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Fashioning The Pious Self: Middle Class Religiosity In Colonial India

Abstract

Drawing on archival and ethnographic fieldwork, this dissertation examines the public construction of personal piety in nineteenth- and twentieth-century north India (1857-1930). The emergence of reformist piety, with its emphasis on individual responsibility and a focus on the self, is supposed to mark the privatization of religion, such that the public sphere becomes the site of politics and economy, and the household displaces the community as the locus of religiosity. This dissertation critiques the thesis of separate spheres to argue that the cultivation of middle class religiosity was an extremely public act that unfolded in the myriad spaces that opened up in the late nineteenth century. The middle class household, with the conjugal couple at its center, was inextricably linked to these spaces, whether it was a university campus, a newspaper office, a political rally, a fundraiser, or an arboretum in a hill station. Central to this thesis is the use of Michael Warner's idea of discourse publics as an alternative framework to the Habermasian conception of the bourgeois public sphere. The emphasis on physical space makes room for understanding the household as a living social site of tellings and retellings that coexists with other overlapping publics and counterpublics. The reformist piety which became the hallmark of the middle class was fashioned under the watchful eyes of peers, superiors, and spouses in these spaces. It was appraised, acknowledged, emulated, and perfected through networks that belied the public-private divide. This dissertation focuses on the institution of the household as one such site in the network to suggest that the radical reordering of the household in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries enabled the emergence of personal piety. The history of reformist piety can be retold as the history of the reconfigured household. Furthermore, the re-imagination of the woman as a chaste and loyal spouse was fundamental to her elevation as an independent spiritual actor of the household. The spiritual independence of the wife, however, was predicated on her social, economic, and legal subordination to the husband.

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FASHIONING THE PIOUS SELF: MIDDLE CLASS RELIGIOSITY IN COLONIAL INDIA

Darakhshan H Khan

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FASHIONING THE PIOUS SELF: MIDDLE CLASS RELIGIOSITY IN COLONIAL INDIA

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Darakhshan H Khan

To the loving memory of my father.

To my mother.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The seed of this project was planted in the mid-1990s, on a Friday afternoon in Bombay, when my mother dragged me to a women's meeting of Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic proselytizing movement that believes in self-improvement as the stepping stone to reforming the community. Week after week, I sat through the meetings, listening to women sermonize about the horrors of Judgement Day and the joys of Paradise. The passion of the speakers struck me, especially in comparison to my inability to be moved by the discourse of death and repentance. Almost two decades later, the project has come to fruition half way across the world, and I would like to thank the women of the Jamaat for introducing me to the world of Islamic reform. Women who cannot be named because the norms of feminine modesty espoused by the Tablighi Jamaat forbids them from being identified. Over the course of many years, and especially during my ethnographic fieldwork in Bombay and Delhi, these women opened up their homes and their hearts to me. Even as they tried to 'reform' me, they held back their judgements, and for that I am grateful to them. My research year in India was funded by the American Institute of Indian Studies' junior fellowship as well as short-term research funds disbursed by the Dean's office at the University of Pennsylvania. I am grateful to these institutions for supporting my work and making this project possible.

The project, as it exists today, would not have been completed without the guidance and encouragement of my doctoral committee—Dr. Ramya Sreenivasan, Dr. Lisa Mitchell, and Dr. Daud Ali.

In our first meeting, Dr Sreenivasan asked me if I had finally found “my space” in the US. She elaborated by asking if the American light switches that worked ever so differently from the ones back home still annoyed me and if I had found that one shop that stocked clothes that fit me well. Before the meeting ended, I knew I had found my advisor. Ramya’s concern for the emotional well-being of her students is matched by her intellectual generosity, her unflinching support, and her insights into navigating the academic system as a young woman. A mention must also be made about her incredible ability to recall book titles, complete with the colour of the cover, a testament to the depth of her engagement with her field of study. The faith and confidence she has in my work is humbling and exhilarating at once.

If I can make any claim about the interdisciplinary nature of my work, it is only because I have been mentored by Dr. Mitchell. This is not simply because Lisa is the anthropologist among the historians on my committee, but because her dogged insistence on asking broad questions about methodology and sources has encouraged me to borrow texts and methods from the disciplines of Religious Studies, Literary Studies, and Anthropology. As graduate students doing coursework, we knew that Lisa was the scholar who would bring the “methods questions” to the table, and as I was writing the introduction to the dissertation, I became aware of the impact her questions have had on my work.

Dr Ali put together an entire course on Islam in South India because his graduate students wanted guidance in navigating new scholarship on the topic. In reading the texts with us, he helped us read the texts without his assistance. He has always insisted that a good historian is one who can imagine the complexities of the social world of which only a sliver is preserved in the archives. I hope he can see a glimpse of that imagination in this dissertation.

Dr Jamal Elias has been an invaluable interlocutor and an encyclopedia of Islamic legal terminology. I have knocked on his office door for citations, popular culture references, and to talk about sticky questions that might pop up during field work. As a Muslim woman interested in the history of Islamic reform, I was supposed to 'have it easy'. The reality of the fieldwork was the stark opposite and on the many occasions when my respondents quizzed me about my religious beliefs in a friendly 4 am phone call, I followed Jamal's advice: keep it simple, and it worked every time. When I walked into Dr. Rupa Viswanath's Religion and Secularism class on the first day I was confident about where I stood with vis-à-vis the idea of the separation of state and church. It was a good idea that served countries like India very well. At the end of the three-hour lecture, everything I knew about religion and secularism was thrown out of the window, a pattern that was repeated every week. Rupa's seminars laid the foundation of my understanding of how a text should be read, and for that I will always be indebted to her.

I want to thank Dr. Nate Roberts for being an anthropologist's anthropologist. He introduced me to scholarship on anthropology of religion, one edited volume at a time. He has been an excellent mentor and a kind friend.

Dr. Shefali Chandra at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign introduced me to foundational texts in South Asian historiography and taught me to distinguish the postcolonial from the Marxist and the structural feminists from the cultural theorists. When I was an M.A. student, Dr. Valerie Hoffman believed that I could embark on a doctoral program, and sent me an email in the summer of 2008 that stated as much. She commented on every single sheet of paper I submitted to her, and, along with Shefali, remains my most important mentor in this country. I would also like to thank Dr Ritu Saksena and Dr Marilyn Booth for offering me a fellowship to pursue a Master's degree at the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, thus paving the way for my doctoral studies.

Going through the hoops of graduate school can be isolating, but a cohort of like-minded peers can bring cheer and comfort, and become the foundation of lifelong friendships. In Michael Collins and Samuel Ostroff I have found intellectual allies and I am looking forward to years of running into them at conferences and workshops. With Philip Friedrich I share the utter inability to find my comfort zone at social events. We do not know what to do with ourselves, so we stand in the corner and watch our peers hold the court. Samira Junaid, the person most likely to be holding the court, is a sister and friend rolled into one, always ready with joke, a kind word, and an app to get me home on time. She has helped me carve a small space that

looks and feels like home in this faraway country. Sarah Hicks is a rare friend, one with whom I disagree on about everything under the sun, except our love for brunch and French toasts, and have nonetheless created an archive of conversations that continued into the early hours of the morning. Without these friends my days in the graduate program would have been dull, dreary and frightening, and I am extremely thankful to have them in my life.

My friends in India—Jhilmil Motihar, Shivani Kagti, Sonal Nerurkar, Manjushri Dutta, and Sharifa Kagzi—have ensured that every trip back home feels like ‘a trip back home’. They have inquired about my work, and never shied away from giving brutal feedbacks. In a rapidly changing India, they have surrounded me with warmth and stability.

Madhavi Murty is a friend like no other. She sets the bar high for me, and has been doing so since the 1990s. I followed her into journalism, and then walked out on journalism with her to pursue graduate school. Madhavi and her partner Juned are the most sensible sounding board I could have ever wished for. Our love for the Bombay of the 1990s, and a shared concern about the disappearance of that world, has animated many a weekend conversations.

My fieldwork was made possible by the kindness and generosity of too many people. I thank my friend Ambarien Al Qadr and her family for opening their home and their hearts to me, and putting up with me months. Maulana Nur ul Rashid hosted me in his home at Kandhla, and allowed me to work in his fantastic library. My

conversations with him about the history of the reform movement as it unfolded in his family has filled several pages of my book and informs the dissertation.

When I was plotting the itinerary for fieldwork, the stay in Deoband, the seminary town in Uttar Pradesh, seemed dreadful. Deoband was a small town, with no coffee houses and surely no place for a woman to hang out. But Yasmin Siddiqui and her wonderful daughters—Bushra, Sana and Yumna—transformed Deoband into a magical space for me. Their courage, affection, kindness, playfulness, confidence and generosity of spirit shatters every stereotype that can be found in the archives or otherwise about the helpless women of the zenana. I thank Maulana Obaidullah Siddiqui for introducing me to Yasmin and her family and for taking a genuine interest in my research.

In Lucknow, I would like to thank my aunt Shameem Jahan, my uncle Shahabuddin Khan, their sons Shujat and Asif and their wives Zeenat and Tabassum. They took me in and treated me like a daughter. My other aunt Sarwar Jahan and her daughter Shahana were always ready with an invitation for a cup of tea and warm meals.

Thanks to them Lucknow was a home away from home.

I thank the library and photocopy staff at Deoband's Dar ul Uloom and Lucknow's Nadwat ul Ulema, and library staff at the Delhi office of Jamiat e Ulema e Hind. The absolutely professional manner in which the seminaries treated my presence in the madrasa and my requests for photocopies was refreshing. What cheered me up the most, however, was the sheer pride and joy they displayed at the idea that their old

books and papers were contributing to academic research. I hope to return to these libraries in the future.

My siblings, Gudiya (Najma), Huma, and Adnan have, on more occasions than I can count, embraced my eccentricities, nurtured my curiosity, and humored my argumentative side. The completion of this dissertation is a testimony to their patience and faith in my work, and the warmth and support they have surrounded me with. My brothers-in-law Safder Ali Khan and Zameer Syed have embraced the role of my brothers, friends and interlocutors. My journey to the US and the many trips back home for research would not have been possible without their support. In my sister-in-law, Saba I found a friend, who never fails to see the bright side, and for that I am glad she is part of my family.

To my mother, Rafat Jahan, I owe everything. From her I have learnt patience and kindness. She belongs to a generation of women who understood the merits of listening. I am nearly not as good a listener as she is, but I hope to get there someday. Urdu is technically my mother tongue, but it really is the language of my mother. Her impressive command on the language, along with some sprinkling of Persian, has seen me through some of the most difficult passages in the archive. My parents-in-law, Lina Maria Cantu and Giuseppe Motta, are just the perfect set of parents a graduate student could ask for. They have always understood the demands that graduate school makes on time and the importance of the cups of coffee in keeping the word count flowing. They take sheer joy in my accomplishments, no matter how meagre, and for that I cherish them.

In Davide Motta, my partner and companion, I have found an intellectual ally and a friend. He has stood right by my side through the ups and downs of graduate school. He has allayed my anxieties and fears in the run up to the completion of the dissertation, maintaining a Zen-like disposition during my many meltdowns. His meticulous formatting of my chapters (a work in progress by all means) and essays only adds several feathers to his caps. He moved cities and turned down job offers so I could stay in Philadelphia and complete the dissertation. He is the best lay audience I could have hoped for, pushing me to break down complicated sentences and step away from academic jargon. I would be utterly and completely lost without his support, and this dissertation would be far from complete without his inputs. No account of my journey towards the writing of this dissertation is complete without the mention of Soraiya Rafat Motta-Khan, an eighteen pound some ounces bundle of joy who has routinely lodged herself under my work desk for the past few months. This dissertation would probably have been done and defended a few month ago if it wasn't for the arrival of Ms Motta-Khan, but our lives would be much, much poorer for that. I have repeatedly been told by my friends and colleagues that writing a dissertation is like going into labour. Well, it really isn't. And without Soraiya in the mix, I would have never known that that bluff can be called.

ABSTRACT

FASHIONING THE PIOUS SELF: MIDDLE CLASS RELIGIOSITY IN COLONIAL INDIA

Darakhshan Khan

Prof. Ramya Sreenivasan

Drawing on archival and ethnographic fieldwork, this dissertation examines the public construction of personal piety in nineteenth- and twentieth-century north India (1857-1930). The emergence of reformist piety, with its emphasis on individual responsibility and a focus on the self, is supposed to mark the privatization of religion, such that the public sphere becomes the site of politics and economy, and the household displaces the community as the locus of religiosity. This dissertation critiques the thesis of separate spheres to argue that the cultivation of middle class religiosity was an extremely public act that unfolded in the myriad spaces that opened up in the late nineteenth century. The middle class household, with the conjugal couple at its center, was inextricably linked to these spaces, whether it was a university campus, a newspaper office, a political rally, a fundraiser, or an arboretum in a hill station. Central to this thesis is the use of Michael Warner's idea of discourse publics as an alternative framework to the Habermasian conception of the bourgeois public sphere. The emphasis on physical space makes room for understanding the household as a living social site of tellings and retellings that coexists with other overlapping publics and counterpublics. The

reformist piety which became the hallmark of the middle class was fashioned under the watchful eyes of peers, superiors, and spouses in these spaces. It was appraised, acknowledged, emulated, and perfected through networks that belied the public-private divide. This dissertation focuses on the institution of the household as one such site in the network to suggest that the radical reordering of the household in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries enabled the emergence of personal piety. The history of reformist piety can be retold as the history of the reconfigured household. Furthermore, the re-imagination of the woman as a chaste and loyal spouse was fundamental to her elevation as an independent spiritual actor of the household. The spiritual independence of the wife, however, was predicated on her social, economic, and legal subordination to the husband.

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PREFACE

In November 1946, noted Urdu novelist Ismat Chughtai (d. 1991) was in Lahore to appear for a court hearing. She had been charged with obscenity for her short story titled *Lihaf*, which explores the theme of homosexuality. The novel was brought to the attention of the colonial state by the writers and journalists of Lahore in 1944 and the state had promptly registered a case (Ismat Chughtai vs The Crown) against her and the publisher Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi. Chughtai, who lived in Bombay at this point, travelled to Lahore with Dehlavi and stayed with the famous Urdu novelist, M Aslam. Her meeting with M Aslam started on the wrong foot, when the latter criticized her for writing about topics that were unbecoming of a woman from a respectable family. In response, Chughtai pointed to the many “dirty sentences” in M Aslam’s novel *The Nights of Sin*. When the argument escalated, Chughtai backed off and deployed a different strategy of argumentation. Slipping into a mode of self-deprecation, she complained, “Nobody ever told me that writing about the topics raised in *Lihaf* is a sin. No book ever forbade me to speak about this...sickness or....addiction! Perhaps, my mind is not like the brush of Abdul Rahman Chughtai¹. It is but a cheap camera that captures what it sees. Provoked by my mind, my pen forces my hand. I have no control on them.” In response, M Aslam asked, “Did you not receive religious instruction?” “Oh, I did read *Beheshti Zewar* (The Heavenly Ornaments), but it broaches several private issues very openly. I read the book when I was a young girl and found it very discomfoting. When I read it again after

¹ A renowned Lahore-based painter from British India who died in 1975.

completing my B.A. I realized that topics raised in there were not dirty but informational.”²

In her biography, Chughtai mentions the ‘turn to religion’ in the conversation as a way to pacify her host. Though her play with sarcasm was completely lost on M Aslam, he did become amicable to Chughtai and Dehlavi and a generous breakfast was soon served.

I have used this anecdote to introduce the dissertation for two reasons: the first is to point to the widespread acceptance of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi’s (d. 1938) *Beheshti Zewar* as a text that could provide religious education to women, even to women as intractable as Ismat Chughtai. The second aim is to flag the content of some sections of the *Beheshti Zewar* that apparently made Chughtai squirm as a young girl. If I were to hazard a guess, I would say that the sections she was referring to deal with the topics of female hygiene, especially the bathing rituals that girls and women have to follow in order to become ritually pure at the end of the menstrual cycle. Another section could be the one that educates women in the sexual obligations that a wife has toward her husband.³ Now, it is true that in writing these sections Maulana Thanawi was only following the centuries-long tradition of writing about bodily hygiene and sexual practices with the most scientific and dispassionate

² Ismat Chughtai. *Kagazi Hai Pairahan* (The Mask / Attire is Fragile) (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting), 1994, 37-39.

³ See the sections on ‘Instructions for Menstrual Cycle’, ‘Instructions on Bleeding After Child Birth’ and ‘Instructions on Puberty’ in Volume II (pages 122 to 129) and ‘Instructions on Husband’s Rights’ in Volume V (page 278-279) of *Beheshti Zewar*.

precision. The most famous text to do this is the section on Etiquettes of Marriage in Imam Ghazali's (d. 1111) four-volume jurisprudence text *Ihya ul Ulumuddin* (The Revival of Religious Sciences).⁴ However, unlike Imam Ghazali's legal manual, Maulana Thanawi's *Beheshti Zewar* was a text for lay reader. It was meant to be purchased for the women of the family and placed on an easily accessible book shelf. It addressed women in plain Urdu, eliminating the complicated legal nuances to present them with the dos and don'ts of female hygiene in bullet points.⁵ More importantly, it redefined housekeeping, budgeting, social visitations, and, of course, cleanliness as essential aspects of personal piety.

This dissertation traces the history of the emergence of personal piety in colonial north India (see Appendix I for maps) and the reconfiguration of the household and public spaces that facilitated its rise. It focuses on the texts, periodicals, authors, and public figures that came into prominence in the period following the 1857 revolt and follows their impact on the discourses and practices of piety into the first

⁴ Imam Ghazali describes in great detail what kind of bleeding constitutes menses, including the color and consistency of the blood, the site of bleeding, in case women confused anal bleeding with the menses, the duration of bleeding, etc. While these matters may seem trivial, Imam Ghazali's primary occupation was that of a jurist, and he was aware of the importance of ascertaining as accurately as possible the dates for the beginning and ending of the menses cycle for legal cases related to inheritance, succession, alimony, patrimony, divorce, etc. For a translation of Etiquettes of Marriage, see Madelain Farah's translation of Imam Al Ghazali's Marriage and Sexuality in Islam (A Translation of al Ghazali's Book on the Etiquettes of Marriage), University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1984.

⁵ The discomfort that Ismat Chughtai felt on her perusal of *Beheshti Zewar* was not unfounded. Maulana Thanawi was aware of the awkwardness the sections on sex and hygiene could create, especially because the text was supposed to be read aloud to women by the men of their families. In an attempt to prevent embarrassment for all parties, Maulana Thanawi begins the section with precise reading instructions: "If the teacher is a man he should not read this section to his students (presumably girls). He should get his wife to read it out or instruct the girls to read it on their own. If the student is a young boy, he should be asked to read the section after reaching puberty." See *Beheshti Zewar*, 122.

quarter of the next century. The decision to bookend this project between 1857 and the 1930s is based on a couple of considerations. The violence of 1857 and the political changes that followed had a lasting impact of the relations between what was eventually to be the colonial state and the colonized. The writings that follow in the wake of the revolt acknowledge British dominion, even if grudgingly. On the part of the colonial state, this period saw an intensification of the educational initiatives that were launched in the early decades of the century, with a special focus on the improvement of educational and professional prospects of upper-class Muslims. The reformist project of moral and economic self-improvement was provided ample impetus by the colonial state, especially the provincial Departments of Public Instruction. As is famously known, *Mirat ul Uroos* (The Bride's Mirror, 1869) circulated as a manuscript in the neighbourhood of its author, Nazir Ahmad (d. 1912), before it won a state award and was included in the curriculum of girls' schools. The partnership between the colonial state and the reformers, especially on matters of women's education, reached its peak in the decades after 1857 before cooling down in the early decades of the following century. However, this period resulted in an explosion of texts and ideologies, and launched the career of several notable journalists, activists, and educationists.

The decision to use 1930 as the end point of the research is based on the belief that the narrative of reform was seriously challenged toward the end of the second decade of the century, mainly due to the rise of the Urdu Progressive Writers'

Movement in the 1930s that questioned the idea of domesticity and piety that were the cornerstones of religious reform. Ironically, prominent women writers of the movement such as Rashid Jahan (d. 1952), Nazar Sajjad Haider (d. 1967), and later Ismat Chughtai, owed their careers as novelists to the changes effected by the reform movement.

Defining Piety

For a term that is routinely used in academic discourse, piety remains terribly undertheorized. Numerous scholarly writings on ritual practice, religious dispositions, and modern technologies of religion examine the social world in which pious subjectivities are formed, but the precise meaning of what piety is, and how does it differ from religiosity, if at all, is rarely ever addressed.⁶ Even Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety*, a text that complicates and critiques the liberal categories of freedom and agency in the context of a women's mosque movement in Egypt, fails to explicate the meaning and texture of piety.⁷

The first community of Muslims, led by Prophet Muhammad in Medina, embraced poverty and austerity. This is not to suggest that every Muslim in Muhammad's

⁶ Two exceptions to this are Daniella Talmon-Heller's work on medieval Syria and Megan Reid's research on the features of bodily piety and practices of asceticism in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. See Talmon-Heller, Daniella J. *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques, Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyubids (1146-1260)*. Brill, 2007 and Reid, Megan H. *Law and Piety in Medieval Islam*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

⁷ Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

community was a pauper. On the contrary, men like Abu Bakr (d. 634), the first Caliph and the father-in-law of Muhammad, was a successful merchant. Uthman ibn Affan (d. 656), the third Caliph, similarly belonged to a wealthy tribe. However, the outward poverty of the community was a sign of its elevated moral status, particularly because their privation was not a result of an actual lack of resources but the result of indifference to material possessions. Their role model, of course, was Muhammad who is said to have been approached by Mount Uhud, a mountain range to the north of Medina, with an offer to turn itself into gold. In another variation of the *hadith*, Archangel Gabriel informs Muhammad that if he so wished, Mount Uhud would turn into gold. Muhammad, of course, chose to walk the difficult but virtuous path. There are numerous *hadith* narratives about his patched robe, his periods of starvation, and his insistence on sharing even his meagre meals with unannounced guests. The Quran repeatedly exhorts Muhammad to stand with the poor and the down-trodden and shun the company of the rich, a topic that will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Embracing poverty continued to be an important form of expressing piety for mystics and ascetics even after the expansion of Islam outside Arabia. Scholars of ascetic traditions of Islamic piety popular in the medieval period emphasize the centrality of the body in the development of devotional piety. This form of piety, in its desire for proximity to Allah, goes above and beyond the required religious rituals and transforms the “body into an instrument of worship” through

extraordinary acts such as voluntary starvation and night-long prayer routines.⁸ This acknowledgement of excess, which sets apart devotional piety from the plain fulfillment of one's ritual obligations is an important one: it captures the fundamental difference between the Urdu term *ibadat گزار* (one who offers regular prayer) and *deendar* (one who possesses *deen* / faith). A *deendar* person is most likely to fulfill her religious duties—the five mandatory prayers of the day, the fasting during the month of *Ramzan*, the pilgrimage of Hajj, if her health and economic status permit, and the giving of charity. In addition to these observances, she could undertake rigorous night vigils or physically arduous journeys to the holy site. Megan Reid has rightly suggested that “inherent in the very nature of this piety was a degree of nonconformity, or at least individual choice. In other words, the element of uniqueness was a proof of a person's holiness”.⁹

The contours of reformist piety in colonial north India, which is the focus of this dissertation, are shaped by the conformist ambitions of the middle class project. In contrast to the unique holiness of the pious woman or man in medieval Damascus, the piety movements in colonial India recommended a form of homogenizing religiosity that was acceptable and respectable. While the ascetics in Reid's medieval world sought to remove themselves from society through their acts of devotional excess, reformist piety prepared its proponents to live and prosper in this world. Instead of finding expression in periodic acts of spectacular performance, reformist

⁸ Megan H Reid, *Law and Piety in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 8.

⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

piety infused the everyday with a tinge of religious purposefulness. It frowned upon innovative displays of piety such as saint veneration or celebration of the Prophet's birthday (*eid milad un Nabi*), giving little room to the devotees for imaginative interpretations of the virtuous piety of Muhammad and his companions.

In reframing piety as an inner disposition that turned mundane chores into acts of piety, reformist movements eliminated the need for impressive displays of religiosity by replacing the magnificent spectacle of a naked ascetic and a starving Sufi with hardworking housewives. A pious woman in colonial India was not recognized by her extreme holiness but by her efficiency and her ability to work tirelessly. The daily rhythm of Islamic ritual prayer that required the faithful to turn to Allah five times a day became the template for organizing the day. This is demonstrated exceedingly well in a 1911 short story *Roznamcha* (Diary) published in the women's monthly magazine, *Asmat*. It is a story about two friends, Naseema and Hafeeza, who meet after a long time. On the day of Hafeeza's arrival, Naseema sends a car to the train station while she is busy taking care of chores at home. She sets the special menu for lunch, oversees the cooking in the kitchen, prepares medicines for her mother, and even bakes a cake. Hafeeza, who represents the unreformed woman in the story, complains that Naseema was so busy that she did not spend a single moment waiting and pining for her. When Hafeeza calls Naseema's lack of affective display a sign of weak intimacy she gets a lesson on productive use of time from her reformed friend. What follows is a reading from

Naseema's *roznamcha* which recounts the skill with which she balances the household chores and her religious obligations. Her days begin at dawn with the morning prayers and wrap up close to midnight with the offering of the last prayer of the night.¹⁰ It is extremely significant that the author of the short story is a woman named Waheed, the daughter of one Syed Sageer Husssain, a deputy collector.

Like the heroines of countless reformist novels and short stories from this period, Naseema's piety lies in treating her responsibilities towards her house and her household as sacrosanct. The mechanics of orienting piety towards domestic labour can be better understood by reading the conventional archive of reforms in conjunction with texts written for specialist readers.

Methodology

I have combined archival research and ethnographic fieldwork to examine the emergence and evolution of practices of reformist piety. However, I do not pose the lived experience of ethnography against the discursive world of the archives.

Instead, I have approached both the past and the present with a concern of both discourse and practice, attempting to chart the changing relationships of both to one another over time.

¹⁰ *Asmat*, July 11, Vol 7, No 1, 35-45.

My ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in Bombay and Delhi over a period of seven months in 2012, 2013 and 2014, during which I attended women's meetings organized by the Tablighi Jamaat.¹¹ My doctoral project was conceptualized as a history of women's participation in the Jamaat, but the findings in the archives encouraged me to broaden the scope of the research. Watching the women negotiate and reconfigure the expectations of female piety in and through everyday practice prepared me for the archives by providing me research questions. More importantly, it alerted me to the gap between the rigidity of prescriptive discourses and the fluidity of the diverse interpretations and practices that stem from those discourses.¹²

¹¹ The Tablighi Jamaat is a lay Islamic reform movement that focuses on austerity and personal piety. It was founded as a proselytizing movement in the 1920s by Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewi (d. 1944) to reform the 'nominal Muslims' of Mewat, a region about forty kilometers southwest of Delhi. The movement's spectacular success in Mewat gave it a reach and longevity that would have pleasantly surprised its early members. In the beginning the Jamaat only recruited men. The assumption was that the tenets of Islam would trickle down to the women if the men were taught well. However, within a few decades women were participating in the segregated Jamaat meetings that were held in the homes of the members. The socio-political context for the formation of Tablighi Jamaat is the launch of the *shuddhi* campaign in north India in the early twentieth century by Lala Munshi Ram (Swami Shraddhanand). The term *shuddhi* or purification refers to the return of Muslims to the fold of Hinduism. The *shuddhi* campaigners argued that the Muslims of South Asia were lapsed Hindus who had to revert to their original faith and, thereby, become pure again. This argument did not apply to the upper caste Muslims who traced their lineage to Central Asia, Persia, Hijaz, etc. While the *shuddhi* movement and its Islamic response, the Tablighi Jamaat, claimed that communities like the Meos from Mewat were either lapsed Hindus or nominal Muslims, neither group was sympathetic toward the communities it wanted to reform, and rarely thought of them as equals. For further readings on this topic, refer to the works of Christophe Jaffrelot, Yoginder Sikand, Charu Gupta and Shail Mayaram.

¹² That members of a religious group or movement have complex opinions about the doctrines of their faith should hardly be surprising. Magnus Marsden's extensive ethnographic research in Chitral, in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, highlights the reflective and nuanced understanding that Muslims of the region have about Islam and the call for normative Islamic practice from Islamist outfits. See Magnus Marsden, *Living Islam: Muslim Religious Experience in Pakistan's North-west Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

In my attempt to understand the reconfiguration of piety in colonial India, I consult texts such as Maulana Thanawi's *Beheshti Zewar* and his sermons in conjunction with his canonical collection of *fatawa* titled *Imdad ul Fatawa*. The former is seen as a populist text that addresses lay readers / women, and has been studied by South Asian feminist scholars. The latter is seen as a work fit for perusal by specialists and is a source usually referenced by legal and religious scholars alone. However, in my research, I demonstrate that a side-by-side reading of the two reveals the fissures that were inherent in the reformist project. Similar contradictions can be highlighted by reading didactic fiction from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries alongside the journalistic writings of novelists such as Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi (d. 1936). The expansive Urdu archive of Islamic reforms in colonial north India attests to intellectual continuities across genres. The social world that the archives reveal is one in which novels and *fatawa*, the magazines and sermons, and the government notices and petitions circulated simultaneously in intersecting networks.

In terms of archival work, this translated into a research itinerary that included the UP state archives and the UP CID archives in Lucknow, which essentially hold colonial records, the libraries of Deoband's Dar ul Uloom and Lucknow's Nadwat ul Ulema, the two leading *madrasas* of north India, as well as the newspaper and magazine archives of Jamia Milia Islamia in New Delhi and Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in Aligarh. In yet another surprise of fieldwork, the *madrasa*

libraries threw up as many novels and household handbooks as the Jamia and AMU archives, though the librarian at Dar ul Uloom insisted that the novels were never checked out by the semiary students. “We do not even know how they (the novels) got here,” he said sheepishly.

