and prison literature constitute an important basis for the reconstruction of history and also of the processes of mutual perception at the cross-sections of European and non-European encounters.

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