A reading strategy that puts disparate texts in conversation has enabled me to combine archives hitherto segregated along the lines of men and women’s literature, as seen in the works of scholars like Gail Minault. Over the course of her long and prolific career, Minault has carefully analyzed the history of educational reforms in the Muslim community, with close attention to women’s social reform. Her essays and monograph present a comprehensive history of three generations of reformers, starting with men like Syed Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) and ending two generations later with women like Rashid Jahan. Her work covers the establishments of educational associations, girls’ schools, and women’s magazines in all the major Urdu-speaking centers of South Asia, such as Hyderabad, Delhi, Lucknow, and Lahore. Minault’s Urdu archive—comprising texts such as the novels of Nazir Ahmad, Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali (d. 1914), and Rashid ul Khairi, Maulana Thanawi’s *Beheshti Zewar*, Syed Mumtaz Ali’s *Huquq e Niswan* (The Rights of Women), and women’s magazines—overlaps to a large extent with my archives. They do, after all, form the canon of Muslim social reform in colonial north India. Scholars have mined them for decades to argue for the egalitarian spirit of gender reform animated by the twin desires of reformist men: to uplift the community and

to marry educated women who were their equals, the latter being a precondition for the former. Starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, in novel after novel, reformers presented their vision of the ideal Muslim home that functioned like a well-oiled machine. It was helmed by an educated man and his educated and pious wife, joined together in a companionate marriage. In fact, in *Mirat ul Uroos*, Asghari, the heroine, has a clear upper hand not just in her relationship with her husband, but also in her dealings with her mother-in-law and father-in-law. From the reformist perspective, it could be argued that Asghari's sound education, her foresight, her superior accounting skills and her piety make her worthy of the high status she enjoys in her marital home. Conversely, it could be claimed that the inferior status of women is not due to their inherent weakness vis-à-vis the men, but because their upbringing and education leave much to be desired. In summing up Maulana Thanawi's stance on the ideological egalitarianism of Islam, Minault says as much when she writes:

Given these egalitarian assumptions (those espoused in Maulana Thanawi's religious and literary tradition), if women have inferior status, it is not due to their inherent inferiority, for their souls are the equal of men's, but rather because of degenerate custom, falsely identified as religion.¹³

This would suggest that embracing a form of piety that eliminated "degenerate custom" would have the effect of leveling the hierarchical relation between men and women. In other words, the goals of Islamic reform were compatible with the ideals

¹³ Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 67.

of gender equality, once the women had adjusted the content and form of their religiosity.

The writings of Rashid ul Khairi and Maulana Thanawi provide a glimpse of this egalitarian world in which men and women are akin to the two wheels of a cart, each assigned control over a separate domain. The man is responsible for going out into the world to provide for his family. The woman is responsible for running the house efficiently to make sure that the hard-earned income of her husband is spent judiciously. However, in the final analysis, the man is in-charge of the household as well. He is, after all, the head of the family. The reformers, of course, argue that the man would never have to step into the affairs of the home if the woman was running a tight ship. So the model of complementarity would, in an ideal household, lead to real, substantive equality between the man and woman.

This, however, was far from true. If we imagine reformist literature as a sub-genre unto itself, its defining feature would be the glorification of the complementarity between the rights and responsibilities and the vices and virtues of the wife and her husband. Like any genre, didactic literature employs literary tropes toward a specific goal. In this case, the goal is to educate women about their own backwardness and the bright future that awaited them—within the four walls of the house—once they had mended their ways.

The contours of the reformed household, and the dazzling lives that women would live therein, are not clearly defined in the novels. *Mirat ul Uroos*, by far the most

popular and the most studied novel from this period, is a collage of extraordinary events through which Asghari sets her husband's house in order. Her achievements as a newly-married woman include convincing her mother-in-law to discontinue customary practices and pushing her husband to complete his education and get a job. However, if one were to read the novel to understand how a woman is to fill her days with ordinary but meaningful tasks, there is little that *Mirat ul Uroos* offers. For that information, one would have to refer to the non-fiction reformist writing, usually published in women's magazines. Rashid ul Khairi, the author of particularly lachrymose novels, launched a women's magazine, *Asmat*, in 1908 on the back of a successful career as a novelist. He frequently contributed articles to *Asmat*, often under the guise of a female reader. While his novels are melodramatic tear-jerkers, his articles are short, pointed, and tackle mundane topics that he believed a woman ought to be familiarized with. He discusses hygiene, cleanliness, children's health, and the curse that was customary practice. But he reserves his most urgent tone for the articles on household budgeting in which he warns women that they are only the managers and safe-keepers of their husbands' income. The purpose of their life is to run his household efficiently and safeguard his wealth. The economic disenfranchisement of the woman in a reformed household was couched in the language of piety: her labour was necessary for the functioning of the house, but housekeeping also enabled her to perfect her piety. However, what a woman gained in religious merit she lost in economic status because the ideology of pious labour bore rewards only in the Hereafter. Meanwhile, in this life, a woman's hold on

economic assets became precarious, such that private property became the preserve of males and piety a virtue of women.

Nowhere is this economic marginalization more apparent than in Maulana Thanawi's sermons and *fatawa* that have been compiled into multi-volume editions. The *alim* (religious scholar, pl. *ulema*) is famously supposed to have said that his *Beheshti Zewar* was a text that was appropriate for educating women and men in their religious duties. Scholars like Barbara Metcalf and Gail Minault have used this proclamation by Maulana Thanawi as evidence of his firm belief in the spiritual equality of all Muslims, men or women, rich or poor, and the positive impact this had, even if limited, on the social and legal status of Muslim women.¹⁴ As stated above, the model of equality espoused by Islamic reformers was based on complementarity between men and women. Maulana Thanawi did not claim to be a liberal feminist. He would have considered the goals of liberal feminism—complete legal and political equality between the two sexes—as problematic and yet another evil Western import that was afflicting modern Muslims. However, this dissertation argues that even the model of social complementarity and spiritual equality that is proposed by Maulana Thanawi in his capacity as a reformist was often at odds with the sermons and *fatawa* issued by Maulana Thanawi, the *hadith* scholar and sermonizer. Similarly, the scope of the roles assigned to the female protagonists in Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi's novels do not square with the advice columns

¹⁴ See Metcalf's introduction to her partial translation of *Beheshti Zewar*. Metcalf, Barbara Daly. "Perfecting women." *Berkeley: University of California* (1990).

they wrote for women's magazines. For instance, in *Toofan e Hayat* (The Storm of Life, 1902-07), Rashid ul Khairi narrates the extraordinary events surrounding the life of Mushrika, starting from her young days as the daughter of a superstitious mother to her marriage into an anti-reformist family. Mushrika's life is a continuous struggle, but she handles the financial, emotional and spiritual challenges that life throws at her with courage and patience and comes out a winner. In a novel populated by stereotypes of gullible, ill-informed and weak Muslims, Mushkrika's fortitude and piety stand out. An attention to religious injunctions, however, is a footnote in Khairi's advice literature, in which he essentially sees women as unpaid housekeepers. In the essay *The Purpose of a Woman's Life*, Khairi writes about the responsibilities of a woman, from the time she is born to the time that she finds herself amid strangers in her marital home. In the ten-page essay, Khairi tackles the topic of a woman's religious obligations in the final three-line paragraph that essentially reminds the readers that one day we all will die and return to our Maker.¹⁵

The seemingly inconsistent approach of the reformers as they shift from one genre to another points to the tension within the reformist project: one that sought to uplift the Muslim community in this world and also ensure their well-being in the Hereafter. The context of colonialism was important in shaping their worldview, especially the belief that the social and political decline of the Muslims, who had

¹⁵ Rashid ul Khairi, *Gudri Mein La'al (Gem in a Patched Quilt)*, 5th ed, ed. Raziq ul Khairi (Karachi: Anjuman Press, 1969), 19 to 29.

once ruled the Subcontinent, was the result of their moral failure. It followed, therefore, that a project of moral reinvigoration would lead to renewed success in this world.¹⁶

The road to religious revival, however, wound its way through the home. A reformed household was both the proof of moral discipline and the very glimpse of the Paradise in this world. Expectedly, this created the problem of working out the time one needed to improve the prospects in this fleeting, mundane world and the time needed to get one's Afterlife in order before death. There was one key difference between reformers like Maulana Thanawi, a religious scholar, on the one

¹⁶ Historians of Islamic reform and Muslim political mobilization in South Asia such as Francis Robinson, Gail Minault and Barbara Metcalf have unfailingly pointed to the emic sources of revolution that are inherent in Islam as a religious tradition. In writing the history of men, institutions and texts, whether it is Abul Ala Maududi's *Jamaat e Islami*, Maulana Thanawi's *Beheshti Zewar* or Maulana Ilyas' *Tablighi Jamaat*, historians have always sought to find continuities with a tradition of reform that dates back at least to Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624). The Naqshabandi Sufi's opposition to heterodox practices in Mughal emperor Akbar's court is seen as a direct predecessor to the reform movements in colonial India, with Shah Waliullah (d. 1762) serving as an intermediary. In fact, the Sirhindi-Waliullah lineage has also been claimed by reformists, who believe that they are bringing to completion a wave of change set into motion by the two men. What escapes scrutiny in the construction of this linear intellectual lineage is the completely different project of reform each of the men under inquiry was engaged in. Ahmad Sirhindi's appeal to the Mughal nobles and emperor to conform to his idea of "true Islam" was part of the long-drawn conflict for royal patronage between the Indian Chishti order and the Naqshabandi order from Central Asia, as effectively demonstrated by Muzaffar Alam ("The Mughals, the Sufi Shaikhs and the formation of the Akbari Dispensation." *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 01 (2009). In the case of Shah Waliullah too, the kernel of reform was fundamentally a philosophical theory of formation and decline of political states, the duties of a just ruler, and the place of communal life in a polity (see Vasileios Syro's "An Early Modern South Asian Thinker on the Rise and Decline of Empires: Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi, the Mughals, and the Byzantines." *Journal of World History* 23, no. 4 (2012). Even the writings of a reformer closer to the period under study, Syed Ismail Shaheed (d. 1831), who shared much of the anxiety about customary practices and the corruption of faith of lay Muslims, does not engage with the domestic sphere and the economy of the household. More importantly, Syed Shaheed's *Taqweeyat ul Iman* (The Strengthening of Faith), a favourite reformist text of the Deoband *ulema*, does not address an Islamic *ummah* or *qaum* that encompasses all Muslim men and women. In their firm belief that the household is a building block of the community, Islamic reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth century north India had much in common with their Hindu counterparts and with evangelical reformers in Britain and North America in late eighteenth century.

hand, and Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi, men who had received some religious education but did not provide religious service to the community, on the other. The former group was clear in its prioritization of the Afterlife over the affairs of this world. Maulana Thanawi's life and career choices, his conduct with other people, his relationship with the material world, the organization of his hospice (*khanqah*) in Thana Bhawan, were all shaped by his desire to lead a pious life in complete compliance of the *shariat*. However, on the topic of women's piety, Maulana Thanawi's position is closer to Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi. It is of consequence that *Beheshti Zewar*, a text that is meant to teach correct religious rituals to women, also instructs them in cleanliness, recipes, fabric-painting, soap-making, baking, an introduction to basic perfumery, wood painting, home remedies for common ailments, parenting tips, ink making, a section on the rules of using postal service, another section on the etiquettes of buying and selling, and so on. The curious mix of the sacred and mundane in a text authored by one of the most Otherworldly-minded *alim* has been explained as the desire of the author to influence and improve every aspect of women's life. The question that begs to be asked is what kind of life did Maulana Thanawi expect a woman to lead? He provides some clues in a booklet titled *A Gift to the Husband and Wife* in which he states:

Those (women) who have been blessed with maids and other domestic servants should do some of the housework with their own hands as well...hard work is quite conducive to the maintenance of good health and physical strength. Take the services of the maids and servants under your personal

supervision. And now and then do the work with your own hands as well. Together with this, spare some of your time to engage in the observance of optional *Salaah* (ritual prayer, *namaz* in Urdu), Tasbeeh (rosary), etc. If time is limited, you may engage in Zikr whilst carrying on your daily chores.

Asking women to perform non-obligatory religious rituals (*nafl*) only when they have an opportunity to do so between household chores or while performing the tasks may seem like a harmless, even helpful, suggestion. Maulana Thanawi does not want women to miscomprehend domestic chores as acts of worship in themselves. The chores “form (a) part of the Deen (faith)” only when they are discharged with the correct intention, and the “intention should be that I, as a wife, am serving my husband and trying to comfort him in order to fulfill his rights upon me. Subject to this intention, even worldly matters turn out to be Deen”.¹⁷ The booklet claims to explain the rights and responsibilities of the spouses, but many of its sections are dedicated to proving the social, legal and spiritual superiority of the husband. The message of the text is simple: while a husband cannot stop the wife from fulfilling her mandatory rituals (*faraiz*), his permission is required before she undertakes any non-obligatory religious rituals, especially if they come in the way of serving him.¹⁸ The full extent of what constitutes ‘serving him’ is unclear. Fulfilling his sexual needs is seen as a wife’s duty. So is keeping his house and income safe, and while she is not required by Islamic law to cook for him, a good wife would be wise enough to do that, says Maulana Thanawi. Among the book’s examples of careless wives are

¹⁷ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *A Gift to the Husband and Wife* (Mumbai: Bilal Books, 1999), 78.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 47-49.

women who leave the cooking to their domestic help.¹⁹ Men, on the other hand, especially scholars like Maluana Thanawi, bolstered their piety by putting in hours and hours into non-obligatory prayers. The hagiographies of male scholars from this period attest to their exemplary piety evident in their extended late night prayers, non-obligatory fasting, and hours spent reciting and memorizing the Quran.²⁰ In defining domestic chores as remedy for women's physical and spiritual malaise, this brand of religious reform bound women more tightly to the domestic labour than they were in the past.

Maulana Thanawi's expectation that women ought to perform household chores even when they can hire domestic help is contrary to the practice prevalent in Prophet Muhammad's community in Medina where families with means would have servants and slaves in their employ for household work. As the chapter on *purdah* (Chapter 3) will demonstrate, time and again, when reformers had to choose between the customary practices rooted in South Asian traditions (*riwaj*) and the more progressive practices and traditions from Muhammad's time, as narrated in the *hadiths*, the reformers opted for the former. The argument that their choices were guided by the model of complementarity ignores the fact that the reformist version of complementarity severely undermined the scope of action available to

¹⁹ Ibid, 75-80.

²⁰ The biographies of scholars like Maulana Thanawi (*Ashraf us Sawaneh*) and Maulana Zakariya Kandhlewī (*Aap Beeti*) are exercises in the display of their spiritual and physical stamina to engage in endless hours of prayer without interruption. It is also meant to demonstrate to the readers, mainly disciples, the disinterest and disdain that these men had towards the pursuits and possessions of this world.

women by strengthening the husband's dominion over the household and by providing religious sanction to the cultural idea of male superiority. Which is to say that the preference for South Asian traditions, especially when it came to defining respectable female behavior, was not despite their tendency to restrict women's movement but precisely because it sought to do so. Minault's reform archive solely comprising women's literature, or more specifically lay texts written for female readers, remains uninformed by the larger vision of the reform movements, which did not just want to create perfect households, but perfect households built on the labour of women but controlled by men.

The segregation of texts along the line of gender sets the stage for dividing the archive into lay and specialist literature, the former being texts for women written by men and women and the latter being religious and legal manuals authored by men with a male readership in mind. Apart from the fact that texts—whether written for men or women—rarely ever circulate in the segregated orbits that the authors, and later historians, imagine for them, there is also the issue of how does one define a text as lay or specialist. The best example of this dilemma is a text that is unanimously labelled as lay by its author and scholars: *Beheshti Zewar*. When Maulana Thanawi declared that a text for women's religious education would also serve the men well, he was tearing down the intellectual divide between lay men and women. For him, it was important to preserve the hierarchy between the religious specialists, the *ulema*, and the lay community consisting of Muslim men

and women. However, once *Beheshti Zewar* was purchased and brought home, its status as a non-specialist text could not be assured. In Muslim homes across north India and beyond, *Beheshti Zewar* is wrapped in an embellished velvet cover (*juzdan*) and placed on the highest shelf in the house, next to the copy of the Quran. Generations of Muslim women, who were famously given a copy of *Beheshti Zewar* as part of their wedding trousseau, turned to the guidebook for expert opinion on the correct performance of religious rituals. The words in *Beheshti Zewar* belonged to a widely-respected *alim*, and were not to be taken lightly. If the advertisements in the women's weekly, *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, are any indication, it is likely that an Urdu translation of Imam Ghazali's shorter works, a copy of the biography of Prophet Muhammad and a book of home remedies also jostled for space on that book shelf.²¹ Religious texts were instrumental in the initial success of the print industry in north India in the eighteenth century.²² These included texts that had previously

²¹ The non-editorial pages of magazines from this period are a good indication of the range of books that an interested reader could purchase, starting in the early twentieth century. In early years of its publication, *Tehzeeb e Niswan* ran advertisements for a wide range of books that its publisher Maulana Mumtaz Ali identified as suitable for women. Several of the texts, such as the al Ghazali reader, were translated and published by Mumtaz Ali himself. Among other notable books were Ibn Batuta's travelogues, collection of poetry by notable Urdu poets such as Ghalib, Hali and Zauq, a collection of works by Shakespeare (titled *Gulzar e Shakespeare*), a travel handbook for women, and biographies of famous Muslims such as Syed Ahmad Khan and Begum Ashraf. The usual texts on housekeeping, home remedies, basic religious education, etc were also advertised. In an interesting development, the range of books advertised in the magazine shrank remarkably in the second decade of the century, with the advertisements now limited to tragic reformist novels, which, by the admission of their authors, were meant to shock and horrify the female readers into mending their ways. This can at least partly be explained as the success of the reformist movement in creating a body of texts that was widely accepted as literature suitable for women. It is indeed the irony of reform that a movement that sought to rid women of their ignorance ended up replacing a well-rounded reading list that included Shakespeare and Sharar with a list of novels that taught them to be efficient housekeepers.

²² Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India*, (New Delhi: Permanent Black), 2008.

circulated as poetry, oral narratives, songs, and recitation materials for religious ceremonies such as *marsiya*²³ and *naat*²⁴. The final decades of the eighteenth century saw the translation and introduction of religious classics to a readership that could not have participated in the more exclusive literary universe of the manuscripts. By the end of the century, Shah Abdul Qadir Dehlavi and Shah Rafiuddin Dehlavi were translating the Quran into Urdu.²⁵ Two decades later, a newspaper was selling an English translation of the Quran and an English to Urdu dictionary at a discount.²⁶ While no conclusion about the precise nature of the reading habits of the men and women in this period can be drawn from simply listing the newspaper advertisements, at the very least it allows us to broaden the range of texts potentially available to curious readers.

Further, one only has to read the biographies of women who came to age in the first quarter of the twentieth century to realize that magazines like *Tehzeeb e Niswan* and *Asmat* were preserved as important documents, shared between cousins and passed down from mothers to daughters. Ismat Chughtai and Shaista Suhrawardy (d. 2000) learnt to read Urdu by borrowing old copies of *Tehzeeb e Niswan* and *Mirat ul Uroos* from the older women in the family. Much has been written about the insertion of

²³ Marsiya is a poem that describes one of the many tragic events at the battle of Karbala (680) in which Imam Hussain, the grandson of Muhammad, was killed by the Umayyid. The events of Karbala form an important part of Shia religious and moral universe, and the first days of Muharram (the Islamic month in which the battle unfolded) are marked by public mourning ceremonies in which the marsiya are recited. For a history of marsiya in South Asia, see C.M. Naim's "The Art of the Urdu Marsiya," in *Urdu Texts and Contexts* (Permanent Black 2004).

²⁴ Naat are religious poems that sing the praise of Muhammad, and are usually recited at religious ceremonies called *Milad Sharif*.

²⁵ Their father, Shah Waliullah (d. 1762), translated the scripture into Persian.

²⁶ *The Comrade*, December 20, 1913, 452.

the printed text, such as the newspapers and songbooks, in a largely oral culture of South Asia,²⁷ but the actual physical relationship of the readers with the printed material—the body of the text—is less understood, especially as it circulated and re-circulated among women. A bookshelf that had room for the Quran in Arabic, Urdu and possibly English, a copy of *Beheshti Zewar*, *Mirat ul Uroos*, the annual collection of *fatawa* published by the Dar ul Uloom in Deoband, some copies of *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, possibly a few textbooks, booklets of *marsiya* and *naat* to be recited during various religious ceremonies, to name just a few, would be a good example of the eclectic reading materials that a family might have acquired as it sought to become pious.

Public vs Private, Sphere vs Space

It is easy to see that the distinction between lay and specialist texts is not tenable in the study of Islamic reform, but dismantling the public and private divide is far more difficult. Women's history, and the history of the household in general, has been saddled with the idea of separate spheres as the primary organizing category. The ideology of the dichotomous separate domains maintains that the social world is divided into two spheres: the public and the private. The former coincides with the outside world and is the field of reason, politics, and economy. It also goes without

²⁷ See the works Christian Lee Novetzke (*Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India*) and Farina Mir (*The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*).

saying that it is the domain of male action. In contrast, the private sphere is the sphere of constrained virtuous femininity. Severed from the public sphere ideologically, economically and spatially, the domestic sphere, however, was the site of the moral and religious regeneration of the middle class. Both American and British feminist historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have abided by the separate sphere thesis, and in doing so, have shaped the nature of inquiry into the everyday lives and practices of women in these societies. Among the most influential contributions to this thesis in the American context is Mary Ryan's 1981 work on the forging of distinctly middle-class values in the 'Burned Again' Oneida County in early nineteenth century around the virtues of domesticity and the cult of motherhood.²⁸ Admittedly, the domestic sphere that Ryan carves for the women of Oneida County was not entirely constraining. It allowed women, as wives and mothers, to participate in charitable and evangelical works and form associations, but the conceptual necessity of a morally purer domestic sphere remains unexamined in her work.

The most influential scholarship to examine the relationship of a nascent middle class with the domestic sphere is Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortune*, an extensive investigation into the religious, economic and domestic lives of the middle class men and women in mid-Victorian (1780 to 1850) Essex, Suffolk

²⁸ Mary P Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*, (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

and Birmingham.²⁹ *Family Fortune* seeks to insert the study of gender in the history of class formation in Britain, and argues that the doctrines of separate sphere and domesticity were the organizing principles of the emerging middling groups in the nineteenth century, resulting in a middle class culture that was domesticated. The book traces the arc of the middle class formation against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution, with its attendant assumption that the establishment of factories wooed economic activities outside the household, leading to the economic marginalization and infantilizing of women and juveniles. The impressive archives that Davidoff and Hall consult demonstrate that women had more economic and political leeway and more elbow room in negotiating kinship networks in the period under study than the separate spheres thesis actually allows, a point made thoroughly and convincingly by Amanda Vickery in her review article.³⁰

In the South Asian context, the endurance of the public-private framework owes a lot to its endorsement by subaltern historiography that has sought to create a private domain of native consciousness that was untouched by the violence and moral corruption of colonialism. The tagging of cultural nationalism to the separate spheres thesis has resulted in the creation of the myth of a private sanctuary of the home where the precolonial, anti-modernist essence of native purity was embodied by the women of the household. The most important articulation of this thesis is

²⁹ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850*. (New York: Routledge, 2002).

³⁰ Vickery, Amanda. "Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history." *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 02 (1993): 383-414.

Partha Chatterjee's essay, *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question*, first printed in 1990 in the important feminist anthology, *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*. Chatterjee's argument, in a nutshell, connects the public humiliation of the elite Indian male as a colonized subject in the decades after 1857 with the desire of the nationalist movement to imagine a domestic sphere that the colonial state could not, and more importantly, should not, access. The political subjugation of the Indian man was offset by his control of the private sphere. Chatterjee's essay, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 (Piety and *Purdah*), remains one of the most cited essays of the Subaltern Collective. It, however, also remains one of the most critiqued, with the most vocal criticism coming from Marxist feminists such as Himani Bannerji, who argues that the "domination of women implicit in Hindu, or any other, cultural nationalism is not simply described with any critical annotation by Chatterjee...but rather given a prescriptive status as it escapes all criticism".³¹

Also implicit in the thesis of separate spheres is the assumption about the superiority and the intellectual self-reliance of the male public sphere. If the home is a haven for emotion, nurture, sentimentality, and religious disposition, the public sphere is aligned with reason, culture, rationality and secularism. The women's sphere becomes the site of embodied performance of wasteful rituals and ceremonies, while the public sphere is where the sensible men gather around to

³¹ Bannerji, Himani. "Projects of Hegemony: Towards a Critique of Subaltern Studies' 'Resolution of the Women's Question'" *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 11 (2000): 902-20. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4409022>.

read, write and discuss the terrible impact of those ceremonies on the community. This binary is based on an understanding of discourse that valorizes speech utterance, but pays no attention to listening, retelling and relaying.

Perhaps, the biggest drawback of the imagination of a hermetically-sealed women's sphere is that it does not exist. This is not to simply say that the boundary between women's world at home and the outside world was porous, but to suggest something bolder, as Amanda Vickery demonstrates in her review of British history: namely, women, at least those belonging to the elite and laboring classes—both in the factories and on agricultural farms, have always participated in the civic and economic life, albeit often in capacities and roles different from their male counterparts. In the South Asian contexts, Indrani Chatterjee, Radha Kumar, Durba Ghosh, and Ashwini Tambe, to name just a few, have presented enough evidence to take apart the idea that women were secluded within the four walls of their homes.³²The fact that the presence of women outside their homes is not registered or even acknowledged by theorists and political scientists points to the blind spots inherent in the Habermasian-inspired idea of an elite, male public sphere. Another problem, as Nancy Fraser has presciently pointed out, is the tendency among feminist scholars to label everything that exists outside the familial space as the public sphere, and in doing so conflate at least three analytically distinct meanings

³² See the works of Indrani Chatterjee, especially *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (Oxford University Press, 1999), on the ruling elite in the eastern region of Bengal. For an account of the political and cultural lives of the Mughal woman, refer to Ellison Findly's monogram on Nur Jahan (d. 1645).

of the public sphere, namely “the state, the official-economy of paid employment, and arenas of public discourse”.³³ This has led to the misrepresentation of the absence of women, and subaltern groups in general, from the official channels of politics and economy as their absence in public spaces of discourse as well.

This dissertation suggests that one way out of the analytical limbo inherent in the thesis of male and female spheres is to focus on the idea of the publics as articulated by Michael Warner in his 2002 essay “Publics and Counterpublics”.³⁴ According to Warner, a public can come into being by just being addressed, it can be formed around a text and it is self-organizing. Most importantly, a public that evolves around a text, say this dissertation, is one among the many publics and counterpublics that can exist simultaneously. This conceptualization of multiple publics, each one of them as legitimate as the other, breaks away from the Habermasian framework in which the bourgeois public sphere exists as the only arena of meaningful deliberation.³⁵ Other aspects of Warner’s public that are particularly useful to the study of the Urdu reading public in the nineteenth and twentieth century is the condition that the public be made up of strangers that come together around a text. “A nation, market, or public in which everyone could be known personally would be no nation, market, or public at all,” argues Warner. Further, a collective of strangers would turn into a social space of a public that

³³ Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy." *Social text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

³⁴ Warner, Michael. "Publics and counterpublics." *Public culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 49-90.

³⁵ Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (MIT Press, 1991).

comes into existence around a text only through a reflexive circulation of discourse. By this Warner means that a single sender-receiver or an author-reader act does not constitute a public. No single voice, genre or medium can make a public. It requires a back and forth, a certain repartee, some retelling, maybe even some distortions, for texts alone do not create publics, but the “concatenation of texts through time. Only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and a responding discourse be postulated, can a text address a public”.³⁶

In making multiple iterations of a text or speech act that are “linked through a context of interaction” a fundamental component of a public, Warner’s model makes room for the inclusion of the household, as social spaces of tellings and retellings, a part of a discourse public.³⁷

The home, however, was not just simply a social space that came into existence through and in discourse. It was a physical, built environment that was experienced and used differently by the men and women who lived in it, the outsiders who visited it from time to time, and the servants who worked there. At the turn of the twentieth century, the space of the household was transforming, much in line with the transformation of the topology of the cities, the towns and the *qasabas* in colonial north India. The experience of colonialism was also the experience of finding one’s self in new kinds of spaces. A fair amount of writings by both men and women in the early decades of the twentieth century obsesses about learning the

³⁶ Warner, Michael. "Publics and counterpublics." *Public culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 62-63.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 62.

proper conduct that was befitting a town hall meeting, a walk in the park, a university campus, a theatre or a train station. The anxiety about new spaces was ultimately the discomfort about not being able to control the events as they unfolded in the public eye. It was the fear of constant scrutiny that came with being a public space. I argue that the reformed household, modelled on similar modes of scrutiny, was yet another novel and public space that came into being during high colonialism. While it is widely acknowledged that with the rise of nationalism and reformism, the private (the household, the family, the *zenana*) became the political, it would not be incorrect to say that the household also became public in the twentieth century. And by this I mean it was the topic of intense scrutiny and reprimand from people and institutions that were not, in any measure, a part of the household. In yet another paradox of social reform, a movement that sought to seclude women was also keen to bring into public every detail of the household. Women's ceremonies, their lifecycle rituals, their personal hygiene, their manners or the lack thereof, their language, clothes, habits, skills, dispositions, even their place in the Afterlife: there was not a single aspect of women's everyday life and beyond that was not open for a public debate. In short, the household became one among the many spaces that opened up in the transformed political landscape of twentieth century north India.

The history of the emergence of reformist Islamic piety has to be situated against the history of these foundational changes in the structure of the household in

colonial north India. Scholars of Islamic revival in north India have distinguished modernist piety from traditional forms of religiosity by pointing to the personal nature of the latter. Modern forms of piety demanded personal accountability, both from male and female followers of the faith. It urged devotees to foster direct relationship with Allah. There was no room for a pious interlocutor, living or dead, in reformist piety. The responsibility of reviving Islam and the Muslim community rested on the shoulder of every Muslim, though it can be argued that women were expected to bear a larger burden. It is no coincidence that the Tablighi Jamaat, a proselytizing movement based on the model of reforming the self, emerged in this milieu, and had the blessing of Maulana Thanawi. Allama Muhammad Iqbal's (d. 1938) poetically articulated idea of the self in *Asrar e Khudi* (Secrets of the Self) is also a reflection of this period.³⁸ Since the home was the haven for the private individual, it was here that modern piety found its anchorage.

What happens to the personal nature of modern piety if the most important site of its fashioning was more public than previously imagined? In this dissertation, I argue that the construction of personal piety was a deeply public act. Its deeply

³⁸ *Asrar e Khudi* is Iqbal's first work of philosophical poetry. Written in Persian in the second stage of his career as a poet, it was published in 1915. Iqbal followed *Asrar e Khudi* with a second poem in 1918, also in Persian, titled *Rumuz e Bekhudi* (The Secrets of Selflessness). *Asrar e Khudi* is Iqbal's doctrine of the Islamic self in which he argues that humans are uniquely endowed with the gift of consciousness, of knowing the self, and realizing, in the broadest possible way, the purpose of their creation. The realization of the self, however, can only be achieved by disciplining the *khudi* or the Ego. A disciplined self / Ego is worthy of being the vice-regent of the Divine in this world. A successful Islamic community, as imagined in *Rumuz e Bekhudi*, is a community of self-realized Muslims that coexist without subsuming the individuality. For a detailed discussion on the dialectical tension between the self and community in Iqbal's later works, see Ayesha Jalal's *Self and sovereignty: Individual and community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (Routledge, 2002) and Saleem Kidwai's "Iqbal—Philosophic Poet." *Indian Literature* 18, no. 3 (1975): 71-82.

performative nature meant that the maintenance of personal piety was in need of constant appraisal, acknowledgement, and reinforcement. Being seen as pious was as important as being pious, and the most convincing expression of modern piety was the reformed middle-class household with the conjugal couple at its centre.

The Middle Class Muslim Household

The emergence of the middle class, or middle classes in some formulation, forms an important backdrop to my thesis of the emergence of reformist piety in the nineteenth century. Like other meta-categories such as 'agency' or 'modernity', the middle class is a slippery term. In contrast to Marxist categories like the working class or aristocracy, the middle class is notoriously expansive, often to the point of being imprecise. The study of the emergence of the middle class in the colonial context, as is the case in South Asia, is further complicated by the legal, economic and political reality of colonialism. The standard narrative of the middle class presupposes the centrality of the Industrial Revolution as the key event that led to the evolution of the industrial bourgeoisie. It is the objective conditions of a rapidly industrializing society, most evident in the change in the modes and scale of production, that are supposed to create an authentic middle class. The emergence of the middle class, thus, is linked to the fulfillment of the predetermined trajectory of industrial capital. It is, therefore, assumed that the conditions of deindustrialization or under-industrialization in nineteenth-century South Asia, accompanied by the

political dependency of its colonized subjects, prevented the rise of an authentic Indian middle class because the objective conditions for its emergence were not met.³⁹ Theories about the rise of the Muslim middle class are even bleaker because an assumption about the backwardness of Muslims, in comparison with their Hindu peers, puts them in a position of disadvantage when it comes to embracing middle class institutions. The assumption that the Muslim community is split between the two ends of the class spectrum—the economic, political and religious elites, or the *Ashraf*, on the one end, and the peasants and artisans, or the *Ajlaf*, on the other—continues to colour the scholarship on the middle class in India, which is largely imagined as Hindu.⁴⁰

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, in his chapter that discusses the rise of communalism in the Muslim community in colonial north India, offers a fascinating reading of the Muslim middle class. Citing British statistician and historian William Hunter, Smith suggests that British mistrust and antagonism crushed the nascent Muslim middle class in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The repression of the Muslims that is indicated above (citations from W.W. Hunter's *The Indian Musalmans*)—keeping them out of the administration, and of the medical, legal, and other such professions, and in general not educating them—was clearly a policy affecting the upper and the potentially middle classes. It was at this time that the clerical and professional classes among the

³⁹ Guha, Ranajit. "Dominance Without Hegemony and its Historiography" in *Subaltern Studies VI* R. Guha, ed. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989.

⁴⁰ For example, see Fernandes, Leela. "Nationalizing the global': media images, cultural politics and the middle class in India." *Media, Culture & Society* 22, no. 5 (2000): 611-628 and Jaffrelot, Christophe, and Peter van der Veer, eds. *Patterns of middle class consumption in India and China*. SAGE Publications India, 2008.

Hindus were developing, and beginning to wield some power. The British were afraid to allow that same power to the Muslims, whose upper classes, as the Mutiny supposedly showed, already wielded more power than was comfortable for the foreigner. More specifically, they were afraid to allow that power to both groups at the same time.....Communalism would not have proved so affective a divisive force, nor could the upper-class Muslims have been so effectively repressed, had the Muslim and Hindu sections of the classes concerned been at the same economic level. But they were not. Economic development within the British imperialist system benefitted a group of Indian of whom a far larger proportion were Hindus than Muslims. The Indian bourgeoisie still to-day is predominantly composed of Hindus (and others; e.g. Parsis); its Muslim members are relatively few, and, taken collectively, poor.⁴¹

Smith's work echoes the claims made by the Cambridge historians of colonial India in the widely contested theory of Indian factions, which posits the colonial state and the Indian elites in a patron-client relation, such that the former actively pursued policies that comparatively evaluated and bestowed political favours on different communities in India.⁴² In this version of India's colonial history, the techniques and the institutions of competitive popular politics introduced by Britain, knowingly or unknowingly, cultivated a loyal middle-class that was well-versed in the language and aspirations of liberal politics but also sowed the seeds of communalism. The

⁴¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis*, (Lahore: Ripon Printing Press, 1943), 191.

⁴² The foremost proponents of this theory were Anil Seal (see Seal, Anil. *The emergence of Indian nationalism: Competition and collaboration in the later nineteenth century*. Vol. 1. CUP Archive, 1971) and Eugene Irschick (see Irschick, Eugene F. *Politics and social conflict in South India: The non-Brahman movement and Tamil separatism, 1916-1929*. No. 3. Univ of California Press, 1969). For a critique of this position, see the early works of the Subaltern Collective, especially Guha's early work. For instance, see Guha, Ranajit, (1982): 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India' in Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Vol I. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

emergence of the Europeanized middle class as collaborators of the colonial state was a result of the cultural, economic and political influences of the Empire.

The benchmarks that Smith expects a population group to attain in order to be counted among the bourgeoisie or the middle class are the adoption of secular (Western) education and liberal professions such as law, medicine, and administration. His examination of the political mobilization of the middle class hints, especially in the run-up to the Khilafat Movement, at a striking increase in the number of poets, journalists, and writers who took to expressing their anxieties and aspirations about an Islamic polity, its place in the global Empire, and its spiritual core and leadership. However, this engagement with the public spaces and discourses does not interest Smith much, whose primary goal is to highlight the lurching of the Muslim middle class from liberal to progressive and finally to a reactionary standpoint in response to the colonial state's political and economic regime.

A dissatisfaction with the methods and politics of the historiography that conflates "the biography of the coercive colonial state and its Indian elite collaborators as the history of colonial India"⁴³ encouraged modes of history writing that focused on archives and institutions where colonial rule was negotiated, challenged, and resisted. An increased emphasis on the participation of educated Indians in print

⁴³ Pandian, M. S. S. "Beyond Colonial Crumbs: Cambridge School, Identity Politics and Dravidian Movement(s)." *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 7/8 (1995): 385-91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4402414>.

and publication and the manner in which they shaped public discourses was seen as evidence of their ability to carve out spheres of autonomy within the colonial regime. Historian Sanjay Joshi's work on the middle class in Lucknow is in this vein. In his monograph *Fractured Modernity*, Joshi argues that the ability of the members of the middle class to shape and dominate the public sphere makes them "cultural entrepreneurs", providing them "ascendance in the social and political life of the country."⁴⁴ Joshi's strongest intervention lies in the claim that an absence of industrial economy in colonial India did not prevent the emergence of the middle class. Pushing back against scholarship that denies the presence of an authentic middle class in India due to conditions of political and economic colonialism, Joshi defines the formation of the middle class as a cultural project that took shape in the public sphere. The public sphere is where the middle class found its voice. It is where the social and moral values of this class were debated and fine-tuned. While Joshi's deflation of the thesis of the ideal-typical middle class that haunts the study of middling groups outside Europe is welcome, his conflation of the public sphere with the activities of the Western-educated liberal professionals is less so. If we cease to see public discourses as instruments of liberal-nationalist machinations overridden by the ambitions of English-educated elites that deployed convenient, even if contradictory, religious and gender ideologies, we open up the space to understand the emerging middle-class as a highly diverse category that barely came

⁴⁴ Joshi, Sanjay. *Fractured Modernity: Making of the Middle Class in Colonial North India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, 6-8.

together as a group. It is correct that the common glue that held the middle class together in colonial India was not so much the group's distinct position vis-à-vis the means of economic production. Instead, it lay in its certain belief that with respect to its source of livelihood, its consumption of goods and cultural artefacts, its moral outlook, and its fraught relation with respectability, it was a group disassociated from the moldy aristocracy and the bawdy lower classes.⁴⁵

It is important to remember that the desire to be included among the middle class in this period was also a desire to be seen as disciplined, cultured, educated and financially-solvent. To this extent, the middle class was a social category that coalesced around shared discourses of propriety and piety. It, however, was not a homogenous category, and the families and individuals that claimed to belong to the middle class showed immense diversity in terms of their relationship to the means

⁴⁵ Newspapers columns, government petitions, and novels from this period routinely criticize the colonial state for encouraging lower caste families to enroll their children in schools. The starkest instance of the fear of the immorality of the upwardly mobile lower castes was a steady campaign in the vernacular newspapers between the years 1878 and 1879 in response to the government's efforts to enroll the sons and daughters of dancing girls in government-aided schools. When asked to submit their opinion on the matter, the respectable newspapers such as *Kashi Patrika*, *Shole I Tur*, *Agra Akhbar*, *Avadh Akhbar* and *Almora Akhbar* asked that the children of dancing girls be sent to separate schools. While they praised the government for wanting to pull the children out of the depraved environment, they feared that the conduct of girls from respectable family would be adversely influenced in the company of the daughters of the dancing girls. It is interesting that the middle-class morality underpinning the reformist project ensured that the government's proposition received nothing but praise in the newspaper columns. This contrasts with their blanket reservation against providing liberal education to children belonging to respectable occupational castes such as oil pressers, vegetable vendors, butchers, etc. At the other end of the spectrum was the vitriol against the royal families ruling the princely states that was also regularly printed in the vernacular newspapers, giving voice to the sentiment that the native rulers were lazy, uneducated, irresponsible and flamboyant. Some columnists urged the colonial government to appoint private teachers that would ingrain a sense of discipline and responsibility in them at an early age, while some others wanted their stipend to be released in small installments to curb wastefulness. For details, see the vernacular newspaper collection in the UP state archives. Vol 12, 1879, pages 108, 109, 149, 170, 208, 247, 248, 274, and 275.

of economic production as well as social status, with the latter having only a tenuous connection to the former. More importantly, the aspiration to be counted as a member of the reformed middle class was shared by a demographic far larger than that which could be identified as having attained middle class-ness, as is apparent from the numerous studies on caste associations and social mobility in colonial India.⁴⁶ Any critique that views the reformist project as a result of the status anxiety of a miniscule elite population does not take into account the aspirational pull of the reformist discourse, especially among the newly-emerging service class.

On the one hand, the category of middle class included men like Nazir Ahmad, who hailed from an economically weak but upper caste background.⁴⁷ It also included men like Mirza Hadi Ruswa (d. 1931) whose family had served in the royal armies in pre-colonial north India. Ruswa was the first man in his family to enroll in higher education and work as an engineer and writer.⁴⁸ The group would include countless men like Ruswa who, in all likelihood, were the first members in their family to take up government employment. It would include the disciples of Maulana Thanawi, who sought his *fatwa* on a postcard through the newly-launched mail service. Or merchants who had the economic and social resources to provide boarding and

⁴⁶ For example, see Osella, Filippo, and Caroline Osella. "From transience to immanence: consumption, life-cycle and social mobility in Kerala, South India." *Modern Asian Studies* 33, no. 04 (1999): 989-1020, Säävälä, Minna. "Low caste but middle-class: Some religious strategies for middle-class identification in Hyderabad." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 35, no. 3 (2001): 293-318, and Sheth, D. L. "Secularisation of caste and making of new middle class." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1999): 2502-2510.

⁴⁷ Beg, Farhatullah Mirza. *Nazir Ahmad: In his Own Words and Mine*. Translated by Mohammed Zakir. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009.

⁴⁸ Dr Adam Shaikh, *Mirza Ruswa: Hayat aur Novel Nigari*, (Lucknow: Naseem Book Depot), 1968.

lodging to a pious Muslim woman (preferably divorced) who would educate his daughters in the basics of *deen* and *duniya* (the sacred and the mundane). Along with their wives and children, many of these men lived away from home and were deeply invested in fashioning a pious subjectivity whose economic and cultural coordinates were informed by reformist discourses.

How does one work around the problem of analyzing a social group that comes into being discursively, one that identifies itself as a class distinct from other classes, but whose members do not share an equal or even similar access to economic resources? Margrit Pernau approaches this problem heads-on in the introduction of *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi*. Pernau compares the German legal and social category of *Burgertum* with the British conception of the middle class to claim that the former, with its emphasis on “education—both formal academic credentials and, even more importantly, self-education, the ennoblement of one’s soul through familiarity with culture, poetry, music, and art” was a better social category to describe the *Ashraf* of north India.⁴⁹ Legal changes in Germany in the nineteenth century ensured that *Burgertum* could no longer be defined solely as an economic category, making room for its expansion and diversification into a broader social category. But the English category of the middle classes, since the eighteenth century, was more solidly centred on merchants and

⁴⁹ Pernau, Margrit. *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013, p xxviii.

traders as opposed to the liberal professionals, leading to a more entrenched tradition of an economic-based view of class, according to Pernau.

Closer home, in his analysis of a social category that shares with the *Burgertum* a preoccupation with education and personal ennoblement, namely, the *bhadralok* of Bengal, John McGuire offers a quantitative reading of the class complexity of the region's elite. McGuire sifts through immense data about key *bhadralok* institutions such as the university, the printing press, and the voluntary associations and political lobbies to argue that the conditions of colonialism arrested the transformation of the *bhadralok* into a true capitalist class. However, it did give rise to a secondary rentier class and a middle class. While McGuire does not invest the colonial structures with the totalizing powers imagined by Wilfred Smith, he does claim that the appearance of bourgeois values masked the "ideological essence of the power relationships which shaped colonial society".⁵⁰ The middle class, for McGuire, inhabited a position of fundamental contradiction, at least until they developed a relationship of opposition to British capital towards the end of the century.

The most significant contribution of McGuire's work is the systematic compilation of sociological data that demonstrates the economic and social diversity of the *bhadralok*. A comparative database for the north Indian *Ashraf* community would be an excellent tool for historians of this region, though the sheer size of the

⁵⁰ John McGuire, *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadrakok in Calcutta, 1857-1885*, (Canberra: Australian National University, 1983), 120-121.

demographic group that called itself *Ashraf* would make this task considerably harder. In this dissertation, I have approached the decennial Census data collected and compiled by the colonial state, to get a sociological window into the transformation of the household size at the turn of the century.

Sociologists more or less agree that a nuclear family is made up of one married couple and the couple's unmarried children. The presence of another married couple can transform the nuclear family into a lineal joint family if the second couple is the parent of either spouse, typically the parent of the husband. It transforms into a lateral joint family if the second couple is the brother and sister-in-law of the husband. However, the presence of a single parent, for instance, the widowed mother, renders the family somewhere between a nuclear and joint family.

Disciplinary and ideological differences between scholars have ensured that there is no agreement about the essential features of a joint or extended family. While most scholars would agree that co-residence or commensality, marked by a common kitchen, is an important identifier, others like A.M. Shah argue that two households can live under different roofs and still be counted as a single family as long as they manage joint property and come together for rituals and festivals.⁵¹ However, what Shah calls a joint family is more widely known as the coparsenary family.

The sheer diversity of the living arrangement across regions, ecological zones, castes, occupations, and class in colonial India was apparent in the baffled

⁵¹ Shah, A. M. "Changes in the Indian Family: An Examination of Some Assumptions." *Economic and Political Weekly* 3, no. 1/2 (1968): 127-34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4358128>.

comments from the returning census officers. Successive censuses did get better at capturing some of the lived complexities and diversities of colonial India, allowing the mammoth surveys to make a few unqualified claims: for instance, the household size among the subsistence classes was smaller than the size of the affluent households of merchants and traders. Urban areas of industrial production such as Bombay and Calcutta saw extremely crowded living arrangements, often in the form of sub-nuclear families or families that did not include a single married couple, and the average household size in colonial India was shrinking.

According to the 1911 Census, the average size of the household in the United Provinces was 4.6, down from 5.5 in 1891. The establishment of nuclear or conjugal households has been seen as a development concomitant to industrialization. This theory is based on the corollary that preindustrialized economies and societies were better suited for large, intergenerational households.⁵² In view of this theory, the figure of 4.6 members per household for north India in 1911 is significant because it is close to England's steady average of 4.75 members per household between the late sixteenth to the early years of the twentieth century.⁵³ This would suggest that in England, which was the heart of the Industrial Revolution, and in its underindustrialized colony, the household size was small even before the onset of industrialization. While industrialization, and the migration and urbanization that

⁵² Parsons, Talcott. *Social system*. Routledge, 2013.

⁵³ Laslett, Peter. "The comparative history of household and family." *Journal of social history* (1970): 75-87.

follow in its wake, may impact the size and structure of households, it is not the only factor.

The practice of systematically collecting data about the size and forms of households in South Asia came into force only with the institution of census in the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ We do not have sociological data about non-elite households for the period before mid-nineteenth century. However, a series of surveys and studies in post-independence India do confirm the trend towards smaller family sizes, not just in towns and cities but also in the countryside. These studies analyze the impact of changes in land-holding patterns, rise or fall in agricultural income, better educational and professional opportunities, and the rise of individualism, among other factors, that sustain the general trend towards smaller household size.⁵⁵

The life events of the historical actors who animate this dissertation bear out the sociological claims about the importance of education and employment in determining the family size among the middle classes. Women like Sheherbanu Begum (d. 1933), the mother of Pakistani author and diplomat Shaista Suhrawardy, Attia Hossain (d. 1998) and Ismat Chughtai moved from complex to smaller

⁵⁴ For an overview of the field, see Premila D'Cruz and Shalini Bharat's "Beyond Joint and Nuclear: The Indian Family Revisited." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* (2001).

⁵⁵ Singh, J.P. "Nuclearisation of Household and Family in Urban India." *Sociological Bulletin* 52, no. 1 (2003): 53-70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23620301>. Also see Owens, Raymond. "Industrialization and the Indian Joint Family." *Ethnology* 10, no. 2 (1971): 223-50 and Patel, Narsi. "Family Dispersal Among Indian Immigrants." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 2, no. 2 (1972): 168-78.

households comprising single conjugal units in the pursuit of employment and a better life. It is these households that form the heart of this study.

In focusing on the household, as opposed to the family, I seek to circumvent the problem of defining the 4.6 persons who live in the house as members of a joint or nuclear family. More importantly, the broad category of household allows me to take into account the domestic institution in all its economic, emotional, sexual, social, religious, and political complexities. It makes room for analyzing the ties among the members of the family, but also the relations of the family with the servants, with the markets and shops, and with the religious specialists and their sermons. In so doing, I hope to bring to light a household that was an important site for the public construction of piety.

Chapter 1: The House, the Household, and Personal Piety

The first chapter sets the stage for chapters 2 to 4 by charting the relationship of the emerging middle class with the ancestral house. Through a close reading of novels, colonial census reports, memoirs, and family trees, the chapter suggests that in the fight against tradition the ancestral home—majestic but dilapidated—came to symbolize the unsustainability and vanity of the elite lifestyle. The success of the middle class was predicated not only on breaking away from the traditional joint family household, but also leaving the ancestral home behind. Even as census officials were documenting the real and imagined features of the Indian joint family,

an increasing number of men were leaving the family home to work in faraway places. These men were bureaucrats, government servants, postal and railway clerks, lawyers and journalists, surgeons and doctors, tehsildars and police officers, and engineers and education inspectors, among others. They were the modern citizens of an aspiring nation who came together to form voluntary associations. They participated in the creation and consumption of new cultural artefacts such as novels, magazines, the newspapers, theatre, and cinema.

While several studies of the household and political mobilization in this period have focused on the reformulation of religion and its instrumental deployment in the service of representative politics, this chapter argues that an examination of piety provides a better lens to the shifting relationship between the household, community, and religion in the nineteenth and twentieth century in colonial north India. Traditional piety was recognizable in a family's patronage of religious festivals, its contribution toward the upkeep of the shrines of local saints, or in its decision to help a poor relation, but modern piety displayed a different set of markers. It found its best expression through the relation between the husband and the wife.

Chapter 2: Piety and Conjuality

This chapter charts the history of the rise in the popularity of a man with a government job. At a time when old money was disappearing in repaying money-

lenders and fighting court cases, the hard-working man who earned a steady monthly salary could hold a higher moral ground. As more and more men settled away from home, their wives followed them to the new towns to set up households that were out of the controlling reach of parents and parents-in-law. However, the relocation also meant displacement from entrenched networks of spiritual and monetary security. The sermons of Maulana Thanawi as well as women's writings from this period reveal deep anxieties about the unravelling of the older systems of affect and economy. Reformist literature from the 1860s onwards touches on this theme in varying degrees. Underlying such writings is the acknowledgement, and sometimes even celebration, of the flight of the man away from his hometown.

This paper will read texts such as *Beheshti Zewar*, *Fawaid us Sohbat* (a sermon by Maulana Thanawi) and the essays and letters printed in women's magazines to suggest that they foreshadow the emergence of a mode of conjugality and piety that was better suited to handle the stresses of the emerging salaried class. It was a modality that allowed educated men and women living in far-flung towns to gain social status by participating in the spiritual economy of religious merit (*sawaab*) as opposed to material reciprocity that was the hallmark of the landed aristocracy. More importantly, it replaced the pious wife as an ideal companion for a pious man, undermining the role of spiritual master in the reformed household.

Chapter 3: Piety and Purdah

The third chapter is a close analysis of the family tree of the famous clan of *ulema* from Kandhla in western Uttar Pradesh, the family of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewi (d.1944), the founder of Tablighi Jamaat. In looking for evidence of marriage outside the extended family, this chapter argues that marriages were contracted outside the clan as far back as the family tree reaches in time and as late as the nineteenth century. But the twentieth-century discourse about piety and purity of descent erased that history in order to create a narrative of a lineage free of imperfect pieties. The narrative of the unblemished family tree intersected with that of the hard-to-follow *purdah* arrangements of elite family's women in the practice of choosing brides only from the close family circle. While the women of respectable families were not to be seen outside the *zenana*, the form of strict endogamy practiced by the families of *ulema* sought to ensure that no woman from outside the family would ever see the inside of their *zenana*, especially their unmarried girls. Apart from creating tight endogamous units that shunned alliances with the Mughals, Pathans and Muslims of South Asian origin, this coupling of piety with *purdah* in the nineteenth century allowed the *ulema* to distinguish themselves as first among equals with respect to other Syeds and Shaikhs.

Chapter 4: Piety and Fidelity

The history of the household reform in South Asia traces the emergence of companionate conjugality to the nineteenth century when it found articulation in novels, magazines, and court verdicts. In the north Indian context, writers like Nazir Ahmad, Rashid ul Khairi and Maulana Thanawi became the foremost proponents of the ideal household, in which female fidelity was the fulcrum on which the idea of companionate conjugality rested. A model wife was expected to look past her husband's infidelities and misdemeanours. Guided by her faith and noble upbringing, she knew that he would eventually mend his ways and return to her, if only on her deathbed.

While it is true that reformist texts shamed errant men and gave hope to the women who had been wronged, this chapter highlights the legal and economic structures favoured by reform that made fidelity the only practical option for women. Islamic legal texts and biographic materials of the period show how the men who expounded the virtues of the woman who never left the side of an abusive husband, also issued *fatawa* asking an abandoned wife to wait for her missing husband till he had reached the age of ninety. This chapter argues that the valorization of the piety and fidelity of the South Asian woman, often in comparison to the "unmanageable" Bedouin women of Hijaz, naturalized the legal and economic dependence of women on the male guardian in colonial India.

CHAPTER 1: THE HOUSE, THE HOUSEHOLD AND PERSONAL PIETY

As an intellectual movement that spanned the nineteenth and twentieth century and found articulation across religious sects and denominations, it is impossible, and even unwise, to see reformism in colonial South Asia as a unified, homogenous ideology. The reformist agenda of somebody like Nazir Ahmad, a popular novelist who hailed from a humble family of *imams* (men who lead congregational prayers in mosques), was fundamentally different from the goals of a scholar like Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, who belonged to a landed family of good standing in the *qasaba* town of Thana Bhawan in western United Provinces. If we are to stay with the idea that the reformers were invested in the crystallization of the Indian middle class, it has to be admitted that the relationship of this nascent economic class with the means of production was as varied as the various hues of reform. The myriad studies of the middle class as a cultural force that shaped and took shape in the colonial public sphere signals to the difficulty in identifying the class location of this group vis-à-vis economic production.⁵⁶ However, if it is near impossible to assign a clear source of economic position to the middle class in north India during the period of this study, it is much less difficult to find commonalities about spending and consumption in reformist discourses that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth century. It can be safely said that the reformist movements were united in

⁵⁶ Sanjay Joshi (ed), *The Middle Class in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 2010.

their obsession about economic austerity, and, to that extent, in their approach to thrift, consumption and material possession.

The most iconic and ideologically loaded item of possession in reformist discussions and fiction was the house, in particular the ancestral house. The ancestral house was more than just a built space that was inhabited by people. It was a physical manifestation of the owner's illustrious lineage. An evidence of the hard work put in by the previous generations. In literature and memoirs it was often anthropomorphized, especially by the women who would have spent substantial time of their life in the *zenana* quarters. Attia Hosain's 1961 novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is as much a story of a family caught in the crossfire of colonialism and nationalism as it is about the protagonist Laila's navigation of *Aashiyana*, the grand family home in Lucknow. The house, with its interplay of light and shadow, warmth and suffocation, plays an important role in the narrative of the novel. Following the 1947 Partition, *Aashiyana* loses its salience as the residence of the *talukdar*⁵⁷. Its rundown and dilapidated condition in the denouement of the novel can be seen as Hosain's commentary on the status of the Muslim political elite in India after 1947.

⁵⁷ Taluqdars (also spelt as talukdars) were influential landlords under Mughal and British regime. Apart from being responsible for revenue collection, they also had minor jurisdiction over criminal suits. For a brief history of the role of this group in the political landscape of colonial north India, see Francis Robinson's *Separatism Among Indian Muslims* (1993) and David Lelyveld's *Aligarh's First Generation* (1978, 1996).

The most heart-wrenching description of the centrality of the ancestral home in a family's narrative of itself can be found in Ismat Chughtai's unpublished short story *Garam Hawa* (The Scorching Winds) that was made into a film in 1973 by Mysore Shrinivas Sathyu. It is the story of Saeed Mirza, an Agra-based Muslim businessman, and the emotional, economic, legal, and political tumult his family faces in the aftermath of the Partition. Members of the Mirza family become refugees in the city of their origin when they lose the ancestral home in the new regime due to a legal technicality. When the time comes to move out of the house the aging matriarch, Saeed Mirza's mother, locks herself in the innermost store room of the house. She prefers to die alone in the house where she has lived her entire life instead of moving to a rented apartment. She has to be physically carried out of the house and the space she knows best by her son.⁵⁸

In the hands of a careless heir, the ancestral house was the final asset that could be pawned to put food on the table and to ward off money lenders. After the family gold and heirlooms had been sold, the ancestral home was also sold to the *bania* as the final bulwark against the public shame of financial insolvency. The auction of the family home, or the specter of losing the house, is a fairly well-established motif in didactic literature from colonial north India. It is the humiliating blow that finally alerts the protagonist to the merits of economic and religious reform. The reformed

⁵⁸ It can be argued that in contrast with the writings of men that usually focused on the history of the *qasaba* or lineage history, women have often re-created their immediate surrounding—the house, the *zenana* quarters—in their writings. However, their writing, both fiction and non-fiction, is not devoid of the political context and criticism, as is evidenced in the oeuvres of Attia Hosain, Ismat Chughtai and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain.

household that emerges on the other side of the public auction of the ancestral home is leaner, fiscally fit and infused with austere piety. The head of the household is a government servant with a modest but stable income. The management of the household expenses is in the hands of the hard-working, thrifty, and pious daughter or daughter-in-law. There are barely any servants in the picture. The family has endorsed saving as the new motto and embraced Allah as the sole benefactor. In *Mirat ul Uroos*, the daughter-in-law Asghari takes over the reins of the household amid panic generated by the rumor that the money-lender (the *mahajan*) has procured a court summon to auction the house in order to recover the debt repayment that the family had defaulted on. Asghari ropes in her father-in-law to conduct an inquiry and finds out that the threat of court summon was a mischief spun by the family cook, Mama Azmat. She also uncovers the financial misdealing through which Mama Azmat was siphoning family money and using it to run her daughter's house. The inquiry results in the sacking of Mama Azmat, which automatically frees up enough family money to start paying back the money-lenders. In this case, the auction of the house is averted but the old family servant is cast by the wayside. The new household, under the helm of Asghari, is reformed both economically and religiously. The religious reform, in fact, facilitates and reinforces the economic turnaround of the family.

The family of Mushrika, the protagonist of Rashid ul Khairi's *Toofan e Hayat* (The Storm of Life, 1902-07), is not so lucky. The family is pushed into penury and

bankruptcy by Mushrika's mother, who is beholden to ill-founded religious beliefs and superstitions. Her father, Inam, starts off as a good Muslim but eventually his voice of reason is drowned by the clamor of his wife, his mother-in-law and his wife's Sufi *pir*. Every festival and every superstitious ritual drags the family further into debt until finally the ancestral home has to be mortgaged. A family friend, the pious Bade Miyan (an Old / Wise Man) helps the family move into a small house. He also finds employment for Inam and takes Mushrika under his wings. He trains her in the twin reformist virtues: household budgeting and piety. Mushrika's hard work pays off and the family gets the home back, but in the reformed household the control of the purse and kitchen is firmly in the hands of Mushrika. Inam's wife is reduced to the status of a juvenile. Her mother is no longer a frequent visitor and the *pir* is never to be seen again. The new regime of austerity and piety of the reformed household meant that when the family lost its ancestral home, it also shed the corrupt, aristocratic lifestyle that was built on conspicuous consumption, flamboyancy, religious ignorance and superstition. In sharp contrast, members of the reformed household were rational and their religious values did not clash with the discourse of science and hygiene, technology and modernity, and government employment and self-control.

The reformed house as the physical loci of rational piety is illustrated most dramatically in Mirza Hadi Ruswa's *Shareef Zada* (The Man of Good Family, 1900), which recounts the spectacular success of Abid Hussain, who comes from a humble

family of soldiers, but achieves the status of a *shareef* citizen through hard-work and correct morals. Abid Hussain's father receives a monthly stipend of ten rupees from the Nawab of Lucknow, but his sudden death puts an end to this steady source of income and the family is forced to sell jewellery and expensive heirlooms. Meanwhile, Abid Hussain prepares for the matriculation exam. Tragedy strikes again and his mother's death right before the day of the exam forces Abid Hussain to abandon his dream of becoming an engineer for the time being. In a bold move, Abid Hussain mortgages his house to an upstart vegetable vendor and moves to a rented apartment. Eventually, through sheer hard work, honesty and ambition, Abid Hussain witnesses dazzling success, first as a junior engineer, then as a supervisor, and finally as a researcher and scholar. He moves out of the inner city of Lucknow, which, to him, was a den of vices, and moved to his farm outside the city where he could experiment, read and engage in physical labour. The importance of the physical distancing from the old life in order to start anew is evident in Ruswa's claim that appropriate and encouraging social environment (*mahaul*) was important for a person to succeed.⁵⁹ He then proceeds to inform the reader that Abid Hussain's ancestors were uncouth, uneducated soldiers. His father had learnt a little Persian and was keen to educate his son. The true potential for social mobility was unlocked only when Abid Hussain left his old neighborhood in which men wasted precious time and resources in pointless pursuits. Ruswa lists a number of childhood friends of Abid Hussain, who had grown up to be wastrels:

⁵⁹ Mirza Hadi Ruswa, *Shareef Zada* (New Delhi: Taraqqi e Urdu Board), 28.

Most houses in the neighborhood belonged to the community of palanquin bearers. One of their sons, Durga, studied and became the chief palanquin carrier at Sarfaraz Mahal....Mirza's (Abid Hussain) childhood friend Fida Ali had taken up pigeon breeding and baiting. Once he raised a flock of hundred pigeons and flew them all the way up to Nawaz Ganj. They returned with fifteen pigeons of Qurban Ali, who is a master in this sport. While Abid Hussain studied to become an engineer, Fida Ali was appointed a pigeon fancier in the court of Shahenshah Mirza. When Abid Hussain returned home with pension, Fida Ali had quit his job and was flying pigeons, quails, etc. A family of Nawabs was also among the neighbours of Abid Hussain. Their son became an expert in making *chandu* (opium)...Among other friends of Abid Hussain was a body-builder named Ali Hussain. He was very fond of exercising and body-building. His physical strength was unmatched and he was feared by one and all, from Nakhas to Sa'adat Ganj, and from Sa'adat Ganj to Aminabad. Mirza Baqar Hussain, the father of Abid Hussain, had a friend who was a poet...His son Tasadduq Hussain was a classmate of Abid Hussain. He did not make much progress in his education, but at the age of fourteen he became a poet and used *Wehshat* / Restless as his nome de plume (*takhallus*).⁶⁰

In short, there wasn't a single social vice and unproductive occupation that was not represented in Abid Hussain's old neighbourhood. In contrast, Ruswa describes his protagonist as a follower of nobler pursuits and hobbies. Abid Hussain is well-versed in Persian but he abhors poetry. He has no interest in "reading poetry and in drinking endless cups of tea. He did not rejoice the puffs of hookah, or listening to tales of fantasy, and he found the tradition of debates (*muqaddama*) and long-winded conversations pointless and uninteresting".⁶¹ It was clear that Abid Hussain was a misfit in his neighborhood. Unlike the *Ashraf* protagonists of *Mirat ul Uroos* and *Toofan e Hayat*, Abid Hussain does not pine for his mortgaged house. Neither does he see his shift to a rented apartment as a blot on family honor. In fact, what is

⁶⁰ Ibid, 28-29.

⁶¹ Ibid, 29.

singularly missing in Ruswa's treatment of the struggles and triumphs of Abid Hussain is a discussion of his noble lineage, because Abid Hussain does not have one. This, however, does not stop him from achieving remarkable success and social status.

When the time comes to find a wife for his son, Abid Hussain chooses a minor girl, Sakina, who is an heiress to a plot of land that falls under *nazul* regulations.⁶² Abid Hussain is interested in buying the land but *nazul* regulations prevent him from finalizing the deal. He resolves the situation by arranging the marriage between his son, Ahmad Ali, and Sakina, who, at this point, is ten years old and is under the guardianship of her uncle. In a move similar to Rousseau's *Emile*, Abid Hussain and his wife take Sakina under their care and raise her in preparation for her impending marriage with their son. By choosing a daughter-in-law who is a legal minor, who is an orphan, but owns property, Abid Hussain reinforces the economic stability of his family and simultaneously neutralizes any challenge that could have emerged to his authority from Sakina or her biological family. In fact, Ruswa informs the reader that Sakina's entry into the household at a young, impressionable age ensured that she could be molded to the ways of her affine family.

Miles away from the narrow, poorly-lit lanes of the old city, Abid Hussain—
ensconced in his farm that is equipped with a chemistry laboratory, a botanical garden, an observatory to study the changing weather patterns, an animal stable, a

⁶² Nazul property is land that is vested in the government or state administration for the purposes of its development or sale.

water pond surrounded by scientific models of mountains—is the new *Ashraf*. He is rational, interested in the sciences and full of disdain for unproductive activities like poetry and debates. He is hard-working; Ruswa informs the reader that Abid Hussain toiled in the fields without any sense of shame. Even the men he hires are remarkable in their willingness to engage in physical labour. Most importantly, he is not held back by a line of debt-ridden, slothful and spoilt ancestors. His migration out of the city is significant because the geographical distance thus created paves the way for Abid Hussain's intellectual, spiritual and genealogical progress.

The goal of *Shareef Zada* is to suggest that the new regime had opened up possibilities of rapid social mobility for members of the occupational classes. In Abid Hussain, Ruswa creates a young, self-made patriarch unencumbered by family, friends, traditions, and customs. The only meaningful personal relation he has is with his wife Ruqaiya Begum. The couple has a son and a daughter. The son studies to be an engineer and the daughter is married to an engineer. The daughter-in-law, when she joins the family, seamlessly replaces the daughter, who remains unnamed in the novel. Ruswa is not interested in the narrative of Abid Hussain's son and daughter-in-law. As a young couple, Ahmad Ali and Sakina stay in the care and guardianship of Abid Hussain and his wife. The text does not delve into how a domestic and economic enterprise so closely aligned with the intellectual proclivities of the patriarch survives the stresses and pressures of a generational change.

Neither marriage and parenthood nor employment leads to a clear transition to adulthood for the younger generation in this joint family. A person's status in a large, multi-generational household depends on a complex matrix that takes into account her age, gender, physical and economic capabilities, her relationship with the patriarch and matriarch of the family, her ability to rally other members around her cause, and her rapport with the household servants. However, the reformed domestic and intellectual empire of Abid Hussain is nothing like the grand household that is broadly defined as the joint family in sociological and historical scholarships on South Asia.⁶³ In this respect, it is closer to the vision of the ideal household articulated by the reformist authors discussed above. It is a socially sanitized space that has no room for caste and class diversity. It is intolerant of heterodox religious practice because they are inauthentic innovations to Islam. The *zenana* quarters of the reformed households are no longer crowded spaces of female socialization. Instead, they are isolated sites of hyper-productivity where women of the family skillfully balance the grueling tasks of house-keeping with the demands of reformist piety.

In comparison with the sparse, solemn, and streamlined households of reformist fiction, the large extended family of the protagonist of *Twilight in Delhi* appears chaotic and unwieldy. The novel, authored by Ahmed Ali and published in 1940, has

⁶³ See Schlesinger, Ben. "The Changing Patterns in the Hindu Joint Family System of India." *Marriage and Family Living* 23, no. 2 (1961): 170-75. Also, Conklin, George H. "The Influence of Economic Development on Patterns of Conjugal Power and Extended Family Residence in India." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 19, no. 2 (1988): 187-205.

been widely applauded for capturing the cultural and political decline of Mughal Delhi.⁶⁴ Set in the early twentieth century, the novel closely follows the gradual unraveling of the world of its protagonist, Mir Nihal. The decline of Delhi and the social status of Mir Nihal's family mirror each other: as the walls of the inner city of Delhi are razed in 1911 to make way for King George's coronation, Mir Nihal's life—as he knows it—is coming to an end. His mistress is dead, he has lost his pet pigeons in a series of calamities, he suffers from a crippling stroke and his youngest son marries beneath class.

Apart from his wife (Begum Nihal) and five children, Mir Nihal's household includes a widowed sister-in-law, a grand daughter-in-law, and nephews and their wives. Supplementing this network of kin and affine relationships are servants, who have had lifelong relationships with the family. There is Dilchain, who works in the *zenana*. She is about the same age as Begum Nihal and at some point in the past has had a sexual relationship with Mir Nihal; the outcome of the relationship was a stillborn child. Ghafoor helps Mir Nihal with chores outside the *zenana*, and Nazir helps him train the pigeons. The author suggests that Mir Nihal is the guardian, even if a reluctant one, of Ghafoor when one Sheikh Mohammad Sadiq requests Mir Nihal to accept his young niece as a bride for Ghafoor. Mir Nihal's income also supports the household of Babban Jan, his mistress, who lives with her mother in the inner city. One of the most moving sections of the novel is the death of Babban Jan. It

⁶⁴ Ahmed Ali, *Twilight in Delhi* (New York: New Directions Publishing), 1994.

triggers Mir Nihal's eventual withdrawal from economic, domestic and social obligations.

Mir Nihal's household is as far removed from the reformist ideals as possible. If the fictional universes of Nazir Ahmad and Ahmad Ali were to collide and if we could speculate how Asghari, Nazir Ahmad's zealous reformer par excellence, would go about setting Mir Nihal's house in order, it would reveal the actual scale of the reconfiguration of the economic, social and affective relations that the reformist project was predicated on. The household that Asghari marries into comprises but four people, including her husband. Her mother-in-law is a credulous old woman who is entirely dependent on the dishonest servant, Mama Azmat, to run the house. She acquiesces to Asghari's authority at the first given opportunity. Mahmooda, her sister-in-law, is also quick to affirm her loyalty. In fact, she becomes the eyes and ears of Asghari in the new household, reporting all the conversations between her mother and Mama Azmat to Asghari. Her father-in-law is a discerning and sensible man, but he is in residence at a court in Lahore. Her husband Mohammad Kamil is lazy and irresponsible, but Asghari carefully guides him and trains him to find government employment. In short, Asghari's reformist project meets no resistance in her affine household. However, a similar success in Mir Nihal's household would be much more difficult to attain. To begin with, the word of Mir Nihal, as the patriarch, carries greater authority compared to Asghari's father-in-law. This is not to suggest that the women in Mir Nihal's household did not have a say in any matter.

On the contrary, Ahmad Ali deftly describes the series of events and conversations through which Mir Nihal's wife Begum Nihal fixes the marriage of their youngest son against the wishes of her husband. This balance between the formal authority of Mir Nihal and the substantive powers of Begum Nihal is only one of the many axes along which the economic and affective balance of the household rests. Mir Nihal, more than anybody else, is aware of this, as it is revealed to the reader during the episode when his deceased brother's wife, Begum Jamal, threatens to leave the house following a minor squabble, causing much distress to Mir Nihal. Begum Nihal, Begum Jamal, and Dilchain are the key figures in the *zenana*, who possess disciplining powers over the daughters and the daughters-in-law. The male servants Ghafoor and Nazir are also constant fixtures of the household, along with a steady stream of *qalandars* and *fakirs* who interact with the women in the *zenana* through intermediaries, usually servants and children.

The shared, multi-focal and constantly shifting nature of authority in the household means that a heavy-handed intervention like Asghari's in *Mirat ul Uroos* would run into obstacles. As a young and newest member of the *zenana* she would have little clout, making it impossible for her to isolate a veteran like Dilchain or seize control of the family accounts. It is also difficult to imagine how she would convince Mir Nihal, and his sons, to find gainful employment, end relations with courtesans, stop flying pigeons and desist from reading and citing romantic poetry.

In other words, in being non-receptive to the forces of reform, the household of Mir Nihal is unlike the idealized households imagined by reformist writers. It is, however, remarkably similar to the descriptions of the nineteenth and twentieth century domestic spaces in north India offered by historian David Lelyveld, who writes about the “rambling network of courtyards and rooftops” that had a great variety of kin and non-kin people coming and going throughout the day.⁶⁵ Lelyveld finds it remarkable, but not surprising, that men like Syed Ahmad Khan and poet Altaf Hussain Hali (d. 1914) were raised by older siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles in homes that were not very different from the one that Ahmed Ali imagines for Mir Nihal and his extended family. One is hard-pressed, argues Lelyveld, to find children in Syed Ahmad Khan’s generation who were raised by the father or mother alone. Lelyveld cites an anecdote that is often narrated by biographers of Syed Ahmad Khan, who was raised by in the household of his maternal grandfather. When Syed Ahmad Khan was about twelve years old, he hit an old family servant. This angered his mother, who threw him out of the house. But his maternal aunt took Syed Ahmad Khan in, hid him in the house for three days and then interceded on his behalf with his mother. Syed Ahmad Khan was allowed back into the house only after he had apologized to the servant. Regardless of the veracity of the anecdote, it is important to analyze the work it does in the biographical sketch of Syed Ahmad Khan. First and foremost, it serves to highlight his disciplined

⁶⁵ Lelyveld, David. *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 1996, 38.

upbringing by pointing to the emphasis his parents and guardians placed on Ashraf values such as civility, justice, and restraint. Second, it reveals a social world in which the differentials of wealth, caste, age, and gender animated the web of relations that brought together kin and non-kin actors of the household. As a young member of the family, Syed Ahmad Khan had to learn to be mindful about these hierarchies and learn how the interplay of affect, respect, seniority and loyalty could blunt, even if not entirely erase, the difference in lineage status between the various members of a complex household.⁶⁶ The servant that Syed Ahmad assaulted is likely to have started his career in the household in a position similar to Mir Nihal's Man Friday Ghafoor, but with the passing of time, he would have developed avuncular rapport with the women and children of the family. It is also possible that upon his marriage his wife would have joined the family as a household help in the *zenana* quarters, and the couple's children would be playmates of boys like Syed Ahmad Khan. They might even have attended the local *maktab* together or received basic education from the same *ustani*, the career paths of the children eventually diverging in the early teens.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ It is certainly true that the privilege of transgression, which, in this case, resulted in an assault on an old servant rested with Syed Ahmad Khan. It is difficult to imagine a situation in which a young servant would be able to hit or abuse his older master. However, in a slightly different configuration, there is empirical and literary evidence to suggest that older servants who were care-givers to young children would neglect or ill-treat them.

⁶⁷ In her essay *Gubar e Karawah* (The Dust of Caravan), Ismat Chughtai writes that it was commonplace for generations of servants to remain in the employ of a single family. Her views about the economic and social relationship between domestic servants and their masters is rather simplistic, and is based on the assumption that generations of servitude has chained the bodies as well as the minds of the servants. She claims that domestic servants, as a group, are cunning, lazy, and foolish. They refuse to seek independent employment away from the master's family even when

Even if every member of a servant's family was not affiliated to the household of the employer through a direct transaction of labour, he or she was still likely to be associated with the economic and affective unit of the master's household through a series of economic and extra-economic ties. Often times, these ties could last beyond a servant's active years of employment.⁶⁸ During my fieldwork among Tablighi Jamaat meetings for women at the movement's centre in New Delhi, I met an old woman who had been in the service of one branch of the founding family since her early teens. She had retired from active service, though she spent most of her time in the family's home in Markaz Nizamuddin. Her sons were now in the employ of the Kandhlewis, working as drivers and errand boys.

The reformist movement of the late-nineteenth century frowned upon such familial intimacy between the servants and the masters. The humiliation and dismissal of Mama Azmat through Asghari's careful planning in *Mirat ul Uroos* is a case in point. When the time comes to hire a new cook, Asghari overrides her mother-in-law's first candidate because she stayed close-by and was, therefore, likely to take frequent

they are kicked out, much like "domesticated dogs". Chughtai does concede that the skewed equation between the rich and the poor is the backbone of the fraught and ambiguous relation between the servant and the master, in which the former is always selfish and the latter is two-faced. See *Gubar e Karawan* in *Kagazi Hai Pairahan* (The Attire is Paper). New Delhi; Star Publications, 1994, p 19-20.

⁶⁸ Maulana Zakariya Kandhlewī (d. 1982), the cousin of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewī and a key figure in Tablighi Jamaat, always travelled with a retinue that comprised, apart from scholars and family members, lay disciples who had renounced their careers to stay by the side of Maulana Zakariya. They modelled their behavior on the Sufi concept of service to the master, attending to his every need and looking after his guests as well. The most prominent among such men was one Abu'l Hasan, an assistant clerk and stenographer of Saharanpur's Islamiya College who quit his job to become Maulana Zakariya's disciple. He travelled with him to Pakistan and Hejaz, eventually relocating to Medina with Maulana Zakariya. He was by the bedside of his Sufi master at the time of the latter's death. For further details, see Kandhlewī, *Zakariya Maulana. Aap Beeti*, vol 1 and 2, (Deoband: Dar ul Kitaab), 2002.

breaks to go home. There was also the possibility that she would scheme with her husband, who was a trouble-maker, and steal from the house. The second candidate is rejected because she has a toddler, who was sure to accompany the mother to work, linger around, and interrupt her. The woman Asghari finally hires quotes a higher salary but has the reputation of being professional and honest.

In effect, in the reformist vision of the late nineteenth century the ideal household is homogenous as far as class, age and caste are concerned. Its core comprises the man, his wife and the couple's biological children. The presence of any other person, whether it is a poorer relation, a servant or a guest, is episodic and incidental. In comparison to *Mirat ul Uroos*, Rashid ul Khairi's *Toofan e Hayat* does a better job of situating the protagonists' household in a larger network of relations. Apart from the central characters of the novel—Inam, his wife Hajra and daughter Mushrika, the novel also talks about Inam's cousin Sadiqa, an impoverished uncle (who lives with his wife), and a rather well to do aunt. Sadiqa resides a few doors down the road from Inam's house. She is widowed at a very young age and is the sole guardian of a toddler. The mother and son live in abject poverty after the death of Sadiqa's husband, her mother- and father-in-law. She does not have a source of income and is unable to attend to chores outside the house because *purdah* regulations for *Ashraf* women restrict her movements in public. However, despite being a close kin of Sadiqa, Inam does not take her in. In fact, the only other characters who appear with some regularity in Inam's household are Hajra's mother and her spiritual

guide, both of whom are portrayed by Rashid ul Khairi as ill influences on the household. After taking the readers through a series of tragedies and poor judgements by the protagonists, the author finally ends the novel by reuniting Mushrika with her estranged husband and son. All the other characters are gradually eliminated from the plot.

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature provide different models of a middle-class household in colonial north India. There is the reformist model, as seen in the works of Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi, with the nuclear family as its stable core. This model stands in contrast with the large, multi-generational, fluid, chaotic, and geographically fragmented household represented in Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*. This chapter will now turn to the decennial census of the population in British India to ascertain if there existed a structure of household uniform enough to talk about, and if so, what changes did it undergo at the turn of the century.

The Household in Census Data

The decennial census brought the colonial state's administrative and ethnographic instincts into synergy. Every ten years the monumental exercise, involving hundreds of officers, clerks, and village leaders, not to mention the participants, was undertaken by the government in order to break down the population into religious, linguistic and caste-based communities. Every ten years the definitions of

sociological categories such as religion, mother tongue, infirmity, and occupational and marital (civil condition) status were fine-tuned to ensure that the returning officers could collect statistics that were as true to the reality on the ground as possible.

The 1871 Census was the first operation undertaken by the British government with the goal of quantifying the population of the entire area under its rule on the same appointed day, even though the provinces of Punjab, Oude (Awadh) and Berar were excluded from this census on account of having gone through an enumeration exercise in the recent past. The East India Company had been conducting surveys of the districts governed by the Presidency of Bengal as early as 1807 in an attempt to gather statistical data about taxation, land revenue assessment, and trade and mining figures.⁶⁹ In their focus on the topography, agricultural and commercial aspects of the land under governance, these surveys were similar to the Mughal-era preparations of statistical documents, the most well-known of which is Abul Fazal's sixteenth century text *Ain e Akbari*.⁷⁰ With the setting up of a small department of statistics in the India House in 1847, the groundwork was laid for more comprehensive census operations. In 1848, a revenue census of all the districts of

⁶⁹ Enumerations of the people had already been made in the Northwest Provinces in 1853 and 1865, in Oude in 1869, in the Punjab in 1855 and 1868, in the Hyderabad Assigned Districts in 1867, and in the Central Provinces in 1866; while in Madras quinquennial returns had been prepared since 1851-52 by the officers of the Revenue Department, giving with more or less accuracy the numbers of the people in each district. See Henry Waterfield, (1875), *Memorandum on the Census of British India 1871-72*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Ghosh, J. K., Maiti P., Rao T. J., and Sinha B. K. "Evolution of Statistics in India." *International Statistical Review / Revue Internationale De Statistique* 67, no. 1 (1999): 13-34. Also see, Peabody, Norbert. "Cents, sense, census: Human inventories in late precolonial and early colonial India." *Comparative studies in society and history* 43, no. 04 (2001): 819-850.

the North-Western Provinces was published. This was followed by the census reports of 1855 and 1868.

The many district-level censuses, the enumerations for gazetteers, and even the 1871 census were “fragmentary, hardly systematic and lacked any uniformity”.⁷¹ After several decades of trials and errors, the 1881 all-India census was the first operation that was carried out simultaneously across the entire territory governed by the British government, and the second census to conduct a head count of people according to religion, caste, sex, occupation, and infirmity.

The summary reports of the first four censuses—1871, 1881, 1891, and 1901—comment on the obstacles faced by the returning officers in the field. While the vast majority of people were enthusiastic about participating in the census, there were some villages where the returning officers were met with suspicion. This was particularly true in the districts in the northeast where residents had little experience of being enumerated unlike the northwestern region of the empire. The officers were often confronted with the rumors that the government was planning to impose a poll-tax on the villages, based on the head count of every household. This often led people to under-report the number of children and siblings living with them. Another fear among residents was that the census was an exercise undertaken by the government to reduce the population through mandatory

⁷¹ Ibid, 16.

immigration of excess people to Assam and Mauritius or by blowing them away from guns.⁷²

While successive censuses assuaged people's misgivings about the goals of the exercise, there were other obstacles that were tougher to surmount. The Census, along with the regional gazetteers, the ethnographic reports on the tribes, the flora and the fauna of South Asia, and the many administrative dossiers, was part of colonial state's attempt to understand and catalogue the places and people under its rule. The classificatory impulse of the surveys was animated by the assumption that the public of India was divided into neatly-defined primordial communities of religion and caste. The attention to enumerating the various castes and religious denominations in the 1871 Census stemmed from this assumption. The reality on the ground, however, was far more complex, and the returning officers often struggled to contain the diversity and fluidity of people's religious, caste and linguistic affiliations in the columns and boxes on the census forms. More categories and instructions were appended to the census form with every passing decade, but the difficulty of mapping the social complexity of the Indian public remained.⁷³ For instance, the 1871 Census form allowed a respondent to identify herself as a Hindu, a Muslim, a Sikh, a Jain, or a Christian. The two other categories were "Others" and

⁷² Henry Waterfield, (1875), *Memorandum on the Census of British India 1871-72*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, p 41.

⁷³ For the role of government censuses in cementing and mobilizing caste identities, see Bernard Cohn's 'The Census, Social Structure and Objectification' in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

“Religion not known”. At 5,102,823, more people identified themselves as “Others” in comparison to Buddhists and Jains (2,832,851) and Christians (896,658) combined.⁷⁴ The 1881 Census tried to correct this shortcoming by adding more religious denominations to the census form in order to accommodate the religious affiliations of “nominal members of dissenting sects”.⁷⁵ Buddhists and Jains were now separate categories, and the sects of Satnami, Kabirpanthi, Nath worship, Brahma, and Kumbhipathia were admitted as religious denominations distinct from Hinduism. However, the problem of assigning a fixed religious identity to people who “could not tell whether they belonged to any particular religion” persisted.⁷⁶ The entries in such cases depended on the discretion of the returning officer, who often “carried preconceived notions to the extent even of dispensing with the formality of inquiry and rejecting replies given”.⁷⁷ The enumeration of the “aboriginal tribes” who practiced the “primitive cult of their forefathers” and the Dalit outcasts also put a spanner in the colonial government’s desire to assign uncomplicated religious categories to individuals. It is telling that at 6,426,511, the

⁷⁴ Henry Waterfield, (1875), *Memorandum on the Census of British India 1871-72*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, p 16.

⁷⁵ W.Chichele Plowden, (1883), *Report on the Census of British India taken on the 17th February 1881*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, p 17.

⁷⁶ The enumeration of linguistic and caste groups turned out to be an equally complex task for the returning officers. JA Baines, the Census Commissioner for the 1891 census, concluded the section on mother tongue in the chapter “Ethnographic enumeration of the population” with the comment that despite eliminating redundancies and streamlining the data, the 1891 Census had listed about one hundred and fifty languages.

⁷⁷ W.Chichele Plowden, (1883), *Report on the Census of British India taken on the 17th February 1881*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, p 17.

aboriginal population formed the third-largest religious group after Hinduism and Islam in the 1881 Census.⁷⁸

In comparison to its preoccupation with fine-tuning caste and religious categories, the colonial state showed little interest in tracking the changes in the household patterns in South Asia. The family—joint or nuclear—was not seen as a fundamental block of society. Instead, the house, namely the built environment inhabited by a family, however loosely defined, was considered the basic unit for enumeration. This, in turn, led to considerable contemplation of what constituted a house and / or a home in the context of the Subcontinent. The first complete census of 1871 attempted to draw a basic distinction between “the better class of houses, or those built of masonry and tiled, and the inferior sort, constructed of mud and thatched”.⁷⁹ However, it was not always easy to assign a class position to a house, just as it was often not possible to accurately assess the number of inhabitants sharing a living space.⁸⁰ The census did peg the average number of “inmates” per house in India to five. For the North-Western Provinces, the average number of residents per house was 4.84, whereas for Oude the figure was 4.60.^{81 82}

⁷⁸ Ibid, 23.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 10-12.

⁸⁰ Baffled by the living arrangement prevalent in the Central Provinces, the returning officer of the 1871 Census officer for the region stated that while “the figures (4.90 inmates per house) do not suggest the idea of overcrowding, a knowledge of the way in which the five human beings share their dwelling with buffaloes, cows, or goats, interferes with the view which might otherwise be formed respecting the standard of comfort among the people”. See the section “Houses” in the 1881 *Report on the Census of British India*.

⁸¹ The colonial province of Oude (Awadh) was created through the annexation of the princely state of Awadh in 1856. The province was merged with the North-West Provinces in the same year and the

The 1881 Census sought to provide better guidelines to the returning officers by defining a house as a structure that had a “separate entrance from the public way”. This meant that all the houses that were situated inside an enclosure with a common gate were counted as a single unit for the purposes of the census. In the United Provinces, however, this definition was set aside in cases where more than four families were found to be residing in an enclosure. In such instances, the rule of enclosure gave way to the rule of commensality. This exception was made for the United Provinces, along with the Punjab, due to the unusually high prevalence in these provinces of the practice of “congregating a number of buildings occupied by different families within the same mud-wall enclosure”.⁸³ By the 1901 Census, the commensal family had been “adopted as the sole test in the United Provinces as well as in the Provinces where it had already been taken as such in 1891. Elsewhere the older standard was generally adhered to, and separate families inhabiting the same enclosure were treated as belonging to the same census ‘house.’”⁸⁴

new administrative unit was called the North-West Provinces and Oude. In 1902, the region was renamed as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh or the United Provinces. The newly formed province consisted of nine administrative divisions, namely Agra, Allahabad, Benares, Meerut, Rohilkhand, Lucknow, Faizabad, Gorakhpur, and Kumaon.

⁸² W.Chichele Plowden, (1883), *Report on the Census of British India taken on the 17th February 1881*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, p 11.

⁸³ H.H. Risley and E.A. Gait, (1903), *Report on the Census of India, 1901*. Calcutta, Superintendent of Government Printing, p 33.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 33.

In 1881, the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, with a combined area of 111,236 square miles and a population of 44,849,619, had an average household size of 6.1.⁸⁵ In 1891, this figure fell to 5.5 and further down to 5.4 in the first census of the twentieth century in 1901. Also, during this period the region was officially renamed as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. The new administrative unit had lost 4,072 square miles of area in redistribution and its total population now stood at 47,691,782. In the next census, the region's population fell to 47,182,044 and did the average size of the household to 4.6.

Census year	Average household size
1871	4.7 (NWP 4.84, Oude 4.6)
1881	6.1
1891	5.5
1901	5.4
1911	4.6

The census reports attribute the fluctuations in the aggregate population of the region to multiple factors such as the famines, epidemics, migration to urban centers, good crop cycle, etc. However, while the total population of the region ebbed and fell in response to local and global factors, the size of the average household was steadily shrinking at the turn of the century. The table above would suggest that it rose to 6.1 in the decade ending in 1881 before beginning to fall again. The 1881 figure stands out as an anomaly in an otherwise clear trend of

⁸⁵ The average household size for the British-governed regions of the North-West Provinces and Oude was 6.4, while the average for the feudatory states was 5.8. The national average for this period was also 5.8. For details, see Abstract Three (Area in Square) of the 1881 Census report.

shrinking household size in north India. It is, however, more likely that the numbers from the 1871 report are inaccurate, a possibility alluded to in the early census reports. The early censuses were ridden with logistical and methodological hurdles, but with every passing decade the enumerations were better streamlined and the later censuses throw up fewer anomalies and unexplained rises and falls in trends.⁸⁶ So if the relatively low figure of 4.7 persons per household in the 1871 report is disregarded it can be argued that the average size of the household in colonial north India fell from 6.1 persons in 1881 to 4.6 persons in 1911.

The figure of 4.6 members per house for the United Provinces does not square with the fact that this is the region for which the rules of enumeration were altered to account for the preponderance of large families. The summary report of the 1901 Census attributes this discrepancy to the impact that the numbers from the lower class groups bear on the average size of the household. The lower class is a numerically more significant group whose “dwelling place with a separate entrance usually corresponds to the residence of a commensal family”. In other words, families belonging to poorer backgrounds tended to live in less complex formations that involved fewer children, dependents, and servants. This did not mean that poor men and women bore fewer children or had smaller kin networks, but fewer of them lived together as a single familial unit. Migration of men and women to cities

⁸⁶ For a difference in trends between early and late censuses, see the discussion on absolute rise in the population of the country between 1871 and 1921 in the Census Report of 1921. http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/old_report/census_1921.aspx (last accessed on June 30, 2016).

such as Bombay, Karachi, Kanpur, Surat and Calcutta to work in leather, textile, and sugar mills shrank the family size among the lower classes.⁸⁷ The census returns do not mull over the structure of the working class families that were splintered by migration to urban centers. However, scholars have suggested that the state's domestic ideal of the family as a unit comprising a man, his wife and the couple's children was frequently challenged by the presence of families that were headed by female bread-winners or families where children were left in the charge of grandparents. The children were also routinely sent away to work in the homes and commercial enterprises of the middle and upper classes. The 1871 Census estimates that 6.2 per cent of the adult male population of the country, or 4,137,000 men, worked as domestic servants, of which "1,937,000 are returned as servants".⁸⁸ This does not take into account the women and children who worked as domestic servants. While women were hired to work as cooks, as cleaners or to run errands, younger boys and girls under the age of puberty were useful because they could circumvent the *purdah* requirements and move between the male and female quarters of the household with messages, food, goods, and for chores. Some, if not all, children stayed with the family of the employers, returning home for short

⁸⁷ Women's participation in the formal and informal sectors of the urban economy rose and ebbed depending on the technological advancements, status of male recruitment, and government's health and family welfare policies. Radha Kumar argues that women's participation in the textile sector in Bombay declined between 1919 and 1939 at the same time that family emerged as the cherished social unit in the discourses and policies of the government. Women as mothers were seen as the center of the family and their income was defined as supplementary even in cases where female factory workers were the primary bread earners of the family. See Kumar, Radha. "Family and Factory: Women in the Bombay Cotton Textile Industry, 1919-1939." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 20, no. 1 (1983): 81-96.

⁸⁸ Henry Waterfield, (1875), *Memorandum on the Census of British India 1871-72*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, p 33.

breaks. On reaching puberty the girls were usually married off and sent to their husbands' homes, but the boys were likely to remain in the employ of the family.

The old servant who was assaulted by Syed Ahmad Khan, Dilchain, the domestic servant of *Twilight in Delhi*, and the nameless servants who populate Ismat Chughtai's memoir had at some point in their lives moved out of their real or fictional homes to live with their employers. This move would have had an impact on the size and structure of the families they had left behind and also transformed the families that offered them lodging and employment. The census summaries do not indicate if the domestic servants were counted in the household of their biological family or their master's house.

The returning officers' disinterest in the structure and texture of the working class families is in contrast with their ethnographic interest in detailing the domestic arrangement of the wealthier sections of the society. The 1881 Census report supplements the enumeration data with excerpts from Reverend Baboo Ishuree Dass' well-known 1860 text *Domestic Manners and Customs of the Hindoos of Northern India (Or, More Strictly Speaking, of the North-Western Provinces of India)* in order to describe the north Indian household.⁸⁹ It cites liberally from the ninth

⁸⁹ Baboo Ishuree Dass of Futtehgurh was a Christian missionary and a government servant in the North-West Provinces. Orphaned at an early age, he was raised by missionary HR Wilson. Apart from *Domestic Manners and Customs*, Dass also wrote about his journeys abroad. Titled *A Brief Account of a Voyage to England and America*, it was printed by Allahabad's Presbyterian Mission Press in 1851. He also wrote an account of the outbreak of Mutiny in Futtehgurh in 1857 in which he calls the mutineers the enemies.

chapter of Dass' book, entitled Household Customs, to argue that unlike Britain, patriarchy was still firmly entrenched in India where married daughters⁹⁰...

...go to live with the families of their husbands. When sons, however, settle in life, they do not leave the roof of their parents, but still live with them, and are under their direction and government, that is, so long as the father does not lose his senses through extreme age....all that sons earn is made over to the father, who keeps the accounts of the household, that is, purchases food and raiment for the members of his family, and manages all things that concern them. He is the head, and his sons and daughters-in-law and grandchildren are under his government, and he sees that all live with comfort. Sometimes it happens that when a man has two or more sons, one of them is dissatisfied with some arrangement, and he parts from the others so far as to eat separate, then he carries on business on his own account, he and his wife consult together about their own interests and do as they think proper. When a son does so, he does not remove to another place, but lives in the same yard with the other members of his father's family. In this case, a son is not under the immediate control of his father. In matters that concern his wife and children, and in affairs that are strictly private, he is at liberty to do as he thinks best, though he is generally willing to hear the advice of his father when he has any to offer.....when the sons get to the meridian of life and the father becomes very old, dissatisfaction begins to prevail among them, and they think of eating separately. They cease to have their interests common, and parents join that son who is the kindest to them, though others also help them from time to time. Sometimes they find it convenient to eat together, but have expenses regarding raiment and other things separate. Each son pays a certain portion of his earnings for own and his family's support.....If the sons of a man do not have separate concerns before their father's death, they do so after his decease; the father may have kept them together, but after his departure they fall out. But even after having their concerns separate they live altogether in the same place. It is very seldom that a man leaves his brothers to live in another part of the town or village. They find it much more convenient to live together; they can help each other in time of sickness; can defend each other if a disturbance takes place with the neighbours; and when a brother is absent from home for any length of time, his family is under the immediate protection of his brothers or other male relations living in the same place. A male relation is always requisite to be at home (that is, not absent from the town) for the protection, and general management also, of the whole establishment. Women

⁹⁰ Dass, Ishuree. *Domestic Manners and Customs of the Hindoos of Northern India (Or, More Strictly Speaking, of the North West Provinces of India)*. Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1960.

would much rather have a boy of even twelve years with them than be left alone.⁹¹

The enclosure of a single joint family could be home to five to six families and the number of residents living together in a single house could tally up to twenty or thirty members, according to the 1881 Census report. The large open space of the enclosure was typically walled in by a hedge or rattan, and as the sons of the family got married, separate living quarters were built for them in the same compound. The very grand among these residences covered "several acres of ground, with numerous courtyards and detached buildings, into some of which none but a member of the household is permitted to go, and the whole is surrounded by what would be the "external wall" of the English definition."⁹²

The enclosures were planned and designed to grant differential access to visitors and servants, based on their age, gender, caste and class. The public spaces of the enclosure, such as the outer living room, were open to the outsiders and were usually the site of male congregation and socialization. The *zenana* quarters, on the other hand, were guarded spaces, but they were never completely cut-off from the outside world.⁹³ It is, however, true that among the more influential families, the

⁹¹ W.Chichele Plowden, (1883), *Report on the Census of British India taken on the 17th February 1881*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, p 12-13.

⁹² Jervoise Athelstane Baines, (1893), *General report on the Census of India, 1891*, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, p. 54.

⁹³ The identification of the male and female spaces in the enclosure as public and private enclaves respectively does not amount to aligning them along the political / domestic binary that is more common in the discourses of political scientists. Scholars like Indrani Chatterjee have alerted us to

desire to claim exclusiveness and superior status often found expression in the doors, thick curtains and high walls of the *zenana*. The 1881 Census report makes the following observation about the homes of the affluent families in north India...

... in the north of India, where family exclusiveness is carried to the highest pitch, all well-to-do people adopt the walled enclosure, with a courtyard or yards, and a small room or verandah along the outer wall in which to receive visitors and strangers. In Peshawar, for instance, which is a city pre-eminent in this respect, and, in a lesser degree in Lahore, there is street after street with hardly a single window in it.⁹⁴

The Household in Women's Writing

Sheherbanu Begum, the mother Shaista Suhrawardy (d. 2000), a diplomat and prominent essayist of Pakistan, spent a part of her childhood in a house similar to the one described by the returning officer in the passage cited above. Shaista was born into a remarkably privileged family in Bengal. Her maternal grandfather was among the Muslim nobility that had successfully integrated itself into the new bureaucracy of Bengal. Similarly, her father and uncles embraced English education and despite early hardships and financial hurdles went on to become lawyers and doctors. Shaista's father Dr Sir Hasan Suhrawardy was the second Muslim in the country to be honored with the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons. In 1932, during his tenure as the vice-chancellor of Calcutta University, he received

the deeply political nature of domestic spaces in elite households. See Chatterjee's *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (Oxford University Press 1999).

⁹⁴ Jervoise Athelstane Baines, (1893), *General report on the Census of India, 1891*, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, p 54.

knighthood for foiling a student's attempt to assassinate Bengal's governor Sir Stanley Jackson.

Shaista's own career was equally illustrious. She first flirted with politics as a young girl when she grabbed a last-minute opportunity to speak at a private gathering of the politically-inclined *purdah nasheen* women of Calcutta. Her initiation into active politics began in 1940 after she moved to Delhi with her husband, who was a civil servant. The timing of Shaista's arrival in Delhi was fortuitous because it coincided with Jinnah's return to politics from his self-imposed exile. In his second innings, Jinnah was focusing on strengthening the Muslim League and creating a countrywide network of cadres. A chance visit to Jinnah's residence in Delhi, where he stayed with his sister Fatima Jinnah, drew Shaista into the circle of the rejuvenated Muslim League and she soon found herself convening the first meeting of the Muslim Women Students' Federation in February 1942.⁹⁵

Shaista has chronicled her political and diplomatic career in "From Purdah to Parliament" which was first published in 1963. The organizing themes of her writings are a nostalgia for the lost 'Mughal culture' and her peculiar upbringing that required her to flit in and out of the "Arabian Nights world of [her] mother's family, and [her] ultra-Westernized home, and the English school".⁹⁶ She writes:

⁹⁵ Suhrawardy, Shaista Ikramullah. *From Purdah to Parliament* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 83-99.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 26.

My mother's father, Nawab Sayyid Muhammad, belonged an old, noble (sharif), middle-class family of Dhaka. When the vagaries of life ate into the wealth of the family, my grandfather came to Calcutta and cooperated with the British government to the extent of finding employment with the government. Under duress, he agreed to put his sons through the English education system but he absolutely refused to change the manner in which the women of his family lived. Not a single door or window of the zenana of his house opened on the streets. Strange women were not allowed into the house. Even women who peddled bangles, vegetables, etc were investigated before they were let in. And the family cooks had to wear the chadar (hijab) before setting foot outside the house. My mother and aunts were allowed to visit only two houses: one belonging to their uncle and the other to their aunt. Apart from those two, they did not have permission to visit a third place. Their uncle lived next door so his house could be accessed through the window, but a palanquin had to be called to go to the house of the aunt. The palanquin waited for my mother and aunts inside the verandah. It would be covered with a thick sheet and a servant travelled with them.⁹⁷

The elaborate *purdah* arrangements for the women of Nawab Sayyid Muhammad's family and the simultaneous willingness of its men to enter the British workforce strikes as an arrangement straight out of the idealized domestic paradise that unfolded in a steady stream of novels and short stories. In 1915, the year of Shaista's birth, *Mirat ul Uroos* had been in circulation for more than forty years, Mumtaz Ali's *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, a weekly magazine, had been in print for fifteen years, and *Beheshti Zewar* was selling as an essential guidebook for pious women for about a decade. Shaista belonged to the generation of women who grew up around reformist literature. Her first copy of *Mirat ul Uroos* belonged to her mother Sheherbanu Begum. And yet the 'Arabian Nights' world that Shaista imagined her mother to inhabit and with which she constantly compared her between-two-

⁹⁷ Ibid, 7-8.

worlds upbringing was slowly transforming. The pragmatism of the previous century had accelerated the reconfiguration of the household in ways not entirely anticipated by the reformists, by the returning officers, and by men like Nawab Sayyid Muhammad. Despite spending her early years behind veils and in palanquins, a married Sheherbanu Begum had to adjust to a more westernized household of her husband. Nawab Sayyid Muhammad resented her daughter's occasional brush with Hindu and English women at the *purdah* parties hosted by her sister-in-law. While he was alive, Sheherbanu Begum could not join her husband in the western-style bungalows and had to stay with her mother- and sisters-in-law. Eventually Sheherbanu Begum did move in with her husband. Quickly adapting to the itinerant lifestyle of a government civil surgeon, she set up homes in towns around Bengal.

Shaista often contributed articles to women's magazine *Asmat* in which she wrote in some detail about the many houses she lived in as a child, especially the labour and planning that went into setting up a *mardana* fit to receive English officers and a *zenana* that was out of bounds even for the male servants once they had attained puberty. In accordance with his position as a senior medical officer, Dr Hasan Suhrawardy was allotted accommodation in the English quarters of the town or city in which he was posted. This privilege came with its own set of problems. For one, it was difficult to get household help because servants refused to commute so far outside the city. An equally pressing problem was the absence of *fakirs* and beggars, shrines and mosques. Immediately after moving into a new house, Sheherbanu

Begum looked up the closest mosque and started contributing money towards its upkeep. She also sent evening meals to the mosque during *Ramzan* and sponsored its illumination during festivals.⁹⁸

As Sheherbanu Begum set up her household anew every time the family moved, she also established fresh infrastructures of piety. The *zenana* was cordoned-off, the poor were sought out and fed, and faraway mosques were patronized.⁹⁹ It was impossible, however, to recreate the 'Arabian Nights'-like atmosphere that drew her daughter to the homes of her maternal cousins. Her outer city bungalows with sprawling gardens and water fountains were cut off from the labyrinth of city houses where multiple generations of her father's family lived side by side. In the long passage cited above, Shaista emphasizes the circumscribed world of Sheherbanu, who could visit only two houses. However, as her remarks elsewhere demonstrate, each of these houses was buzzing with uncles, aunts, nieces, cousins, and grandparents. A robust network of servants, itinerant *fakirs*, and peddlers of wares ensured that goods and information moved in and out of the household efficiently.

⁹⁸ Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah ki Muntakhib Tehreerein (The Selected Writings of Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah)*, ed and introduction Ahmad Saleem (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 47.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 9-10.

The Case of the Mega Household of Firangi Mahal

While it may be true that the *zenana khana* of respectable families did not have access to the main streets, but their windows, verandahs and stairs connected them to women's quarters of other households in the kin network. A perfect example of this is Firangi Mahal in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh). Today, Firangi Mahal (the palace of the European) is a large inner city neighbourhood in Lucknow's congested Chowk area, but in 1693-94 it was famous as a residential quarter owned by a European trader. Firangi Mahal was allotted to the sons of Mulla Qutbuddin, a renowned religious scholar from Sehali (Bara Banki district in Uttar Pradesh) who was killed in an act of arson. His eldest son Mulla Mohammad Asad, who was in Aurangzeb's service at this point, secured a *farmaan* from the emperor that granted them the now vacant Firangi Mahal and the family moved to Lucknow. Mulla Nizamuddin (d. 1748), the notable scholar and teacher whose syllabus—*dars e nizami*—is taught in *madrasas* across South Asia, was the youngest son of Mulla Qutbuddin. He taught students, most of whom were boys of his extended family, in the premises of Firangi Mahal, making it an important meeting point for political and religious thinkers. Firangi Mahal burst into limelight as a family, an institution and a religious-political ideology in the first half of the twentieth century when Maulana Abdul Bari Firangi Mahali (d. 1926), a descendant of Mulla Qutbuddin and a product of *dars e nizami*, transformed Lucknow into the headquarters of nationalist politics. As the family expanded, it bought more land and houses in the vicinity. Firangi Mahal was now a

tight network of houses, narrow alleyways, walled courtyards, and open terraces that sent out several generations of religious and secular scholars, bureaucrats, jurists, and poets into the world.

This was accompanied by another kind of expansion: the gradual settlement of lower-caste Muslims around Firangi Mahal who became affiliated with the family as commercial and residential tenants, servants, students, and murid (disciples). The painstakingly researched family tree of the *ulema* of Firangi Mahal pays no attention to these affiliations because it is not in the nature of family trees to register those relations of affect, intimacy, and reciprocity that have no basis in biological reproduction. The built environment and everyday practices of the neighbourhood, however, destabilise the biological bias of family trees without ever overthrowing it entirely.¹⁰⁰

The expediency of crafting an illustrious and uninterrupted lineage of scholars also required the marginalization of those family members who moved away from Firangi Mahal and established themselves in distant courts and cities. The discourse about who qualified as an authentic member of the lineage—and therefore worthy of inclusion in the family tree—highlights two concerns: one, the purity of the

¹⁰⁰ In February 2014, during one of my meetings with Mateen Nana, the tenth generation descendent of Mulla Qutbuddin, he looked vexed and distracted. When I asked him he complained that he had lost three cell phones in as many days. The latest one seemed to have disappeared that very morning, a few hours before my arrival. He said he had a very good idea who was walking away with them. “When my second phone was stolen, the thief was kind enough to insert my SIM card in his old phone and leave it behind. He spared me the trouble of getting a new SIM. I, of course, recognized his old phone,” he said. I asked him if he would act against the thief he knew so well. He said, “No. It’s a delicate matter. It is a question of old relations. The phone is not worth it.” Instead, he asked his grandson to buy him a new phone.

lineage of the parents and the second, more interesting, factor is the geographical and emotional relocation to urban centers outside Lucknow. In *Firangi Mahal: Past and Present*, a comprehensive hagiography of the family, Dr Wali ul Haq Ansari describes his family as a “super joint family” because the “structure of the family was somewhat tribal and thus even those members of the family who were generations apart were so close to each other as if they were members of a modern small family”.¹⁰¹ However, this cozy, inter-generational play between the members of the ‘super joint family’ was only available to those who lived in Firangi Mahal. In the introduction to his text, Dr Wali ul Haq remarks that an incredible feature of the super joint family was that when “some members of the family had to go outside to earn their livelihood, they did not have to worry about their families because the other members were always ready to look after them”.¹⁰² During my interviews with the current members of Firangi Mahal I was told that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many men from the family accepted positions as scholars, scribes, and administrators in the distant courts of Hyderabad, Arcot, Rampur, etc. It was not unusual for them to leave their wives and children behind in Lucknow when they travelled abroad for work. Many of them also married again after moving to the new towns. For instance, writing about Maulvi Habib Ullah (d. 1874), the great great grandson of Mulla Qutbuddin, Dr Wali ul Haq comments:

¹⁰¹ Ansari, Dr Wali ul Haq. *Farangi Mahal: Past and Present*. Lucknow, 2004, 28.

¹⁰² Ibid, 28.

He received traditional education from his father and settled in some village in Mirzapur and died there in 1874. He married a daughter of Maulvi Asad Ullah, son of Maulvi Noor Ullah, who lived long after his [sic] husband's death and died on third Rabi-ul-Awwal 1319 / 1901. They left behind only one son, Maulvi Reayat Ullah. At Mirzapur where Maulvi Habib Ullah was posted as Munsif, he married another lady of some unknown family from whom also he had descendant.¹⁰³

Maulvi Habib Ullah's father, Maulvi Ghulam Yahya Khan, was *sadr us sudoor* (an official with a combination of police and judicial powers) of Benaras and he died there. He married twice. His first wife belonged to one of the respectable lineages of eastern United Provinces that has a long tradition of marriage relations with Firangi Mahal. The second wife who belonged to "some such family which was not familiar to Farangi Mahal [sic]" bore him three sons. The father-son duo of Maulvi Ghulam Yahya Khan and Maulvi Habib Ullah are not alone in marrying women from "unknown" families. Dr Wali ul Haq Ansari's hagiography claims that matrimonial alliances in the super joint family "were made mostly inside the family only and in some such families outside whose pedigrees were properly checked and if some one (sic) married outside their descendants in most cases were not accepted for marriage purposes in the family".¹⁰⁴ However, Dr Wali ul Haq's own work contradicts the claim he makes in the introduction. Starting with Mulla Mohammad Hasan (d. 1785), a renowned scholar and one of the earliest pupils of Mulla Nizamuddin, Dr Wali ul Haq lists numerous ancestors and peers who married outside the lineage into families whose pedigrees were nowhere near as

¹⁰³ Ibid, 32-33.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 29.

distinguished as the men and women of Firangi Mahal. Mulla Mohammad Hasan married five times, of which three marriages were outside the family. His second wife was a “lady of some unknown family of Lucknow” and his fourth and fifth wives were Afghan women he met after moving to Rampur.¹⁰⁵ Of his four sons that lived into adulthood, three—those born from his marriage outside the family—married women that Dr Wali ul Haq describes as unknown. No further information about the lineage from these sons is available. Meanwhile, the son and each of the five grandsons born from his third marriage to a woman from a scholarly family of Safipur, a town about seventy kilometres from Lucknow, were married at least once to women outside the family. This is also true for most other men that appear in the family tree that Dr Wali ul Haq Ansari puts together carefully.

While contemporary dominant narratives of Firangi Mahal may shy away from granting complete recognition to these marriages and the offspring from such unions may not be considered ‘truly Firangi Mahali’, the descendants of the forgotten offshoots were aware of their place in the lineage. As Dr Wali ul Haq writes:

A few years ago I was introduced to a young man who claimed to be a descendant of Mulla Hasan. He informed me that some of his other relatives were living in different villages in Moradabad.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 31-32.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 35.

Men from Firangi Mahal have always travelled to distant courts in search of patronage. In fact, the continuous celebration of the events surrounding the journey of their ancestors from Herat to Sehali during the reign of Akbar (r. 1556–1605) and then to Lucknow in the seventeenth century is a testament to the importance of the trope of relocation to the family's narrative of success. During British rule, many men from the family migrated to Muslim princely states to avoid the ignominy of working for the colonial state. Some moved out of Lucknow to escape the volatile political climate in the city that was frequently gripped by Shia-Sunni conflicts. An equal, if not more, number of men acquired college education and practiced law or joined the burgeoning bureaucracy. Regardless of the profession they chose, a substantial number of men broke away from the 'super joint family' in the nineteenth century, rarely returning to the fold of the large corporate family. Even if these men were already married to women from the clan, the legal and social acceptance of polygamy allowed them to marry local women and create fresh lineages in their adopted hometowns.

Mateen Ansari, the tenth generation descendant of Mulla Qutbuddin, argues that the tradition that discouraged women from relocating with their husbands to new cities inadvertently encouraged his ancestors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to marry outside the clan, especially the second time around. "The women and children who were left behind in Lucknow became the responsibility of the joint family. The men, meanwhile, remarried a second or third time after moving out. We

rarely met those families,” he said. Mateen Ansari also suggested that it was common for men from this period to cultivate relations with courtesans. “The courtesans were cultured companions. Men could talk to them about poetry, music, and literature. Women from respectable families did not, and could not, participate in such conversations. One needs to remember that this was a time when *Ashraf* women were not allowed to pursue higher education,” he adds.¹⁰⁷

As Dr Wali ul Haq’s text moves toward the middle of the twentieth century, the second and third marriages become increasingly rare. In a related development, women feature more frequently in the text in their capacity as professionals, not just wives and daughters of the male members of the family.

It needs to be pointed out that the derogation of marriages outside the clan, especially into lesser known families, at best, reveals the author’s views on the marital alliances of his ancestors during the decades of high colonialism. There is little evidence available that would tell us what the men and women at the turn of the twentieth century thought about these marriages. However, we do know that a job posting in a faraway city or town could sometimes, though not always, lead to distancing from the homestead in Lucknow. The probability of alienation from the ‘super joint family’ increased several folds if the relocation was coupled with a marriage outside the clan. This led to the formation of several forgotten offshoots of

¹⁰⁷ Notes from interview with Mateen Ansari, February 16 and 17, 2013.

the Firangi Mahal lineage in places like Moradabad, Hyderabad, Nagpur, etc, unbeknownst to the primary lineage group.

Dr Wali ul Haq Ansari contrasts the super joint family of Firangi Mahal with the “modern small family”, which he defines as a close knit unit with fewer intergenerational relations. It would be safe to assume that at least some of the Firangi Mahal members who set up households outside Lucknow lived in a ‘modern small family’. It is, of course, possible that the women they married hailed from large joint families that provided affective and social support to the couples. We have examples of such arrangements in the novels of Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi, both of whom assigned crucial roles to the biological family of the newly-married brides in their novels. Nazir Ahmad’s Asghari receives guidance from her father on important matters through correspondence and home visits. Rashid ul Khairi’s Hajra has her mother by her side through the hardships of pregnancies, death of her children, and marital strife.

It can be argued that the case of Firangi Mahal is unique. Its singularity as a family that has made significant contributions to the fields of politics, religion, and education makes it inappropriate as a case study for broad changes in the household structure in colonial north India. However, a quick comparison of the family’s history with other colonial-era memoirs and records indicates that the members of Firangi Mahal were responding to the same shears and stresses as the rest of the community. Essentially, in the wake of the weakening of ties between the

geographically-relocated couple and its extended kin, new forms of networks started to take shape. Sometimes older networks were recalibrated to serve the altered configuration of the household. The next section will examine the spectrum and dynamics of the interpersonal relations that animated the ‘super joint families’ and the many ways in which those relations became extraneous with the emergence of the ‘modern small family’.

From Super to Small

Dr Wali ul Haq Ansari’s nostalgia, even preference, for the “somewhat tribal” large joint family is quite apparent in his text. He sees the enduring joint family structure as one of the two hallmarks of Firangi Mahal, the other being the family’s contribution to the fields of religious and secular education. He writes:

...it was almost traditionally necessary that on the occasions of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha all the male members had to go to the houses of other members to congratulate the ladies and in this respect no distinction relating to financial positions was made.¹⁰⁸

Dr Wali ul Haq Ansari sees the corporate household structure as a nurturing, non-competitive institution where familial ties trump the economic disparities of the individual member of family. His rather benign description of the domestic space stands in considerable contrast to the picture of the *zenana* painted for the readers by another Firangi Mahal resident. Nuzhat Fatema is the great granddaughter of

¹⁰⁸ Ansari, Dr Wali ul Haq. *Farangi Mahal: Past and Present*. Lucknow, 2004, 28-29

Maulana Abdul Bari and a niece of Dr Wali ul Haq Ansari. She has lived in Firangi Mahal all her life. Like Dr Ansari, she also believes that her family's foremost contribution is in the field of education not religion. "Maulana Qutbuddin, back in the seventeenth century, was a religious scholar. If he were to be born today he would perhaps be a physicist," she reasons.¹⁰⁹ Nuzhat Fatema has a doctorate from Lucknow University in Urdu literature. She has published a travelogue recounting her pilgrimage to Mecca and a collection of short stories entitled "*Chilmanon ki Basti*" or "The Dwelling of Veils". Nuzhat Fatema's stories shed light on a network of *zenana* quarters that are barely the site of nurturing, seclusion, and order that the reformist writers wished them to be. On the contrary, it is a competitive space inflected with power differentials, where intimacy is not a given but has to be carefully cultivated. Affective relations have to be cultivated and, like material wealth, they can be fickle. It is also a space where older servants can order younger masters around, where youth could be a liability and widowhood could bring greater freedom and status. Most importantly, it is a space where the private is very public.

Another writer from Lucknow Attia Hosain, who moved to Britain in 1947, captures the public nature of the women's quarter in "The Daughter in Law", a short story about the upheaval caused in the house when the young daughter-in-law of a wet nurse moves in with the family. She writes:

¹⁰⁹ Notes from interview with Nuzhat Fatema, January 28, 2013.

The unpleasantness in the courtyard had started like the small circling eddies of air that sometimes danced around it catching in a whirl of dust and fallen leaves, before fading away ghost-like as the scattered dust and leaves settled into stillness, but it grew steadily in its circular reach and violence, until now it spread beyond the courtyard and enclosed the whole house; and at its centre was the daughter-in-law, once a shadow and now being invested with a dark reality.

The woman who swept the compound and cleaned the bathrooms heard from Sufia of the misdeeds of Nasiban's daughter-in-law. She told the washerman's wife, the gardeners' wives and the watchman's wife when she went to the servants' quarters. The cook and his helper in the kitchen were told of the cause of Nathoo's mother's ill humour, and told the bearer who served at the table. He told the man who helped him, who told the man who dusted the outer rooms, who told the watchman, who told the chauffeur. Everyone found excuses to come inside to see the daughter-in-law of Nasiban who was mad or possessed of a devil. They were ready with suggestions to cure her and cast out the spirit¹¹⁰.

Reminiscing about growing up in a similar household, Ismat Chughtai writes:

We were so many siblings that our mother wanted to vomit at our sight. One after another, we trampled her womb and stepped into this world. After undergoing all the vomiting and pain, she considered us nothing more than a punishment....As kids we were at the mercy of the servants and we were very attached to them.¹¹¹

What emerges from the writings cited above is the picture of the domestic space as a crowded arena where survival was premised on constant negotiation of ties. When a young woman entered a new household as a young bride, she had to count not on her husband's affection but her own skills as a juggler of multiple relationships. As

¹¹⁰ Hosain, Attia. "The Daughter-in-Law," in *Distant Traveller* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013), 160-161.

¹¹¹ Chughtai, Ismat. *Kagazi Hai Pairahan* (The Mask / Attire is Fragile). New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1994, 20-21.

Nuzhat Fatema writes in “Consequence of Desire”, a story about a young, neglected wife whose status in the family rises dramatically after her husband’s death:

Dulhan (the bride) never raised her voice against her husband’s injustices. She was always surrounded by people who would talk about his misdemeanors, but she practiced restraint. She lived with her mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and brother-in-law with such ease that it would appear that she had been married not to her husband but to his family.¹¹²

A match between a man and a woman certainly was, and, to some extent, still is, an alliance between two families. Both the bride and the groom were usually in their early teens at the time of the marriage. In many cases, the groom would be enrolled in high school or college, as was the case of Altaf Hussain Hali and Premchand. Under such circumstances, it was assumed that the married girl would be the responsibility of her parents-in-law until her husband found employment or joined the family business. However, often the boy failed to support his wife and children. In that case, she could either go back to her natal home and seek succor from her brothers or stay with her husband’s family. Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s mother raised him in her natal home because her mystically-inclined husband could not support them. His friend Hali, on the other hand, ran away to Delhi soon after his marriage to train under Mirza Ghalib and his family had to be looked after by his elder brother. Whether a woman decided to stay in her natal home or at her husband’s, her claim to the joint resources of the family was weak if her husband was not a contributing

¹¹² Fatema, Nuzhat. “Anjam e Tamanna,” in *Chilmanon Ki Basti*, 30.

member. Her well-being and that of her children depended on her relationship with the matriarch of the household.

The Household in the Public

According to the census reports, the great Indian joint family was an oppressive patriarchal institution that nevertheless served well the needs of the conservative and largely agricultural Indian society. The pooling of the family resources and its redistribution through the will of the patriarch ensured economic and emotional cooperation among the family members and also provided an incentive for the sons and their wives to stay in the vicinity of the family home. In the view of the colonial state, the hold of the institution of the joint family on the affluent classes in India was complete. This grip was shattered only when a man moved to another part of the village or town “either through want of room or the quarrelsome temper of the wife or that of some other woman living in the place”.¹¹³

As we have seen above in the case of the Firangi Mahal family, even as colonial ethnographers and census officials were documenting the real and imagined features of the Indian joint family, an increasing number of men were leaving the refuge of the family umbrella by accepting employment offers in faraway places. It only takes a cursory look at the hagiographies of the *ulema* from the nineteenth and

¹¹³ W.Chichele Plowden, (1883), *Report on the Census of British India taken on the 17th February 1881*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 11-12.

twentieth century to realize that they too encouraged scores of disciples to actively seek salaried employment as long as they were posted in departments that would not compromise their faith. So a posting in the taxation department was undesirable because it presented too many opportunities for corruption. Similarly, any government position that required licensing, checking, or selling of alcohol was to be refused because of the prohibition on drinking in Islam. In contrast, jobs in the education department were approved even by an *alim* of the caliber of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi. Many of his disciples were former government servants who had mustered the strength to turn their backs on *chakri* due to their master's *barakat* (grace), while some others were his younger students who claimed to have cleared the government exams because they were blessed by the *maulana*.¹¹⁴ Even among the family of *ulema* from Kandhla that launched Tablighi Jamaat, the most politically conservative reform movement of the twentieth century, enough number of men sought secular jobs in government and private institutions. These men were bureaucrats, government servants, postal and railway clerks, lawyers and journalists, surgeons and doctors, tehsildars and police officers, and engineers and education inspectors, among others. They were the modern citizens of an aspiring nation who came together to form voluntary associations. They participated in the creation and consumption of new cultural artefacts such as novels, the newspapers, theatre, and cinema. They subscribed to monthly magazines and also wrote letters

¹¹⁴ For an analysis of the tedium and humiliation involved in colonial employment and *bhakti* as its response, see Sumit Sarkar's "'Kaliyuga', 'Chakri' and 'Bhakti': Ramakrishna and His Times." (*Economic and Political Weekly*, 1992).

to the editor, commenting on all that was good and bad about the Indian society. In short, they participated in a vibrant public sphere that came alive through newspaper writings, debates and contestations.

The framework of the Habermasian public sphere that historians like Sanjay Joshi lay out for colonial north India marginalizes the contributions that women and other subaltern groups make to the public discourse.¹¹⁵ In granting the public sphere a homogeneity and consistency that does not hold ground upon closer examination, Joshi focuses on the male 'speaker / doer' as the primary participant of the public sphere and does not take into account the role of the listener. It is a framework that cannot trace a discourse that might emerge in a government resolution, get reported in the newspaper and then make its way into a living room and from there move to the kitchen and then back outside the house, transformed in the process. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, the household was porous, productive and right in the center of the public discourse. Several of Maulana Thanawi's widely circulated sermons were delivered in the verandah of the home of the Kandhlewī family. The sermons were scheduled at the insistence of the grandmother of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewī, whom Maulana Thanawi held in very high regard. Apart from the women of the family, the audience included senior *ulema*, activists, politicians, and laymen and disciples from Deoband, Kandhla, Saharanpur,

¹¹⁵ Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy." *Social text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

and Delhi. Often times, the maulana's attempts to end the speech would be dismissed by the women who urged him to continue.

Conclusion

Both the house and household transformed at the turn of the century in sync with the changes in the socio-economic changes, and a new understanding of morality and community began to emerge to go with it. While several studies of the household and political mobilization in this period have focused on the reformulation of religion and its instrumental deployment in the service of representative politics, this chapter suggests that an examination of piety provides a better lens to the shifting relationship between the household, community, and religion in the nineteenth and twentieth century in colonial north India. If the Urdu phrase *ibadat guzaar* (one who spends considerable time in prayers) translates to a religious-minded person who is careful and sincere about fulfilling her ritual obligations, a *deendaar* person would imbue her everyday life, every action and decision with a moral code that was deeply embedded in her religion. In making the claim that the middle-class reformist project hinged on the fashioning of *deendaar* subjectivities, this chapter is not suggesting that Indians became more religious in the nineteenth century. The kind of evidence that would allow a historian to make a case for a rise or fall in the performance of religious rituals is difficult to come by for Muslim communities. Unlike the churches, mosques rarely, if ever, maintain a

record of the number of people who turn up to offer prayers five times a day. Similarly, there is no institution that keeps a count of the people who fast in the month of *Ramzan*. The pilgrimage to Mecca or a visit to a local shrine is more likely to leave a trail of documents, though neither of these is a mandatory religious obligation.¹¹⁶

It is possible, however, to chart the suffusion of the public discourse with piety in colonial north India. Reformist narratives attributed the event of colonization to the moral failure of the dethroned ruling families and nobility. Expectedly, wresting the political power back from the British was never seen as an appropriate response to the political crisis, at least not up till the first quarter of the twentieth century. The solutions offered by the reformers focused on the transformation of the self. The focus on the strengthening of the moral self and the insistence that domestic space was the natural site for the nurturing of morality has led scholars to argue that modern piety was intensely personal. It was supposed to be the moment of privatization of religiosity in South Asia when the individual replaced the community as the focal point of piety.¹¹⁷ While the ties that brought a social and religious community together were certainly weakening in the nineteenth century and were quickly realigning around the smaller, more private familial units, the

¹¹⁶ Though the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj) is one of the five pillars of Islam, it is mandatory only for those Muslims who have the monetary resources and the physical ability to undertake the journey to Mecca.

¹¹⁷ See Barbara Metcalf. *Islamic Revival in British India, 1860-1900*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 1982. In particular, see the section "Ulama in Transition".

suggestion that the family—new or old—was insulated from other sites of socialization and production is flawed. The community in colonial north India did not crumble into oblivion but took the shape and function that was better suited to the emerging middle-class. It was a community that no longer relied extensively on geographical proximity, relations of material and spiritual reciprocity, and extensive kin networks. It was now supplemented by alumni associations, membership to voluntary organizations and sports clubs, participation in political and social activism, and subscription to magazines. The new community was not geographically rooted in any one city or town. The itinerant middle-class family could plug itself into these networks and also transfer the contacts to a different city if the need to relocate arose. The modern family was not encumbered by the unmanageable, crumbling, disputed, and mortgaged ancestral house. It resided in the new middle-class homes that were compact but clean, open to natural light and air but closed to disease and illness. It had fewer servants and better productivity. In short, it was the site of rationality and order. More importantly, it was the stage where reformist piety played itself out, for contrary to received wisdom personal piety in colonial India was a highly public affair. It called for austerity, it called for moderation, but it also demanded acknowledgement. While traditional piety was recognizable in a family's patronage of religious festivals, its contribution toward the upkeep of the shrines of local saints, or in its decision to help a poor relation, modern piety displayed a different set of markers. It found its best expression through the relation between the husband and the wife. The next three chapters will

analyze the demands that modern piety made upon the conjugal couple, the particular female and male subjectivities it shaped, and the bearing this had on the couple's relation with the community. In short, it will investigate the multiple ways in which the reconfiguration of piety as an individual quality to be burnished through personal relationships hitched the private firmly onto the public.

CHAPTER 2: PIETY AND CONJUGALITY

On October 17, 1912, Maulauna Ilyas Kandhlewī got married to the daughter of his maternal uncle, Maulana Rauf ul Hasan. The *nikah* ceremony took place in Kandhla, and was attended by religious luminaries such as Maulana Khalil Ahmad Saharanpuri, Maulana Shah Abdur Rahim Raipuri and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi. The latter delivered his famous *khutbah* (sermon) *Fawaid us Sohbat* on this occasion, which has, since then, been printed and widely circulated by various publishing houses in India and Pakistan. The sermon started after the Friday congregational prayer and continued well into the sunset. At various points during the sermon, Thanawi hinted at wrapping up his talk, but was urged by his audience—comprising more than three hundred people—to continue. The influence of *Fawaid us Sohbat* in shaping twentieth century notions of piety and conjugality remains unexplored, though it comes from the same scholar who is credited with having penned the *Beheshti Zewar*. In fact, his sermons and *fatawa* are rarely ever read in conjunction with *Beheshti Zewar* by devotees or academics. To a large extent Thanawi's positioning of *Beheshti Zewar* as a handbook for women has ensured that it is bracketed as his less-scholarly contribution that nonetheless provided valuable reading material for the Ashraf women. This chapter will trace continuities in Thanawi's writings, regardless of their positioning as material for lay or expert audience. Further, it will situate his *fatawa* and sermons in a dialogue with the magazine articles and novellas published around the turn of the century. This

move would have been unacceptable to Maulana Thanawi, who had gone as far as blacklisting Nazir Ahmad's *Mirat ul Uroos* in his attempt to stop women from reading misleading literature. And yet Maulana Thanawi fits right in with reformist writers such as Nazir Ahmad, Rashid ul Khairi, and even Mirza Hadi Ruswa: knowingly or unknowingly, together these men created popular literature that foreshadowed the emergence of a mode of conjugality that was better suited to handle the stresses of the emerging salaried class.

The discourse of companionate conjugality in the nineteenth century—while it privileged the relationship between the husband and wife—also opened the doors for a discussion on the rights and responsibilities of each spouse. A man's duty was to engage in respectable means of earning a livelihood and the woman, in turn, was required to be a frugal manager of the household. A man was duty-bound to ensure that his wife and children were not deprived of basic necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing. The woman, on her part, was never to compare her father's affluence with sparser resources in her husband's house. The man was supposed to earn, while the woman was exhorted to save.

Most, if not all, reformist writings from the 1860s to the first quarter of the twentieth century touch on these themes in varying degrees. Underlying such writings is the acknowledgement, and sometimes even celebration, of the flight of the man away from his hometown or *watan*. As more and more men travelled further away from home, their wives followed them to the new towns, setting up households that were out of the controlling reach of parents and parents-in-law.

However, the relocation also meant their displacement from older, entrenched networks of affect and financial security. The didactic nature of much of the reformist material attests to the anxiety triggered by this dislocation. Maulana Thanawi, whose eyes were set on the Afterlife, worried about the spiritual consequences of this disruption in his sermon *Fawaid us Sohbat*. The sermon was his attempt to keep the flock together even as boys from Ashraf families were enrolling in English schools, joining the service of the colonial government and moving away. In his extended lecture, he laid out the benefits that Muslims could derive by spending time in the company of religious specialists—*maulvis* and Sufi *pirs*. His formula was simple: spend a few hours in a day, a few days in a week, and a few months in a year with a pious personality to achieve success in this life and the next.

Maulana Thanawi's message was fine-tuned and appropriated by Tablighi Jamaat under the leadership of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlawi and was turned into the founding philosophy of a movement that sought to bridge the intellectual and spiritual distance between the learned *ulema* and the illiterate Muslims. While Maulana Thanawi's model reinforced the authority of the intellectual class, the Jamaat sought to dislodge it in order to gain a wider following. The virtue of piety replaced the skill of an *alim*. The only company that mattered was the company of a pious Muslim who was willing to spend time teaching and learning from other Muslims.

This chapter will argue that the biggest beneficiaries of this shift were the women who were allowed to become religious *dai* (Muslims who gave the *dawat* to Islam) without having gone through rigorous *madrassa* training.¹¹⁸ Finally, this chapter argues that nineteenth- and twentieth-century reform movements—by virtue of their ambition to refashion the household space—demanded a partnership between men and women. Tablighi Jamaat, the most tenacious reform movement to have emerged in that milieu, was also the most successful in forging this partnership by replacing scriptural authority with piety and by choosing the company of pious wives over the company of *pirs*.

The Rise of the Service Class

The events of 1857 and Britain's response to the upheaval have impelled successive generations of historians to revisit the archives—each time, casting the net wider to include materials previously overlooked. The key historical interpretations of 1857 have either seen it as a nationalist uprising or alternately as a feudal movement led by landlords, who had much to complain about in the nineteenth century. The subalternist intervention in the 1970s and the 1980s, on the other hand, plotted

¹¹⁸ The term *dawat* is a gerund form, derived from the Arabic root *da-aa-wa*. It means calling or inviting somebody. In this context, it refers to calling a person to Islam. A person who performs the work of *dawat* is called a *dai*.

1857 in a long chain of peasant rebellions that dotted the countryside in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁹

The multiple events that went into the making of the Mutiny had come under the scanner of contemporary administrators, politicians, and historians as well. The result was the circulation of hypotheses and theories in the form of reports that wondered if the uprising was spontaneous or, was, in fact, a conspiracy. Whether it was orchestrated by Muslim elites or was it a plan hatched by the Hindu upper caste. The earliest among these texts was Syed Ahmad Khan's *Asbab e Bagawat e Hind* (The Causes of the Indian Rebellion), which he presented to the government in 1859. Syed Ahmad was the chief assessment officer in the court of Bijnor when the rebellion broke out in the town. *Asbab* is his analysis of the poor policies of the East India Company that had gradually alienated the natives. He brings his training in law to bear upon *Asbab*. The tract begins with a point by point refutation of the thesis that the rebellion was a conspiracy plotted by the Muslims who were miffed with

¹¹⁹ The Subaltern Studies Collective or the Subaltern Studies Group came together in England toward the end of the 1970s with the goal of launching an academic journal dedicated to doing 'history from below'. The first three journals, called *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, was published from Delhi between 1982 and 1984 by Oxford University Press and was edited by Ranajit Guha. The biggest methodological intervention of the Collective was articulated in Guha's essay in the first volume, "The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency", in which he asks historians to read the colonial archive against the grain to illuminate the histories of marginalized groups, such as the peasants, and counter the hegemonic colonial narrative. The early volumes of the Collective put together impressive work by scholars like Shahid Amin, Sumit Sarkar, Gyanendra Pandey, David Hardiman, David Arnold, among others. The Collective's gradual distancing from empirical work, especially its 1985 turn toward recuperating native consciousness, drew criticism from historians, most notably Sumit Sarkar and David Ludden. For a critical history of the Collective, see David Ludden's edited volume *Reading Subaltern Studies*, (New Delhi: Permanent Black), 2002. In particular, Sumit Sarkar's essay "The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies". Also read Dipesh Chakrabarty's essay "A Small History of Subaltern Studies" in *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (New Delhi: Permanent Black), 2006.

the annexation of Awadh (Oudh) in 1856. He also dismissed the theory that the *ulema* and the Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar (r. 1857), were the leaders of the rebellion. He followed the refutations with a five-point list of reasons that he believed had created bad blood between the natives and “their government”. Syed Ahmad Khan’s list betrays his anxiety about the marginalization of upper class Muslim men in the new political dispensation. His grouses against East India Company’s policies include the abolition of Taluqdari rights in Awadh, the public sale of zamindari rights, the resumption of tax-free land grants (*maafee* lands), exclusion of Indians from promotion to high appointments, and inadequate job positions for the Muslim scribal class. The Company’s interference in the religious practices of the natives through the encouragement of missionary activities and its imposition of English laws that had little understanding of the local customs had led to widespread disaffection among Indians in no small measure, argues Syed Ahmad Khan. The bullet incident of Barrackpore was simply the final straw in this series of blunders; one that pushed disgruntled soldiers and civilians into open rebellion.¹²⁰

Approximately a decade after *Asbab*, William Wilson Hunter’s *The Indian Musalmans* extended the debate around 1857 by situating the role of Muslims in the uprising in the larger context of the “chronic (Wahabi) conspiracy within the Empire”. Hunter wrote the book in response to Lord Mayo’s famous question: “Are the Indian

¹²⁰ Khan, Syed Ahmad. *Asbab e Bagawat e Hind*. Lahore: Mustafai Press. For an early English translation of the tract, see the 1873 version published by the Medical Hall Press in Benares (Varanasi). The translators of the text are simply identified as two European friends of Syed Ahmad Khan. The text is available through the Hathi Trust website (last accessed November 10, 2016).

Musalms bound by their Religion to rebel against the Queen?" The book was Hunter's attempt to reassure statesmen like Lord Mayo and the government more generally. He reasoned that though it would be foolish to expect "enthusiastic loyalty" from the Muslim subjects "we can reasonably expect that, so long as we scrupulously discharge our obligations to them, they will honestly fulfill their duties in the position in which God has placed them to us."¹²¹ Among the obligations that Hunter lists at the end of the book is the reversal of the virtual disappearance of Muslims from all sectors of government employment. He asks:

How comes it that the Muhammadan population is thus shut out alike from official employ and from the recognised professions? The Musalmans of Bengal do not want intelligence, and the spur of poverty constantly goads them to do something to better their condition. The Government has covered Bengal with schools, and many of its Districts are peopled with Muhammadans; yet the Government schools fail to develop a class of Musalmans who can compete successfully at the University, or find an entrance into any of the professions. The same schools send forth every year a vast body of well-read, ambitious and intellectual Hindu youths, who distinguish themselves as young men at the University, and in after life monopolise every avenue to wealth or distinction.

The truth is, that our system to public instruction, which has awakened the Hindus from the sleep of centuries, and quickened their inert masses with some of the noble impulses of a nation, is opposed to the traditions, unsuited to the requirements, and hateful to the religion, of the Musalmans.¹²²

In recommending that the educated Muslims be elevated to the status and prestige they once occupied—and rightfully deserved—by virtue of belonging to the former ruling class, Hunter was taking a position not different from Syed Ahmad Khan. Both

¹²¹ Hunter, WW. *The Indian Musalmans*. New Delhi: Rupa and Co, 2002, 133-134.

¹²² *Ibid*, 168-69

Asbab and *The Indian Muslamans* are apologia that make a case for granting privileges to the Urdu-speaking elite as a strategy of building a base of loyalists. However, while Hunter, in promoting the disenfranchised Muslims of Bengal, was speaking for a constituency that had suffered serious setbacks in the nineteenth century, the same could not be said about the fortunes of Muslims in north India where colonization had followed a different script.

The theory of a blanket British persecution of the Muslims has been comprehensively disproven by modern historians. It has been replaced by a more robust approach that frames interactions between Muslims and the East India Company, or the Crown State after 1858, within a complex matrix of landholding patterns, revenue settlement policy, land right transfers, caste and community stratification, and the presence or absence of loyalist elites. Eric Stokes' groundbreaking work on the rural rebellions in the United Provinces cautions against simplistic accounts of a unified Muslim uprising, given that in a single district (Muzaffarnagar), "the Sayyid communities in the eastern paraganas stayed quiet, while on the other side the Muslim gentry rose to support the Thana Bhawan rising of September 1857 when the green flag of Islam was raised and a jihad proclaimed against the white infidel".¹²³ In other words, in the run up to the events of 1857 and after, the Muslim *zamindars*, *muafidars*, *pattidars* and *taluqdars* of the North-Western Provinces fared differently. More importantly, their situation was

¹²³ Stokes, Eric "Traditional Elites in the Great Rebellion of 1857: Some Aspects of Rural Revolt in the Upper and Central Doab." In *The 1857 Rebellion*, edited by Biswamoy Pati, (New York: Routledge), 2010, 187.

not comparable to the *jagirdars* and cultivators of Bengal who bore the brunt of the Permanent Settlement.

Similarly, the impact of colonial innovations in education and employment policies on the prospects of the Muslim service class differed from one region to another. Hunter's data from Bengal indicates that Muslims started lagging behind Hindus in government service from the middle of the nineteenth century, but arguably the precedents lay in the last two decades of the eighteenth century that saw the gradual dismantling of the Mughal judicial system, beginning with Lord Cornwallis' abolition of the office of *naib nizam* in 1790 and the dismissal of native judges, who could now only serve in advisory capacities to European officers and magistrates.¹²⁴ In the North-Western Provinces that came under Company control only in 1803, the Muslim educated class was well-represented in the subordinate government jobs in the first half of the nineteenth century. Similarly, there appears to be no bias against Muslims in the selection for the posts of *tehsildars*, *talukdars*, and honorary magistrates. Here too, the fall in the number of Muslims filling these positions after 1857, as argued by Peter Hardy, has less to do with the persecution of Muslims and more to do with the changing criteria for qualifications sought in a public servant.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Rafiuddin Ahmed's monogram offers a thorough examination of the crystallization of the Muslim community in Bengal, its internal fissures as well as its distancing from the Hindus during this period. See Ahmed, Rafiuddin. *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: a quest for identity*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1996.

¹²⁵ Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1972.

Despite these changes, as long as Persian was the language of the courts and governance, the Muslim literate class found itself gainfully employed. But when in 1837 Persian made way for the vernaculars and English even the contemporaneous decision to re-open positions in judicial service to natives could not arrest the slump in the percentage of Muslims employed in Bengal's courts and revenue departments.¹²⁶ Muslim intellectuals and colonial government concurred that modern education was the key to reversing the shrinking presence of Muslims in an otherwise growing community of government servants. The older system, in which Muslim boys began early education in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic at home or in local *maktabs*¹²⁷ and then proceeded to memorise or at least read the Quran, meant that by the time they enrolled in the primary school they already lagged behind the Hindu students belonging to scribal groups such as the Kayasths and the Kashmiri Brahmins.¹²⁸ In 1913, the Department of Education sought to remedy this situation by encouraging *maktabs* to adopt a secular curriculum that would "appeal to Muslims and will not prevent the teaching of simple Urdu, where necessary, and of the Koran".¹²⁹ Other recommendations included printing special textbooks for "semi-secular" *maktabs* and the inclusion in the "textbooks for ordinary schools in

¹²⁶ In the year 1856, the number of Muslims employed in Bengal's courts and revenue departments in high positions was 54 as opposed to 366 Hindus. See Peter Hardy. *The Muslims of British India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 48.

¹²⁷ A *maktab* is a basic primary school, often run from the mosque, or the home of an *alim*, a rich merchant or a landlord. It usually catered to the young children, both boys and girls, from the families of the patrons of the *maktab*, though it was very common for other children from the neighbourhood to also acquire basic education at these institutions.

¹²⁸ Francis Robinson. *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1974.

¹²⁹ 131/1913 Muhammadan Education, Education A, Oct 1913.

areas where Muslims were numerous of stories which are not distasteful to Muslims” without intending to exclude the “traditional stories of the Hindu religion”.¹³⁰

At the secondary or collegiate level, the Department of Education recommended the opening of special schools that would help Muslim students who were struggling to learn English through Prakrit. Scholarships were to be offered to poor students and seats were to be reserved for Muslim students in institutions that were likely to draw pupils from the community by virtue of their reputation. Interestingly, despite the realization that the complete absence of religious education of some sort was a key factor in keeping Muslims away from the government schools, the colonial government was extremely reluctant to take upon itself the role of dispensing religious instruction. The bureaucratic trail of recommendations, comments, and polite counter-comments that kept the Department of Public Instructions and the Muslim Educational Conference volunteers busy in the first quarter of the twentieth century reveals the government’s discomfort about mixing secular and religious education in state-funded schools.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ See Education A Part I 909/1922, 83/1916, 96/1916 and Education B 578 and 542 for a few examples. In responding to the repeated demand for religious education, this time made by the Muslim Educational Conference held in Lucknow in February 1934, the government’s standard response was: “Government do not consider it desirable to accept the recommendations that in Muslim institutions religious training may be given to Muslims students at any time during school hours. As regards the second part of the resolution, rule 66 of the District Board Educational Rules will be amended to provide that in the case of Islamia schools the Muslim teacher or teachers on the staff of the school are permitted to give religious instruction to their pupils, In other Muslim

Regardless of the fall in the number of Muslims employed by the colonial state after 1857, the government did emerge as the biggest employer of the service class towards the close of the nineteenth century. According to data cited by Francis Robinson in *Separatism Among Indian Muslims*, at the end of 1880 the colonial state employed 54,000 people, of which only 200 “belonged to the ruling race”.¹³² The other big employers of the literate class were the princely states. In particular, Bhopal, Rampur and Hyderabad were a big draw for Muslims who did not want to work for the British government. It is difficult to find comparable data from the Mughal era or the successor states that would shed light on where the figure of 54,000 stands in comparison to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But it can be safely assumed that as the colonial state’s infrastructure of bureaucracy and surveillance penetrated the Subcontinent in unprecedented ways through institutions such as the railways, postal service, intelligence bureaus, health, sanitation, and education departments, to name a few, it employed natives in various formal and informal capacities. In *Mirat ul Uroos*, Asghari advises her husband Mohammad Kamil, who is looking for employment, to spend his days around the courthouse and make himself useful in the hope of getting noticed by important people. Nazir Ahmad’s advice to young Muslim men here is to actively foster new professional ties based on merit and hard work instead of relying on

institutions there is no obstacle to religious instruction being given by a member of the staff.” See Education 21 A Part III, 115/1935 in the UP State Archives, Lucknow.

¹³² Francis Robinson. *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 20.

older networks of elite privilege. It was an opportune suggestion because it came at a time when a series of Company Acts and policies made educational qualification, as defined by the state, a minimum prerequisite for obtaining government employment in the police force, bureaucracy and judiciary. In particular, appointments to senior posts required clearing the University entrance exam. The middle decades of the nineteenth century also witnessed the introduction of elected representation in local governments at the district-level, which, as demonstrated by Francis Robinson, eventually effected the alliance between the upper caste Hindus and Muslims.¹³³

The Colonial Work Space

The colonial state, to be sure, built a massive bureaucratic apparatus and peopled it with educated natives. But more significantly, it altered the terms of employment and transformed the workspace in which the service class found itself. It has been pointed out that men like Syed Ahmad Khan, Maulvi Zakauallah Khan Dehlevi, Altaf Hussain Hali, and Nazir Ahmad belonged to service families that had historically served the governments of the day.¹³⁴ And yet the conditions of employment in late nineteenth century could not have been more different from the Mughal courts. For one, the new offices were spatially and temporally removed from the household space. Also, they were no longer spaces conducive to leisurely socialization. The

¹³³ Ibid, 33-83.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 10-33.

Weberian impersonality and rationality of the new workspace—defined by fixed hours, centralised authority, and rigid rules—were not lost on the employees. The protagonist of one of Nazir Ahmad's later novels *Ibn ul Waqt* (The Son of the Moment, 1888) captures this shift comprehensively as he recounts to a British official the reasons that made him wary of taking up employment with the colonial state. He states:

As I have repeatedly told you, for generations we have been in the service of the Mughal government. A body of servants affiliated with the dynasty for generations fulfilled every big and small need of the Mughal government. The servants (*mulazim*) took comfort in the knowledge that not only their livelihoods but even those of their children were secure.....I never heard the words 'fine', 'suspension', or 'termination' in the Fort. On the contrary, the employees were always showered with limitless praise, gifts, and respect. The descendants of Taimur did not attach too much importance to money. Salaries of the deceased royal servants continued to be disbursed among their children, grandchildren and even the great grandchildren, such that often a descendant received only a few paise in remuneration. And that too every two years or so. In most cases, the money was accepted by the families as a token of grace (*tabarruk*). The appreciation shown by the government was what kept the people going.....In short, the government of the Fort (Mughal government) treated its employees like its children. This is the kind of government I have lived with and I do not think myself fit for working for the English.¹³⁵

Nazir Ahmad is easily the most successful of the Urdu reformist writers of his generation. His *Mirat ul Uroos* received high praise and support from the government and lay readers alike. The novel is painfully didactic and unabashed in pushing the agenda of reform down the reader's throat. Its message is simple: if women learn to save and men get employed in government offices, respectable

¹³⁵ Ahmad, Nazir Deputy. *Ibn ul Waqt* (The Son of the Moment). Delhi: Kitabi Duniya, 2000, p 90-91.

Muslim families can climb out of debt and misery. At opportune moments in the plot, Nazir Ahmad makes summary references to correct Islamic practices, but his engagement with religious revival is fundamentally different from that of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewī and Maulana Thanawī for whom the Afterlife took precedence over every material concern. Nazir Ahmad, on the other hand, never loses sight of the worldly goals that he thought Muslims could, and should, achieve. He was aware that in the nineteenth century this often required associating with the British government. In *Mirat ul Uroos* when an unemployed Muhammad Kamil contemplates seeking a position in a princely state in Lahore where his father is already employed Asghari reminds him that:

There is nothing left in Lahore. The government of the *raees* (rich nobility) is already in ruins. He continues to keep your father in employment out of old courtesy and pays him rupees fifty. There is no scope for fresh recruitments there.¹³⁶

Asghari further elaborates that none of the native states was doing well ever since the English had set shop in the country. The only realistic option Muhammad Kamil had was to work for the English. Nazir Ahmad himself worked in the education and revenue departments of the North-Western Provinces for nearly two decades. *Mirat ul Uroos*, written during this period, is his most optimistic vision of the colonial state's potential to facilitate Muslim empowerment through employment.

¹³⁶ Ahmad, Nazir Deputy. *Mirat ul Uroos* (Mirror for Brides). New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1958, 104.

In not entirely surprising ways, the plot of Nazir Ahmad's novels mirrors the aspirations and disappointments of his life, especially his career as a government servant. He moved to Hyderabad in 1877 to work in the Nizam's government but his stint in the Deccan was short-lived. He returned to Delhi in 1884 and stayed there until his death in 1912. He wrote *Ibn ul Waqt* in 1888, towards the end of a long career as a public servant and an activist. In contrast to *Mirat ul Uroos*, which is set in an *Ashraf* household, *Ibn ul Waqt* narrates the blossoming—and eventual failure—of friendship between a *sharif* Muslim and a British official. The novel's protagonist, Ibn ul Waqt, graduates from Delhi College, with interests in Arabic, Persian and History. The plot unfolds with Ibn ul Waqt taking in an injured British official, Noble Saheb, during the 1857 rebellion. When peace is restored in Delhi, Noble Saheb returns the favour by granting Ibn ul Waqt prime *zamindari* land in Gurgaon¹³⁷ and also appoints him as his assistant in the governmental probe into the rebellion. Soon a friendship develops between the two and Ibn ul Waqt, upon Noble Saheb's coaxing, fashions himself as a reformer of the Muslim community. Since a leader can only lead by example, Ibn ul Waqt embraces English forms of clothing and rents a house in the cantonment area as a first step towards reforming fellow Muslims. However, his relocation to the camp area gradually isolates him from the very community he had set out to reform. He finds himself further marginalized when Noble Saheb abruptly returns to Britain. Ibn ul Waqt realises

¹³⁷ Gurgaon (renamed Gurugram in 2016) is located about thirty kilometres southwest of Delhi. It became part of the Punjab province after the 1857 revolt, and is currently an important industrial city in the state of Haryana.

that his integration into the Anglicised world is fragile and goes back to the world he knows best: the walled city of Delhi.

The transition from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century was a distinctive moment in the history of South Asia. The unshakeable faith in the potential of reform, education and government employment that had defined the writings of men who had come of age around 1857 was replaced by disenchantment and frustration. Nazir Ahmad's disillusionment with the ameliorative promise of government service is voiced in the novel through the character of Hujjat ul Islam¹³⁸ (Proof / Evidence of Islam), a native bureaucrat, who, unlike Ibn ul Waqt, held on to his religious beliefs and value system amid the clamour for modernization. He reminds Ibn ul Waqt:

...the government is so frugal and efficient in its workings that where a rupee has to be spent, it wants to spend no more than fifty paise. And that too after much hesitation. As a result, fewer people find employment and the salaries are low. To make matters worse, the whole world seems to be intent of finding a government job. Bania, Baqal, thetre, kesre, kanjre, bhatiyare, even the grass cutters...families that did not have a single literate person in their midst for generations are now sending their children to schools. So what good can government employment bring?¹³⁹

¹³⁸ As is mentioned in the first chapter, most didactic novels presented straightforward narratives about the battle between the good and the evil, leaving no room for ambiguous characters who could be placed in the grey area. Each character represented a fairly clear position with respect to religion, reform, and politics and his or her actions through the course of the novel reflected those positions. Nazir Ahmad made the ideological affiliations of his key characters even clearer by giving them allegorical names such as Hujjat ul Islam, Ibn ul Waqt and Door Andesh Khan (Mr Foresighted), the father of Asghari in *Mirat ul Uroos*, which gave the readers an indication of their role in the plot.

¹³⁹ Ahmad, Nazir Deputy. *Ibn ul Waqt* (The Son of the Moment). Delhi: Kitabi Duniya, 2000, 117-118.

It should be noted that Hujjat ul Islam's critique of government employment, which forms Nazir Ahmad's closing argument in the novel, is different from Ibn ul Waqt's comparison of the Mughal and colonial employers cited above. The latter set of arguments betrays the anxiety of a service class that was wrestling with the idea of joining British service, struggling to learn a new language, was unsure about adopting English modes of socialization, and was dismayed at not being treated as equals in the new workspace.¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, Hujjat ul Islam's tirade at the end of the text warns Ibn ul Waqt that government employment did not necessarily improve the community's prospects. Nazir Ahmad's critique of the government here is twofold: one, it was not doing enough to improve the fortunes of the elite and two, it was employing the lower classes and creating a new service class that was threatening the entrenched position of the older players. In fact, Nazir Ahmad's own career is testimony to this disenchantment. He came into the limelight as a celebrated author of educational literature apt for training the new service class but he spent his later years loaning money to Muslim entrepreneurs in Delhi in an

¹⁴⁰ In Shareef Zada, Hadi, Mirza Ruswa writes: "Mirza was first appointed as a grade three sub-overseer. After a series of promotions he reached the post of assistant engineer. This progress fell short of Mirza's capabilities but under the given circumstances this was the most that Mirza could achieve. Promotions in the workplace do not depend on an employee's capabilities alone. An important factor is the like or dislike of his officer. Government servants are transferred very frequently. This is the reason why an officer never gets to know his subordinates well. The result is that often an employee who is fit for promotion is overlooked for one who is not deserving of success. The officer and the subordinate are very distant from each other. For instance, the officer stays in outside the city in a beautiful bungalow whereas his subordinate in one of the dark, filthy alleys of the city. Under such circumstances how can the two get to know each other. Had Mirza's officers been aware of his character and nature, they would not have registered the false case of corruption against him. The officers assume that every subordinate is dishonest and a cheat, who demands bribes." See Mirza Hadi Ruswa, *Sharif Zada* (New Delhi: Taraqqi Urdu Board).

attempt to make them “more and more interested in trade and business”¹⁴¹. Mirza Farhatullah Beg, who was a student of Nazir Ahmad during this period, writes that Maulvi Sahab (Nazir Ahmad) could be easily persuaded to offer financial assistance for exciting business ventures, and he always charged interest on the loan. Quoting Nazir Ahmad, Beg states: “He used to say, “My dears, if you also want to do some business, I’ll give you money. When you face difficulties in service, only then will you understand”.”¹⁴²

In 1888, the the same year as the publication of *Ibn ul Waqt*, Nazir Ahmad’s classmate from Delhi College, Maulvi Zakaullah Khan Dehlevi, penned an essay that reviewed the progress made by Muslims in the field of education in time for the third Muslim Educational Conference held in Lahore. In his write-up, Zakaullah Khan paints a dismal picture of the state of Muslim education, especially in degree, professional, and law colleges. The number of Muslim boys in primary and middle schools had risen, according to the statistics he provides, but such boys were barely proficient in English and could do no more than “wear the tag of a peon in the post and telegraph offices and distribute mail or write ‘Lahore’ and ‘Delhi’ in English alphabets on the freight loaded on goods train”.¹⁴³ In the meanwhile, all the plum government posts were being filled by men from other communities, he lamented.

¹⁴¹ Beg, Farhatullah Mirza. *Nazir Ahmad: In his Own Words and Mine*. Translated by Mohammed Zakir. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009, 20-21.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Muhammad Zakaullah Dehlavi, *Musalmanon ki Maujudah Halat e Taleem par Navishtah i Maulvi Muhammad Zakaullah Dehlavi* (Agra: Matba e Mufeed e Aam, 1889), page 113

A disproportionate attention to the maneuverings of the native service class in British administration has prevented scholars from fully understanding the lure of government employment among the non-scribal groups such as landholding class, the *ulema*, as well as groups hitherto distinguished for military service. Hadi Mirza Ruswa, who acquired an engineering degree from Roorkee and worked for the railways, hailed from a military family that had served in the Awadh army. Shibli Naumani (d. 1914), a protégé of Syed Ahmad Khan and the force behind Lucknow's *madrassa* Nadwat ul Ulema, hailed from a landholding family in Azamgarh. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, possibly the most influential *alim* of colonial and post-colonial north India, writes in his biography that his father, a 'pious landholder' made a conscious decision to put his younger son through the modern school system because he wanted one son to master the *duniya* (the world) and another to pursue *deen* (religion, faith).¹⁴⁴

Social mobility through government service may have been a pipedream for many, but this did not make those jobs any less coveted. During my fieldwork in Lucknow, I stumbled upon an Urdu couplet that captures the aspirational pull of government employment, especially the senior positions, which, according to Zakaullah Khan Dehlevi and Nazir Ahmad, had been beyond the grasp of Muslims:

Ya Ilahi de lugai jiske honh ladke hazaar

¹⁴⁴ Majzoob Khwaja Aziz ul Hasan, *Ashraf us Sawaneh*, Vol 1, (Deoband: Maktaba Thanawai, 2009).

Ek ho deputy collector, baki honh tehsildar¹⁴⁵

[Oh god, grant me a wife who bears me a thousand sons

Of whom one becomes a deputy collector and the rest tehsildar]

Much like the reformist writings of this period, the couplet, which continues to circulate in eastern Uttar Pradesh today, places the burden of its hyperbolic expectations on the body of the woman even as it makes an appeal for divine intervention. And while women were expected to bear and raise sons who would one day add to the community's tally of senior government officers, successful men were the ones who could get a toehold in the government apparatus. Deputy collectors, headmasters, assistant engineers and inspectors also inhabited—even dominated—the fictive worlds of novels, short stories and newspaper advertisements, as can be seen in the copy of an advertisement below:

Dongre's Balamrit: The tonic for ideal children

A wonderful restorer in wasting conditions of children.

The Headmaster, Junagarh High School, writes:—I have always used your Balamrit in my family. In its effects it wonderfully bears out its name, viz, Balamrit, i.e. nectar of children. (Sd.) Karim Mohamed, M.A., L.L.B¹⁴⁶

Even in the highly standardized plots of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels, it was often a younger lawyer, a magistrate, an inspector or a teacher who saved the day by setting the affairs in order. This is a departure from the

¹⁴⁵ Another version of the couplet pegs the number of deputy collectors at four (chaar ho deputy collector), I am indebted to 'Motka Nana' for this couplet, whose exhaustive knowledge of colloquial Urdu proved to be a valuable resource during my field work in Lucknow.

¹⁴⁶ The Comrade, August 1, 1914, Jamia Archives (Rare Books Collection)

seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *dastan* and *afsaneh* whose heroes were kings, soldiers, star-crossed lovers, or a combination of all of those.¹⁴⁷ Hasan Shah, the author of the autobiographical Persian novel *Nashtar* (Surgeon's Knife), printed in the 1790s is probably among the last of the novelists who wrote about a Syed falling in love with and secretly marrying a nautch girl. Shah was in his twenties when he wrote *Nashtar*, which was later translated into Urdu and English (The Nautch Girl). He belonged to a Syed family that had sent high-ranking government officers to the court of Rohilla kings and in the service of nobles in Lahore and Delhi. Shah himself worked as a *munshi* (scribe / accountant) for a British officer in Kanpur. The tragic account of his unfulfilled romance with his wife Khanum Jan, which ends in her death, foretells the disappearance of the social space in which an upper class man could marry a dancing girl.¹⁴⁸

An increasing acceptance—even a preference for an ‘employed man’—can be seen in the matrimonial notices that were appearing in the advertisement pages with increasing frequency at the turn of the twentieth century.

Alliance invited for a Sunni girl, age fourteen years, educated and hailing for the Syed community and a respectable family. The boy should be able / accomplished / competent / qualified and employed. Merchants and zamindars can also send in their details. All correspondence will be kept secret. For details, write on the address listed below:

¹⁴⁷ See Francis Pritchett's introduction to her translation of the adventures of Amir Hamzah for comprehensive overview of the *dastan* tradition, its origins in ninth century Iran, its popularity in the royal courts and in the *bazars*, its journey to Moghul India and its creative transformations as it was translated into Urdu and Hindi, and eventually set to print. Pritchett, Frances W. *The romance tradition in Urdu: Adventures from the Dastan of Amir Hamzah*. Columbia University Press, 1991, 1-59.

¹⁴⁸ Shah, Hasan. *The Nautch Girl*. Translated and foreword by Qurratulain Hyder. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd, 1992.

(B) Manager, Tehzeeb e Niswan¹⁴⁹

Alliance invited for an educated girl belonging to a respected Muslim Rajput family. The family is looking for an able / accomplished / competent / qualified boy who should be employed at a senior post. Merchants and zamindars can also write in with details. All correspondence should be sent to the address listed below:

(A) Manager, Tehzeeb e Niswan, Lahore¹⁵⁰

Alliance is invited for a thirteen-year-old girl from a respected family. The boy should be employed and could hail from one of the four *zaats* (communities) of Syed, Shaikh, Mughal or Pathan. He should not be a resident of a village. Single men and widowers are invited to send in their details. Men who already have a wife are not being sought. The girl is good-looking, can read and write Urdu and is proficient in basic needle-work. Interested parties can contact the family on the address listed below:

Manager, Tehzeeb e Niswan, Lahore.¹⁵¹

Matrimonial: A young Sunni Muhammadan, M.A., Sub-Deputy Collector, of a Syed and respectable family, intends contracting marriage alliance in the family of some Rais (affluent), Zamindar, Barrister or High Government official of Behar or up-country. Beauty besides other qualifications common to the sex is desirable in the bride. All communication will be treated as strictly confidential. For particulars please communicate with A.B. c/o The Manager, "The Comrade," 109, Ripon Street, Calcutta.¹⁵²

1-7-11

A young Muhammadan of a Syed and highly respectable family, age 23 years, a Government servant in the Executive line, fairly good pay and future prospects, good references, intends to correspond with a respectable family with a view to matrimony. Good looks essential in the bride. Communications strictly confidential. For particulars write to X.Y.Z., care of Manager, "The Comrade," 109, Ripon Street, Calcutta.¹⁵³

July 1, page 18

¹⁴⁹ Tehzeeb e Niswan, May 25, 1923, vol 26, no 20.

¹⁵⁰ Tehzeeb e Niswan, August 4, 1923, vol 26.

¹⁵¹ Tehzeeb e Niswan, Oct 13, 1923. Vol 26.

¹⁵² The Comrade, 1-7-11.

¹⁵³ The Comrade, July 1, page 18

The Turn to Companionate Conjuality

The emergence of the companionate turn in spousal relations—one in which “the man and the wife together pull the cart of life to its final destination”¹⁵⁴—at the turn of twentieth century has to be explained against the background of the arrival of the itinerant salaried employee and the unravelling of the grand household. Nazir Ahmad’s best-seller *Mirat ul Uroos* is seen as an early articulation of the educated man’s desire for a wife who could be a companion.¹⁵⁵ After all, Asghari is astute and good-mannered and has her wits about her at all times. If anything, she is too good for Muhammad Kamil. All the key plots in the novel involve Asghari, her father and her parents-in-law. Muhammad Kamil is at best a bystander who has to be pushed to complete his education and find employment. If marriage in *Mirat ul Uroos* is an attempt to imagine companionate marriage, Asghari is certainly short-changed. From the moment she sets foot in her marital home, she goes about putting the family’s affairs and finances in order. By the end of the novel, she has earned the goodwill of her family and neighbours but she seems to stand alone in victory. Her children die young and her relationship with her husband is not much to write about.

If Nazir Ahmad was the literary star of the second half of the nineteenth century, the beginning of the next century belonged to his nephew Allama Rashid ul Khairi (d.

¹⁵⁴ Rashid ul Khairi, *Gudri Mein La’al (Gem in a Patched Quilt)*, 5th ed, ed. Raziq ul Khairi (Karachi: Anjuman Press, 1969), 16.

¹⁵⁵ Minault, Gail. “Role Models: Educated Muslim Women,” in *Secluded Scholars* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14-57.

1936), who adopted key tropes and techniques from his uncle's works to write incredibly bleak stories about pious and wise women who suffered at the hands of foolish men, and died. Rashid ul Khairi was rightly called *musavvir e gham* or the painter of sorrow. His early novels, *Hayat e Saleha* (Saleha's life) and *Manazil us Saira* (The Stages of the Journey) were published in 1902 and 1905. He followed these with a trilogy of tearjerkers entitled *Subh e Zindagi* (The Morning of Life), *Shaam e Zindagi* (The Evening of Life), and *Shab e Zondagi* (The Nighttime of Life). In novel after novel, Khairi repeats the theme of the exemplary heroine who brings dramatic improvement in people's life before embracing death with the dignity expected of an *Ashraf* woman.

In the absence of women's accounts from the mid-nineteenth century that would shed light on their cares and concerns, historians have had to deploy innovative reading strategies, or even destabilize the very meaning and location of the historical archive, in order to narrate the lives of women.¹⁵⁶ In the quest for 'sources' that could provide a glimpse into women's world, they have relied on didactic novels and literature that was often penned by men.¹⁵⁷ In the context of Islamic reform in South Asia, Minault has made a case for a reading strategy that "involves studying women as objects of men's programmes of reform" in order to

¹⁵⁶ Burton, Antoinette. *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India*. New Delhi: Oxford University, 2003.

¹⁵⁷ The Victorian novels from the nineteenth century, along with the Evangelical literature from this period, formed a steady source for history writing in the 1950s and 1960s, as seen in the works of Maurice Quinlan and Martha Vicinus. For a critique of using the prescriptive narratives of reformist literature, both fiction and non-fiction, as descriptive manuals, see Amanda Vickery's *Golden Age to Separate Spheres* (The Historical Journal, June 1993).

access the world of the secluded elite women, though the historian would have to “read creatively between the lines of the men’s accounts”.¹⁵⁸

If we take Amanda Vickery’s point on board—that didactic literature is prescriptive and provides idealized role models for companionate wifehood, the question that begs to be asked is why, then, do the novelists fail in their project of imagining companionate marriage? What exactly did reformists like Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi expect a woman to bring to a marital relationship? This section argues that any attempt to look for traces of companionate conjugality in the works of early male reformers would be to misread the reformist agenda. A reading strategy that puts the novels in dialogue with the non-fiction writings, mainly magazine articles and commentaries from the same authors that circulated as widely as their fiction, allows us to better flesh out the contours of the reformist project. A phenomenal run as a novelist and a champion of women’s education enabled Rashid ul Khairi to launch *Ismat*, a literary magazine for women, in 1908. The magazine, like *Tehzeb e Niswan* launched in 1898, routinely invited its female readers to send in articles, recipes, and stories. The editorial voice of the magazine, however, distinctly remains, Rashid ul Khairi’s, who frequently wrote articles for *Ismat*, often using female pseudonyms. His son Raziq ul Khairi, who took over the editorial charge of the magazine in 1922, published a selection of Rashid ul Khairi’s columns in *Ismat* in a collection entitled *Gudri Mein La’al (Gems in a Patched Quilt)*. Of the 75 articles that

¹⁵⁸ Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women’s Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 9-10.

Raziq ul Khairi picked for his readers, 24 deal with the topic of pregnancy and motherhood, eleven advice women on hygiene and diseases, ten entries are dedicated to the management of everyday household chores and a total of 30 articles are devoted to making women aware of the importance of saving money. Snippets from two such articles are reproduced below:

This companionship (between a man and a woman) is not trivial. It is an enormous responsibility and on it rests the foundation of these two lives (the husband and the wife) and the generations that will follow after them. For this reason, not understanding the nature of this partnership is a loss that cannot be reversed, a sin that cannot be atoned, and an illness that has no cure. It is a relationship in which the man and the wife together pull the cart of life to its final destination. Though this companionship effects every aspect of life, the issue at hand right now is money. Money that a husband earns and hands over to his wife. It is a man's duty to strive through honest means, labour if need be, in order to meet the needs faced by the two of them. And it is a woman's responsibility to allocate the budget in such a way that this money is only spent on necessities. Before spending her husband's income on items of luxury that her heart desires, she needs to ask herself if she has the right to do so. Will her actions create problems for her husband?¹⁵⁹

A woman does not become a man's life partner in order to quarrel with him about organizing meaningless ceremonies to celebrate lifecycle rituals. The actual purpose of becoming a wife is to contemplate how she came about each penny that she hands out in expenses. She should tell herself: I came into possession of this money only after my husband agreed to give up his liberty. In a manner similar to my cook (*mama*), who tolerates abuses and reprimands in order to earn a living, my husband too stands in obedience in front of his officer for hours. He works through rain and storm to earn this money. Even if he owns a business enterprise, his life is full of hardships. He does not get a minute's peace. It is, of course, true that money is not worth even the dust of your husband's shoe. If god so wills, he will get paid again next month. And if he is a businessman, there will be no dearth of money. But what if he loses his job or his business runs into loss? He handed all his earnings over to the wife.

¹⁵⁹ Rashid ul Khairi, *Gudri Mein La'al (Gem in a Patched Quilt)*, 5th ed, ed. Raziq ul Khairi (Karachi: Anjuman Press, 1969), 16.

It is her duty to save for contingencies. This is what I call “a man earns what a woman saves.”¹⁶⁰

Rashid ul Khairi switches between reprimanding and imploring women to learn better fiscal management. He takes his mission to ridiculous, and possibly sacrilegious, proportions when he writes:

If modern education can only produce girls who can write essays in newspapers and read books, then the community (*qaum*) certainly does not need such girls. If being educated means that the girl remains ignorant in the virtues of housekeeping, then the community has no desire for such educated girls. The community needs girls who are true Muslims because a Muslim girl will always be aware of her responsibilities, of which the most important is her role as a housekeeper....In these times of escalating cost of living, it has become impossible to find a cook (*mama*). Even if a family does find one, she has to be paid no less than rupees 15 or 20 a month. If the household income is rupees 100 and a big chunk goes toward the salary of the cook, it causes financial hardships. The need of the hour is to first teach our daughters the skills of housekeeping and then allow her to learn to read and write. Otherwise, the situation will get dire. The carelessness of the wives might become the cause of the community’s poverty.¹⁶¹

If there is one theme that runs through reformist literature—both fiction and non-fiction—produced in the second half of the nineteenth century and trailing into the first decade of the twentieth century, it is the anxiety surrounding the fiscally irresponsible wife of a salary-earning man. Much has been written about the call for financial austerity that underpinned reformist movements across religious denominations. The received wisdom is that the impulse to reform arose amid the rapid impoverishment of the landed elite. The constant refrain of reformers and

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 17-18.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 75

English administrators alike—and one that has been internalized by scholars—is that members of the landed elite would not hesitate to mortgage their ancestral property and jewellery to host yet another decadent wedding party. It is true that many reformers belonged to erstwhile landed gentry that had fallen upon bad times. Altaf Hussain Hali, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi hailed from families that not too long ago had rights to land revenues of several villages. However, to understand the quick erosion of their assets as a direct consequence of expensive parties is to understate the role of factors like rescindment of Mughal land grants and the curse of prolonged litigation in colonial courts.¹⁶²

More importantly, the dubbing of reforms as a chorus cry of the hapless elite masks the stake that men like Nazir Ahmad, Hadi Ruswa, Rashid ul Khairi, and Shaikh Abdullah had in the project. These men came from scholarly families, but without illustrious family trees, like the ones possessed by Maulana Abdul Bari Firangi Mahali or Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, their families had little chance of receiving substantial court patronage. The flourishing of *madrasa* education and the opening of government employment to Urdu and Persian speakers in the second half of the

¹⁶² In his biography, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani writes extensively about his family's long battles in Diwani courts over land disputes. According to Maulana Madani, the family had received a land grant of twenty-four villages in Faizabad district in the distant past, but in the absence of valid papers, it lost control of eleven villages before 1857. The family's rivals took advantage of the chaos of the Mutiny and the death of Maulana Madani's grandfather to forcibly take possession of most of the remaining land, barring two villages. Maulana Madani's uncle filed a court case to regain possession of the villages, but a prolonged court battle against a wealthy *zamindar* ended up further impoverishing the family, which finally lost the last two villages in mortgage. See Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naqsh e Hayat* (Deoband: Maktaba Shaikh ul Islam, 2007), 36-38.

nineteenth century created opportunities for young men. The more enterprising among them grabbed these opportunities and emerged as the new elite.¹⁶³ Or at least they made a claim in that direction. Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi's obsessive drive to budget the household expenses, remain solvent, healthy and productive at all times, and an investment in the education of the future generations are indicative of a slow but purposeful climb to the top. And in this march to prosperity, the woman, in her role as the wife, was a fiscally responsible partner, a guardian of resources, an account-keeper of money flowing in and out of the household, and easily available labour in times of crisis.

Given that the potential for romance and equality were not the hallmarks of the martial companionship as imagined in reformist writings, what then set apart their notions of idealized marriage from the ones that they relentlessly critiqued? The answer, this chapter argues, lies in reformers' pragmatic but revolutionary move of adjudging the wife as the keeper of her husband's salary. After Asghari moves into her husband's house, the first thing she does is to convince her mother-in-law to relinquish the store keys and the household accounts. The transfer of power from the matriarch to the newly-arrived daughter-in-law is smooth, uneventful and is largely justified by Nazir Ahmad through the reasoning that an educated Asghari is better equipped to run the house compared to her superstitious mother-in-law. It is

¹⁶³ Nazir Ahmad apparently spoke with great relish about how he ensured that he turned a chance encounter into an admission ticket to Delhi College in 1846 and also got himself a scholarship by giving evidence of his intelligence. See Beg, Farhatullah Mirza. *Nazir Ahmad: In his Own Words and Mine*. Translated by Mohammed Zakir. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009.

logic that the mother-in-law seems to gracefully endorse. The columns and essays in contemporary women's magazine *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, however, provide ample evidence of simmering resentment against the 'educated daughters-in-law' who spent their days in bed reading one book after another.

Between 1901 and 1919, as *Tehzeeb e Niswan* added more pages and garnered a stable readership, it invited women to contribute articles to the magazine. At the end of every year, contributors with a high number of published articles were awarded cash prizes. During this period, essays dwelling on the misunderstandings between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and the mismatch between educated husbands and their uneducated wives frequently found place in the magazine.¹⁶⁴ However, in an essay in the October 20, 1923 issue of the magazine, a woman who uses the penname W.A., wrote that in recent years a new list of skirmishes had been appended to the already circulating stories about the feuds between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law: namely, the cruelty faced by women at the hands of their husbands. The author reasons that this is the case because:

These days married women spend very little time with their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. All their time is spent in the company of their husbands, living a lonely life in a far-flung, foreign place. Unfortunately, when men move away from the watchful eyes of their guardians they cultivate habits that are resentful to their wives. Modern women, on the other hand, are not as resourceful and hardworking as their mothers and grandmothers used to be. They learn no skills in their parents' homes and when in a remote city the responsibility of running the household falls on their shoulders, they fumble

¹⁶⁴ Other topics regularly featured in the magazine included the hardships faced by widows, the need for women to learn better accounting habits and nuanced debates about the role of *purdah* in Muslim society. See *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, 1901-1919.

and fail. It is, therefore, not surprising that in our times the husbands and wives are constant locked in a feud.¹⁶⁵

There are two aspects of the above-cited excerpt that deserve to be highlighted.

First is the social isolation and loneliness of the women who were constantly on the move with their husbands. Going back to the case of Sheherbanu Begum in Chapter 1, after a prolonged illness, she died a lonely death in October 1933, surrounded by a few servants and a distant relative.¹⁶⁶ Her husband was in Europe at the time of the incident and her daughter, Shaista, was married and had moved out. To be sure, not all women met the tragic end that awaited Sheherbanu Begum but more and more women were spending their married lives outside the 'Arabian Nights' world of the inner city where the thick network of female sociality did not follow them. A 1924 matrimonial advertisement in *Tehzeeb e Niswan* makes this very clear:

Wife wanted

A dear acquaintance of mine, who is from among the *Shurfa* of Delhi and is a *Sayyid*, is looking to marry again on account of the death of his first wife. His age is 35, earns 300 rupees a month and has a life style worthy of his income. The boy and his family are well-known in Delhi and the surrounding areas and interested parties should have no trouble investigating the background of the boy.

To quote a phrase from Delhi, the girl should be 'her parents' daughter'. She should be sensible, healthy and pleasing on the eyes. She should be prepared to run a household in the absence of her mother-in-law, sisters-in-law or any senior member. Apart from the house, the girl will also have to look after her husband's three children (ages seven years, four years, and two years).

¹⁶⁵ "Ek Mufeed Tajweez (A Useful Suggestion)," *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, Oct 20, 1923, Vol 26, No 42.

¹⁶⁶ Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah ki Muntakhib Tehreerein (The Selected Writings of Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah)*, ed and introduction Ahmad Saleem (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007).13-14.

Alliance is invited from unmarried girls who should be no older than seventeen or eighteen years. Widows who are twenty-five-years-old or less will also be considered.

Syed Ahmad, inspector police, Ajmer Sharif, Rajputana¹⁶⁷

Maulana Thanawi's *Beheshti Zewar*, which was, and is still, considered the complete household and religious guide for women from respectable families, sought to educate women in skills, sciences and the religious fundamentals that would be useful for running a good Muslim home. The book begins with teaching women the correct manner of speaking, which is distinguished from the coarse vocabulary of lower class women. Next, women learn to write, pray, pickle vegetables, attend funerals, master the art of gift-giving, and many such things. The later editions of *Beheshti Zewar* also have embroidery and *henna* patterns that can be traced onto fabric and craft paper. What kind of household was Maulana Thanawi imagining? It is certainly one in which all guidance comes from his book. Older matriarchs, mothers-in-law, older co-wives, sisters and sisters-in-law do not populate this world. The only other person who inhabits this household apart from the wife, to whom the book is addressed, is the husband.

This brings us to the second key point made in the 1923 *Tehzeeb e Niswan* article by W.A., namely the absence of oversight from the guardians in the new set-up where the husband and wife lived alone. However, the "watchful eyes" that had supposedly kept men away from undesirable habits did not just belong to the parents. Moral

¹⁶⁷ *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, March 15, 1924, Vol 27, No 11

and social chastising could come from a whole gamut of older relatives or even close neighbours. In fact, as Ismat Chughtai makes it clear, most often servants and wet nurses were in charge of keeping the children in line. Finally, the most revered source of guidance were the Sufi masters (the *pirs*) and spiritual preceptors. This was especially true in the days before the establishment of the professional *madrasa* when both boys and girls received their early education at home.¹⁶⁸ After becoming familiar with Urdu, Arabic, and Persian alphabets at a *maktab* at home, the boys would go on to read the Quran under the guidance of the *maulvi* at the local mosque while the girls would read the scripture with a senior member of the family. The next step—open only to boys—was to begin lessons in *ma'qulat* (rational sciences including subjects such as grammar, ethics, logic, mathematics, rhetoric, etc), *manqulat* (a study *hadith* and the Quran) and *fiqh* literature.¹⁶⁹ At this point the education of the male children of the family was taken over by *ulema* trained in these subjects. The entire process could take up to six to seven years, during which a

¹⁶⁸ It could be argued that the crisis of female education, which the colonial state and Indian reformers alike blamed on centuries of backward practices such as *purdah*, was accelerated by the shutting down of the *maktabs* at home because boys were being sent away to formal schools and *madrasa* at an early age.

¹⁶⁹ *Fiqh* refers to Islamic jurisprudence or the “science of religious law” in Islam. The Quran, the *hadith* literature, *ijma* (consensus), and *qiyas* (reasoning / analogy) form the basis of the science. According to the Encyclopedia of Islam, in the “older theological language the word (*fiqh*) did not have this comprehensive meaning; it was rather used in opposition to *'ilm*. While the latter denotes, beside the *Qur'ān* and its interpretation, the accurate knowledge of the legal decisions handed down from the Prophet and his Companions...the term *fiqh* is applied to the independent exercise of the intelligence, the decision of legal points by one's own judgment in the absence or ignorance of a traditional ruling bearing on the case in question. The result of such independent consideration is *ra'y* (opinion, *opinio prudentium*), with which it is also sometimes used synonymously. In this sense *'ilm* and *fiqh* are regarded as distinct qualities of the theologian.” For the complete entry, see *Fiqh*. Brill. Accessed November 12, 2016. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-1/fikh-COM_0055.

student moved from one teacher to another and yet always remained entrenched in the familiar network of male scholars, some of whom were family members—elder brothers, cousins, uncles, grandfathers and fathers—while others were spiritual guides.

This is not to state that a young man never left home. In fact, in the context of the Muslim educated elite, or the clergy and service class as they are referred to, the rhetoric of travelling to distant lands in search of a teacher found encouragement in the frequently cited *hadith* that a Muslim should travel in pursuit of *ilm* (knowledge), even if the search takes him to China. Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewī, for instance, shuttled between Kandhla, Nizamuddin, Gangoh, and Deoband during his days as a student. For a while he stayed with his father in Nizamuddin and received early education from him. But he did not make much progress in Nizamuddin and was asked to shift to Gangoh in 1896 by his brother Maulana Yahya, who was then in the service of the famous Chishti saint and the co-founder of Deoband's Darul Uloom, Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d.1905). Maulana Ilyas struck a spiritual intimacy with Maulana Gangohi and became his disciple, remaining in Gangoh as long as Gangohi was alive. When he finally enrolled in Deoband in 1908 he already had the rare honour of being the *murid* of the school's founder. In all his years of early education never did Maulana Ilyas step outside the familiar and familial network. The same could be said about many people belonging to his class and to his generation and the generations before. It was a system of imparting education and

socialization that ensured that a single family (counting its many offshoots) over the course of many generations virtually transformed itself into a social and political force and claimed for itself the role of the moral guide of the community. The Firangi Mahal family in Lucknow and Maulana Ilyas' family of Kandhla are the most prominent examples of this system.

Furthermore, it was a system that tied together the community's learned elite and the occupational classes in a reciprocal relationship that manifested itself in various institutional and non-institutional set-ups. Maulana Thanawi spent hours answering mails from people who solicited his opinion on various issues. He led congregational prayers, wrote amulets for the sick and the unhappy, issued *fatawa* and counseled people who showed up at his door. He did have strict rules about when he would meet people. Unlike the community kitchen of the thirteenth-century Sufi saint Shaikh Nizamuddin (d. 1325) that was always open to the neighbourhood's poor, Maulana Thanawi's *khanqah* had fixed hours. He did not entertain visitors on Friday in order to avoid serving lunch to more people than he could handle. "Every man who comes to Thana Bhawan for the Friday congregational prayer shows up at my door after the prayer with trivial questions. Too big a crowd gathers and I cannot serve food to so many people. People with genuine queries will make a trip to Thana

Bhawan on another day of the week as well,” he said as an explanation for the Friday ban on visitors.¹⁷⁰

It might seem anachronistic to compare Maulana Thanawi’s *khanqah*, which grew into prominence during colonial rule, with Nizamuddin’s *khanqah* in fourteenth-century Delhi. But a look at the two institutions side by side allows us to better understand how fundamentally different twentieth century notions of community, moral leadership, Sufism, and, most importantly, piety were in comparison to the pre-modern times. At no point in his sermons does Thanawi call for worldly renunciation or dismantling of class boundaries. In fact, he repeatedly argues that it was the duty of the Muslim community to support the *ulema* financially—embracing the role played by emperors and aristocrats in the previous centuries—so that the *ulema* could channelize their energies toward studying the nuances of *deen*. He did not want every Muslim boy to become an *alim*, though he did want the best among them to join this fold. The rest of the community could go about running their businesses or reporting to government jobs. The *ulema* in turn could be the religious specialists provided they did not have to worry about the contingences of the mundane world.

Thanawi was gifted a bag of watermelons or a basket of mangoes by a grateful disciple every once in a while. Another way of showing gratitude was to remain in

¹⁷⁰ Majzoob Khwaja, Aziz ul Hasan, *Ashraf us Sawaneh*, Vol 2, (Deoband: Maktaba Thanawai, 2009), 407.

the service of one's *pir* and his family.¹⁷¹ But it is clear that he did not make a fortune from the services he provided to the community, and neither did he have to. He belonged to a landed family, a privilege that he shared with his fellow *ulema* in Kandhla and Lucknow. An important aspect of the respect that men like Maulana Thanawi and Maulana Ilyas commanded in the community was their disinterest in money-making avenues, which aligned very well with their disparagement of those *ulema* who did take up worldly (*duniyavi*) professions to supplement their income. Maulana Thanawi proposes that poor and uneducated men should receive at least a year of religious education following which they can learn the occupational skills if they need in order to survive. However, he does not see them as particularly suited to play the role of the moral guides of the community. That task, according to Thanawi, can be better performed by men from affluent families who are equipped for a specialized education in religious texts without being encumbered by the concerns of the mundane world. "The poor are never free from worries about livelihood," he writes.¹⁷² He tweaks his recommendation for the educated section of the community—that is knowledgeable enough but not as well-versed as an *alim*—to suggest that they stay in touch with the *ulema* through letters and visits. He even

¹⁷¹ Even today children from poorer families can be found working as domestic helps in the homes of leading *ulema*. While the young girls work in the kitchen, the boys pick up odd jobs in the mardana. The strict implementation of purdah means that movement of the women of the family is restricted and much of the traffic of food, messages, and goods between the outside world and the zenana is facilitated by the children. In return, they are taught to read the Quran and foundational Urdu texts and their parents have relatively easy access to the *pir*.

¹⁷² Thanawi, Maulana Ashraf Ali. *Fawaid us Sohbat: Allah Walon ki Sohbat ke Fawaid aur Samrat*. Karachi: Jamia Ashraf ul Madaris, 65.

urges them to write to numerous *ulema* with a query and compare their responses before picking the most appropriate one.

What is missing in Thanawi's vision of the appropriate role and conduct of *ulema* is an introspection of his own class position as a landed and religious elite in a *qasbah* town that placed him right in the centre of a thick network of material and spiritual transactions. The unreflective elision of 'Ashraf-ness' with a natural disposition towards piety and an inclination to learn and understand religious texts without any care in the world conveniently misrecognizes the cause for the effect. The tools and resources necessary to fashion a pious self had historically been available to Ashraf men like Thanawi, and to women in their family to a lesser extent, in the form of land grants by emperors, service and devotion from the community, and access to knowledge through lineage.

The establishment of Deoband's Darul Uloom and subsequent institutions in Saharanpur, Lucknow, Bareilly and practically every town with sizeable a Muslim population changed the dynamics considerably, though the impact of these institutions on the status of historically endowed *ulema* has not been properly scrutinized. However, the fact remains that soon after opening its door to students, *madrasas* across north India were churning out highly talented *ulema* who came from families with zamindari, mercantile backgrounds or occupational backgrounds. Moreover, an equal, if not more, number of young boys from non-Ashraf

backgrounds were enrolling in English schools and colleges, with their eyes set on lucrative government postings.

It is against this dual possibility of social and economic mobility that was changing the fabric of the qasaba towns that one needs to read Maulana Thanawi's sermon entitled *Fawaid us Sohbat* delivered on October 17, 1912 on the occasion of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewī's wedding ceremony. It was transcribed on the spot by Maulana Saeed Ahmad and has since then circulated widely. Delivered over approximately four hours, Thanawi often meandered but largely stuck to the main theme: the benefits of good company. He begins by reciting the twenty-eighth verse of *Surah Al Kahf* (the Surah of the Cave) from the Quran. Surah Al Kahf is the eighteenth chapter of the Quran, dedicated to an incident in Muhammad's early days as a prophet when he was still facing persecution in Mecca. In order to test his claims of prophethood, the Quraish of Mecca posed three questions to Muhammad.¹⁷³ Surah Al Kahf was revealed to help Muhammad answer the questions to the satisfaction of the residents of Mecca. Nestled between the answers is the verse 28, which warns Muhammad to:

And keep thy soul content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face; and let not thine eyes pass beyond them, seeking pomp and glitter of this life; nor obey any whose heart We have permitted to

¹⁷³ Some commentaries and *hadith* traditions suggest that the Quraish, the tribe to which Muhammad belonged as well, consulted the Jews of Medina before framing the three questions, all of which had origins in the older scriptures of the region.

neglect the remembrance of Us, one who follows his own desires, whose case has gone beyond all bounds.¹⁷⁴

The verse is unrelated to the principle theme of Surah Al Kahf. Quranic commentaries relate this verse to another mischief orchestrated by the Quraish wherein they suggested that if Muhammad could get rid of the band of poor followers that surrounded him, they would be open to listening to his message. The verse is Allah's warning to Muhammad to not trade the company of the poor and pious for those who may be endowed with riches but their hearts did not obey Allah.¹⁷⁵

Thanawi uses this verse as the pivot to drive home the point that amid the cry for education the community had forgotten that an important counterpart to education (*taleem*) is correct upbringing and guidance (*tarbiyat*) for which it is important for men, women and children to spend some time in the company of an accomplished guide / shaykh or an *alim*. While there are different paths to getting an education suited for one's station in life, it is only in the company of a capable guide that one can transform into a morally sentient being. Unlike education, the slower process of *tarbiyat* in which one spends "at least one day in a week or month and one month in a year in the company of *ulema*" requires a man to observe and imbibe the virtues of

¹⁷⁴ The Quran, translation Abdullah Yusuf Ali, p 737-738.

¹⁷⁵ Maududi, Abul Ala. *Tafheem ul Quran*, vol 2 (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islamic Publisher, 2011).

the pious masters around him.¹⁷⁶ Just as there were fixed hours for eating and resting, one needed to set aside time for good company. He observed that the British had already understood this principle and had set up hostels and boarding schools to arrange for better disciplining of students under the watchful eyes of the teachers.

Fawaid us Sohbat is Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's roadmap to fashion a community that chases prosperity without compromising its Islamic tenets. It is a community of differential piety structured around its members' unequal access to material resources. As men who have dedicated their lives in the service of religion, the *ulema* take their position as the moral guides of the community. Conversely, as the top tier of a community ranked according to their display of piety, the *ulema* stand out as men capable of extreme piety. Thanawi's intense displeasure with the *qalandars*, *bairagis* and *pirs* of local saint shrines—who were the whipping boys of Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi as well—is once again evident in their exclusion from the list of people capable of watching the moral compass of the community.

But if *Fawaid us Sohbat* provides a glimpse of the changing conception of moral leadership in the twentieth century, it also elucidates how the community itself was changing. In fact, it appears that much of Maulana Thanawi's disdain about Muslim men not spending quality time with the *ulema* stems from the panic that transferable government jobs, English education, modern boarding schools, clubs

¹⁷⁶ Thanawi, Maulana Ashraf Ali. *Fawaid us Sohbat: Allah Walon ki Sohbat ke Fawaid aur Samrat*. Karachi: Jamia Ashraf ul Madaris, 46.

and associations, and cricket and football were gradually pulling men away from older networks of grooming and socialization. Compared to the tight-knit networks of the familiar and familial discussed above the community in the twentieth century was far more dispersed and the mode of piety that Thanawi chalks out in *Beheshti Zewar* and *Fawaid us Sohbat* are mindful of the contours of the new dispersed community.

Fawaid us Sohbat as a text is more than hundred years old and continues to be in circulation among the followers of Thanawi. It does not come up as frequently in the popular discourse as *Beheshti Zewar* or his collection of fatawa (*Imdad ul Fatawa*), but a better way to gauge the impact of the historic sermon is to trace the changes it triggered and movements it inspired. At the time of the sermon, Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewī, the groom, was twenty-seven years old and already had a reputation of “being constantly preoccupied by the erosion of faith from the lives of Muslims”¹⁷⁷. It would be another fifteen years before his tabligh work in Mewat would gain momentum, but by 1912 Maulana Ilyas, and before him his father and his brother, had put in considerable time and energy into reforming the Meo community. They had tried to bring in groups of Meo men into Nizamuddin, where the family was based, in order to teach them correct Islamic practices. However, the experiment of religious reform failed to take off and Maulana Ilyas was in search for a method that would bring about lasting change and transform the Meos. After years of pursuing

¹⁷⁷ Nadwi, Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Nadwi. *Hazrat Maulana Ilyas Aur Unki Deeni Dawat*. New Delhi: Farid Book Depot, 2002.

the idea that piety could be taught through sermons and lessons, Maulana Ilyas finally tweaked his approach and appears to have borrowed a leaf from Thanawi's sermon. He started approaching *ulema*—men who were friends and family—to travel to Mewat and spend time with the community there. The initial response to Maulana Ilyas' strategy was lukewarm, with even Maulana Thanawi expressing his apprehensions about asking venerable *ulema* to camp out in the hinterland with nominal Muslims.¹⁷⁸ But Maulana Ilyas was relentless and by the second quarter of the century he was organising small batches of *ulema* who travelled to Mewat to spend a few days with the Meos. Similar traffic of men began in the opposite direction, with Meos leaving their community for a couple of days to stay with *ulema* in mosques and madrasa. Within a few years, the movement that is today known as Tablighi Jamaat—though Maulana Ilyas never used that name—claimed remarkable success in the region of Mewat. Biographies of its founder state that very soon after the first meeting of *ulema* in region in 1927 mosques and madrasa were built and Hindu practices were shunned by the Meos.¹⁷⁹ The success in recalcitrant Mewat encouraged Maulana Ilyas and his men to expand the mission to other parts of north India, based on the principle of 'good company' elucidated by Maulana Thanawi in 1912. The formula of spending "at least one day in a week or month and one month in a year in the company of *ulema*" became, and continues to be, the catchphrase of Tablighi Jamaat.

¹⁷⁸ Interviews with Maulana Nur ul Rashid in Kandhla, February 2014.

¹⁷⁹ Nadwi, Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Nadwi. *Hazrat Maulana Ilyas Aur Unki Deeni Dawat*. New Delhi: Farid Book Depot, 2002.

However, the passage of time introduced one key difference that eventually allowed Maulana Thanawi's idiom of good company to crossover into the domain of the domestic. The core feature of Thanawi's 'good company' was the centrality of the learned male as the counsellor to those who sought his company. To the extent that knowledge flowed from the *alim* to the layman, the power to change and transform rested with the scholar. This feature was maintained by Maulana Ilyas and the passionate letters he sent to his friends in Darul Uloom (Deoband) and Mazahir ul Uloom (Saharanpur) asking them to travel to Mewat reflects his fidelity to the idea that the Meos could undergo a moral and spiritual change in the company of *ulema*. But as more and more merchants and professionals joined Tablighi Jamaat there was a subtle but distinct shift in the understanding of what good company entailed. The beginnings of this can be seen soon after the death of Maulana Ilyas in 1944. The next two *umra* (leaders) who followed Maulana Ilyas—Maulana Inamullah Kandhlewī (his nephew) and Maulana Yusuf Kandhlewī (his son)—are credited with expanding the reach of the Jamaat to foreign shores. An important aspect of this growth was the active courting of merchants and professional through exclusive *ijtima* (meetings) organised for specific professional groups across South Asia. Cities such as Bombay, Karachi, Kanpur and Surat that had sizeable merchant populations were specially targetted during the 1950s and 1960s. As the demographics of the men who made the body of the Jamaat changed, good company was no longer predicated on the learned and scholarly achievements of one's companion. Even though the principle of "one day in a week or month and one month in a year"

stayed in place, a good companion could very well be a lay person who was anxious enough about the degeneration of Islam to pack his bags and travel to Muslim settlements far and near. Being possessed by “*deen ki fikr*” (concern about faith) replaced scholarly achievements as the desirable quality, making the *alim* peripheral to the movement.¹⁸⁰ A narrative exercise often employed in the Jamaat meetings compares the accomplishments of an *alim* (a religious scholar), an *abid* (a spiritual master) and a *dai* (one who invites others to the right path). The *alim* and *abid* do not fare well in this comparison because their gaze does not extend beyond themselves. The *dai*, on the other hand, is concerned about the entire *ummat* so he foregoes the comforts of his home to travel. He alone has taken up the difficult task set into motion by the prophet: he is working to save Islam, while the former two are busy saving their individual souls. He surpasses the *alim* and the *abid* in his compassion and piety. For this reason the *dai* will find himself in the company of Muhammad and his companions on the day of judgement.

The emergence of the *dai* as the new hero was based on a conception of piety that was disassociated from formal relationships of scholarly or spiritual lineages. The piety of the *dai* arose from within and did not depend on training under the tutelage of a learned master. Much could be achieved by enrolling in a madrasa or learning at the feet of a spiritual preceptor. In fact, men from the family of Maulana Ilyas

¹⁸⁰ This is not to say that the *ulema* do not hold a position of privilege in the everyday functioning and planning of Tablighi Jamaat. But the greater participation of merchants and professionals, particularly the latter, in the Tablighi Jamaat has made them a prominent faction in the decision-making circles of the Jamaat and drawn the ire of the *ulema* in Deoband and Delhi. Based on anonymous interviews with *ulema* in Delhi in January 2014.

Kandhlewi did both and continue to do so. But the discourse of the superiority of the *dai* created newer, creative avenues for a section of the community that had previously only been the receivers of spiritual guidance. Merchants, businessmen and women who had historically played the role of patrons to religious specialists could now claim to be religious *dai* themselves as long as they could restructure their worldly commitment and travel on *dawat* tours.

The possibility for women to work in the Jamaat opened up much later and it is an innovation that continues to draw severe disapproval even from those *ulema* who are otherwise sympathetic to the movement's work. Their strictures have forced the Jamaat to lay down elaborate rules that monitor women's participation in the movement, but the option of restricting *dawat* work only to men has never been seriously considered because all evidence suggests that women initiates or *dai* are better than men. In a conversation I was party to at a Jamaat meeting in central Bombay in November 2012, Rehmat Apa¹⁸¹, who has spent over forty years with the Jamaat, was giving the following words of advice to the younger members:

The *zimmedar*¹⁸² of Bombay have reported that in most cases where a woman has become involved in our work, she has changed the minds and hearts of her entire family. But men who have joined us are not able to convince their families with equal success. Those cases are far rarer." At this point, I nodded in vigorous agreement and told Shameem Apa that I had a hunch about that

¹⁸¹ The names of all the women have been changed to protect their identities. The dates and locations of the interviews and sermons have been retained, except in cases where the disclosure of that information could lead to the identification of women.

¹⁸² The Urdu term means 'responsible'. In Tablighi Jamaat's hierarchy the *zimmedar* are men from local mosques who give voice to the concerns of their communities at the movement's headquarters in Delhi.

too. "Listen child," she continued, "What did Satan tell Adam: eat it! It is the fruit of eternity. If you eat this fruit you will stay in the gardens of heaven forever. But Adam did not pay heed to Satan. Who did he listen to?" "Bibi Hawwa," we all answered together. "Allah has blessed women with the power to convince," Apa said.¹⁸³

Rehmat Apa's calm disposition and her standing as one of the senior-most women in the Jamaat in central Bombay made her the informal counsellor of the neighbourhood. She embraced this role gracefully and often joked that she was a doctor handing out remedies to troubled souls. At the end of every meeting, younger women thronged to her corner of the meeting hall to seek advice on various topics. The most common theme of discussion, though, was the problem of recalcitrant husbands who did not want to join the Jamaat. Rehmat Apa's recommendation was the same on every occasion: read out aloud to him from Tablighi texts, seek his permission before you begin reading, do not read for too long at one go, keep an eye on the watch while you read. The strategy is to gradually acclimatize the spouse to the Tablighi world without ever giving the impression that he is being bulldozed. The coming around of the spouse is a key aspect of being associated with the Jamaat and much of it has to do with the very nature of the movement's organization and structure. Serious commitment to Jamaat requires making fundamental changes to one's work and domestic life and without a cooperative spouse one does not go very far in the Jamaat.

¹⁸³ File notes: interview excerpts from central Bombay meeting, November 27, 2012.

A perfect example of this is the event called *nusrat* (help or service), in which senior men and women from across India get a chance to spend a month at the *markaz* in Nizamuddin in order to help the incoming members from different countries settle in. The members selected for *nusrat* are entrusted the task of explaining the basic rules of travel, good conduct, worship, and time-keeping to the new members who are about to set out on their first Tablighi travel (known as *khurj*) or are returning from a mission. The Tablighi *markaz* on any given day resembles the waiting lounge of an international airport. It is packed with men and women—living in segregated areas—who have convened there and await their travel assignment. An equally large group of people who have returned from their missions use their time at the *markaz* to give a detailed account of their mission, an exercise called *kaarguzari*.¹⁸⁴ People who serve on the *nusrat* team can converse in multiple languages. Most have at least basic Arabic, English and Urdu under their belt. In the one month that they spend at the *markaz* they train and bid goodbye to countless people. But their most important task is to keep the communication lines between the male and female quarters flowing without breaching the rules of *purdah*. Through a series of complicated procedures, the women on *nusrat* team work in conjunction with the men on the team to carry messages, food and medicine across the *purdah*.¹⁸⁵ And

¹⁸⁴ The term loosely translates to narrating one's work or exploits.

¹⁸⁵ At one end of the women's quarter there are two communication chambers that are small rooms with two doors each. One door opens in the women's quarter and the other in the public alleyway. At the assigned time every evening, one couple from the *nusrat* team takes it position. The man waits in the alleyway and the woman stays in the chamber. If a male guest wants to speak to his wife, mother or sister who are in the women's quarter, he approaches the man in the alleyway and gives his name (never the name of the female relative), the city he hails from and steps back. The *nusrat* member

while one can participate in the Jamaat meetings without being accompanied by one's spouse, serving in *nusrat*—the most prestigious call of duty for a member—is only available to women who can travel with men and vice-versa. In theory, a woman can travel with her brother, father or son. Rehmat Apa, for one, regularly serves on the team accompanied by her brother. But by far the vast majority of travelling Tablighi women are accompanied by their husbands.

Scholars and feminist activists arguing for gender equality in Islam have mined the early history of the Islamic community to demonstrate instances when women played an active role as spiritual and political leaders of the community.

Muhammad's wives Ayesha and Khadija, his daughter Fatema, the eighth century Sufi Rabea Basri are the most common protagonist of such studies.¹⁸⁶ Another school of revisionist history blames the androcentrism of the tenth- and eleventh-century scholars—the period when the canons of *hadith* and *fiqh* texts were formalized—for the later-day misogyny of Islam.¹⁸⁷ But while it is true that Ayesha, Fatema, Khadija and Rabea Basri were exceptionally powerful and pious women and

then knocks on the chamber door. His wife opens the door and her husband gives her the name of the man waiting outside. She goes back to the women's quarter and announces the name of the man and the city. His wife or mother walks to the communication chamber the *nusrat* member but waits outside the door. The *nusrat* member goes into the chamber alone and knocks on the door. Her husband opens the door and is told that the said woman is here. At this point both the husband and wife on the *nusrat* team retreat and the guests communicate with each other.

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, Margaret Smith's *Rabia the Mystic and Her Fellow-saints in Islam: Being the Life and Teachings of Rabia Al-Adawiyya Al-Qaysiyya of Basra Together with Some Account of the Place of the Women Saints in Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 1984) and Fatima Mernissi's *Women and Islam: An historical and theological inquiry* (South Asia Books, 1991).

¹⁸⁷ Ahmad, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

also that the middle-ages of Islam institutionalized practices and texts that curtailed the role of women in the legal and public sphere, the fact remains that it not was before twentieth century that women in large numbers could participate in political and spiritual movements. Apart from Tablighi Jamaat, Abu'l Ala Maududi's Jamaat e Islami and Jinnah's Muslim League were actively courting women. The same can be said about the mass movements floated by Hindus and Sikhs. However, no other South Asian reformist movement from that period has had the kind of success that Tablighi Jamaat has witnessed. Scholars have ascribed Jamaat's wide reach to the early inroads it made in the top-ranking madrasa in South Asia or its creative organizational structure that allows members to affiliate with the movement in various capacity.

These analyses, while making valid points, have left the space of the household unexamined. Given the Jamaat's very early preoccupation with the domestic space and its desire to monitor the actions of women, this lapse in scholarship is baffling. This chapter has argued that nineteenth- and twentieth-century reform movements—by virtue of their ambition to refashion the household space—demanded a partnership between men and women. Tablighi Jamaat, the most tenacious reform movement to have emerged in that milieu, was also the most successful in forging this partnership by replacing scriptural authority with piety and by choosing the company of pious wives over the company of pirs. The virtue of piety replaced the skill of an *alim*. The only company that mattered was the

company of a pious Muslim who was willing to spend time teaching and learning from other Muslims. The biggest beneficiaries of this shift that was first envisioned by Maulana Thanawi in a very different context were the women who were allowed to become religious *dai* without having gone through rigorous madrasa training. Tablighi Jamaat offered a Protestant-like take on piety that trimmed the encumbering rituals and impinging clergies from the everyday lives of Muslims and replaced it with an inward-looking and personal mode of piety. It is not a coincidence that it came into existence in a period when fulfillment of one's religious obligations was becoming a task that could be accomplished more and more in isolation from one's immediate geographical community even as it paradoxically had the potential to connect Muslims across large distances.

When Maulana Ilyas died in 1944 his son Maulana Yusuf received hundreds of telegrams from friends and disciples who wanted to visit the markaz in person to offer their condolences. Maulana Yusuf is said to have famously turned down their offers. He sent out a common letter, asking his well-wishers to stay in their respective cities and recite the Quran in memory of his father instead. The letter further advised that the money that would have been spent on train fare would be better spent as to be spend toward a worthier religious cause¹⁸⁸. More than a hundred years ago, Jafar Sharif, a physician from Deccan, wrote *Qanoon e Islam*

¹⁸⁸ Maulana Zakariya Kandhewi, *Aap Beeti*, Vol 3 (Deoband: Dar ul Kitaab, 2002), 241.

under instructions from his boss G.A. Herklots.¹⁸⁹ The text claims to be a “full and exact account of their (Muslims’) various rites and ceremonies, from the moment of birth till the hour of death” and is indeed quite comprehensive though the introduction of the text, written by Herklots, acknowledges that some rituals encountered in the texts are observed only in Deccan.¹⁹⁰ In the chapter entitled “The Dead, Or The Visiting The Grave On The Third Day After Burial”, Sharif details the multiple ceremonies that involve reading of the Quran at the grave site and feeding of the neighbours and the poor on the third, ninth and the fortieth day following the death of a family member.

When reformist movements gathered steam at the end of the nineteenth century it was these and similar ceremonies that came under attack for being extravagant, unnecessary and un-Islamic. Nazeer Ahmad, Rashid ul Khairi, Maulana Thanawi and Maulana Ilyas may have had conflicting ideas about the future of the community, the rights and responsibilities of women, the nature of education, etc., but they were unanimous in their scathing critique of rituals.¹⁹¹ The model of personal piety presented in sermons and novels decoupled authentic religion from the kinds of ceremonies listed in *Qanoon e Islam*, terming them as extraneous innovations.

¹⁸⁹ Herklots also translated the text into English. *Qanoon e Islam* is only available in this translated form. Sharif’s original text is no longer extant.

¹⁹⁰ Shurreef, Jaffur. *Qanoon-e-Islam or The Customs of the Mussalmans of India*. Al-Irshad, 1973.

¹⁹¹ A rare defense of custom at a slightly later point in time comes from Shaista Suhrawardy, who wrote several columns in *Asmat* listing the merits of South Asian institutions and practices that were a source of patronage and succor for poor relatives, widows and the less fortunate neighbours. She argued that the reformers were throwing the bathwater out with the baby by calling for a sweeping disavowal of customs and instead called for a scaling down of ceremonies.

Maulana Thanawi in *Beheshti Zewar* described an ideal marriage ceremony in which a few male members from the groom's side visited the bride's home, the *nikah* was read in the presence of family elders, and the wedding party returned home with the bride without any fanfare. The relatives and neighbours were not informed about the event till after the bride had come home. Maulana Yusuf's take on traditional condolence meetings has already been discussed above. Even Muhammad and Shaukat Ali—the Ali Brothers at the helm of the Khilafat Movement—could not resist taking a dig at customary ceremonies. In an editorial in their mouthpiece, *The Comrade*, the brothers reprimanded the community for literally burning their money by spending it on fireworks during the festival of *Shab e Baraat* and distributing sweets in the neighbourhood. They wanted Muslims to donate money to the Khilafat Movement instead as an act of genuine piety.¹⁹²

Conclusion

To see the reformist attacks on customary practices that glued a heterogeneous community together in relations of material and spiritual reciprocity as the catalyst in the forging of a new mode of piety is to give the reformist voice more salience than it probably had. The clue to the emergence of personal piety lies elsewhere. It can be found, for instance, in the December 15, 1923 issue of *Tehzeeb e Niswan* that includes a curious announcement and includes a list of fifty-nine women from

¹⁹² The Comrade, Jamia archives, 1924.

Punjab, United Provinces, Maharashtra, and Bihar¹⁹³. The women are volunteers who have agreed to read an assigned section of the Quran in the isolation of their homes whenever a request comes from a reader who has had a death in the family. The announcement, which precedes Maulana Yusuf's letter by two decades, lays down several guidelines to make sure that the volunteers receive the notice for the geographically-dispersed Quran Khwani (the reading of the Quran) well in advance. Volunteers are also warned that a failure on their part to read the assigned section will lead to their removal from the list. Most women who signed up for the group were wives or daughters of government servants. The announcement does not speak the language of reform and does not sound anything like the letter of Maulana Yusuf or the sermons of Thanawi. It is likely that the readers who requested that the Quran be read in the memory of their deceased beloved also arranged for a reading in the local mosque as is usually done. But in cases where this would not be possible—like the distant homes of Shaista Suhrawardy in the English quarters—the community of magazine readers who referred to each other as sisters could potentially step in as a substitute. It is of some significance here that the people eligible for requesting the reading are subscribers' of the magazine who have lost a parent, a sibling, a child or a spouse. There is no room for requests for deceased aunts, uncles, cousins, wet nurses, neighbours or family servants in this scheme.

¹⁹³ Tehzeeb e Niswan, December 15, 1923 (AMU archives).

Tablighi Jamaat's spectacular success as a twentieth century movement lies not its network of *ulema* but its sprawling network of non-specialists—merchants, government servants and their wives and daughters—who inhabited an increasingly homogeneous and mobile middle-class world. Furthermore, it rested in its ability to harness the force of the restructured household at the heart of which lay the partnership between the man and his pious wife.

The narrative of the emergence of reformist piety follows a chain of causality that connects the events of 1857 with the dethroning and impoverishment of the old elite. The impetus for reform is supposed to have arisen from the political and economic exclusion of the elite, both Hindu and Muslim, making reform a political tool in the hands of the excluded. Even if that were to be the case, the resonance of their message in the community cannot be explained as the result of the machinations of a handful of elite. The gradual restructuring of the household made older modes of piety unsustainable. Maulana Thanawi could sense it in 1912 and the readers of *Tehzeeb e Niswan* were already reformulating new ways of being a pious community in 1923. Maulana Ilyas' Tablighi Jamaat, over a period of twenty years, fine-tuned its message and organizational structure to accommodate these changes with spectacular success in the 1940s.

CHAPTER 3: PIETY AND PURDAH

Kandhla is an important site in the history of religious reform in north India. It is the birth place of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewi, the founder of the Islamic reform movement Tablighi Jamaat. Even before Maulana Ilyas brought fame to this town located 50 miles north of Delhi, Kandhla had already been a renowned centre of Islamic learning due to the migration of influential *ulema* from Central Asia in the thirteenth century.¹⁹⁴ Today, it draws scholars from Europe and North America who visit the town for its collection of nineteenth and twentieth century religious literature housed in the private library of Maulana Nur ul Rashid, a descendent of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewi.

During my stay in the *zenana* quarters of Maulana Nur ul Rashid's house the family was invited for dinner in a village several miles away, close to the border of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. I tried to excuse myself for the evening but Maulana Nur ul Rashid insisted that I accompany the family to the dinner. At the appointed hour, right after the pre-sunset prayer of *asar*, we set out in the family van. The men, dressed in white, sat in the front seats, and the women, all draped in black *burqah*, sat in the back of the van. On reaching the destination, we were ushered inside the house while the men joined the already gathered crowd in the alleyway.

¹⁹⁴ Maulana Muhammad Ehtesham ul Hasan Kandhlewi, *Tarikh e Mashaikh e Kandhla (The History of the Shaikhs of Kandhla)* (New Delhi: Idara Isha'at e Deeniyat).

We spent the rest of the evening in the inner room, eating and praying behind the curtains. However, very early in the evening it became clear that the women from Maulana Nur ul Rashid's family were not happy with the *purdah* arrangement of the host. There were young boys loitering around in the outer verandah who appeared to be marginally older than the age at which they would be exempt from the rules of *mehram*.¹⁹⁵ Every time the curtain separating the inner room and the verandah fluttered a little, the boys could catch a glimpse of the guests and the women would frantically adjust their *dupatta*.¹⁹⁶ Finally, one of the younger women from among the guests resolved the situation by wearing her *burqah* indoors to the obvious annoyance of the hosts. The rest of the guests followed suit. Since I was part of the group I thought it wise to do the same but to my utter surprise the younger woman asked me not to. "In your case what you are wearing is enough," she said in a kind voice.

Relieved and puzzled, I pondered about what had just happened. My hosts in Kandhla and other research sites in north India were always aware that though I

¹⁹⁵ A *mehram* is a male relative of a woman with whom she cannot be legally married or have sexual contact under any circumstance. Interpretations of who counts as a *mehram* have varied because the Quranic reference to *mehram* (verse 31, *surah* 24) provides only a partial list that includes a woman's husband, her father, her husbands' father, her sons, her husband's sons, her brothers, her brothers' sons, and her sisters' sons. Most interpretations, however, also count grandfathers and maternal and paternal uncles as *mehram*. If a woman has been breastfed by a wet nurse she also acquires *mehram* through *rada'ah* (breastfeeding). In this case, her wet nurse's husband, her father, her brother and her sons become her *mehram*. Similarly, a woman's stepbrothers, her mother's husbands and the husband's fathers are also considered *mehram* because their legal relationship with the mother makes these men sexually inaccessible to the woman. Since being a *mehram* is a reciprocal relationship, for the man, his mother, sister, grandmother, aunt, sisters' daughters, brothers' daughters are *mehram*. It is important to note that adopted sons and daughters do not count as *mehram*.

¹⁹⁶ A long scarf loosely worn around the neck by women in South Asia, particularly in north India. It can also be combined with a flowing robe as part of the *burqah*.

was wearing the *burqah* during fieldwork, in a different context and in my home city I did not veil myself. However, there was a tacit understanding that as long as I stayed with the host family I would follow the *purdah* requirements practiced by the women of that family. The decision of the *Ashraf*¹⁹⁷ women present in that inner room to step up their *purdah* routine had several ramifications: one, it transformed the secure *zenana* quarters of the host family into a public square where respectable women could only be present, if at all, completely veiled. Second, by elevating the status of the women behind the *purdah* it introduced a clear hierarchy into a gathering of women that ate and prayed together.

The hierarchical complexity of the gathering on the said evening was brought into relief by the simple act of veiling by one woman. The politics of differential modesty that unfolded in the inner room can be better understood in the light of the debates about the veiling of *Ashraf* women in the nineteenth and twentieth century. This chapter investigates the inclusions and exclusions that were at stake in these debates and the strategies of lineage building that motivated them by analyzing the relationship between endogamy, *purdah* and piety among the elite *ulema* of colonial north India.

Sometime towards the end of the nineteenth century, Mirza Suraya Jah, son of the Mughal prince, Mirza Ilahi Baksh, sent a marriage proposal for his daughter Qaisar

¹⁹⁷ *Ashraf*, in the South Asian context, denotes exalted foreign ancestry, usually Arab, Central Asian or Afghan. It is a term that largely defines itself against its opposite, the *Ajlaf*, which refers to Muslims who trace their origins to South Asia and are, therefore, seen by the *Ashraf* as “converts”. For a brief history of the term and its significance in South Asia, see David Lelyveld’s keyword entry on the same here: http://www.academia.edu/3992875/ashraf_SOAS_Keywords_.

Jahan to the family of Maulana Ismail Kandhlewī. The two families had known each other for several decades. Mirza Suraya Jah was an important royal pensioner who had found favour with the British government after 1857.¹⁹⁸ He believed that Maulana Ismail's eldest son, Maulana Yahya, would be a good match for his daughter. The potential groom belonged to a distinguished family of *ulema* from the Kandhla-Thana Bhawan region of the United Provinces. However, the proposal was turned down by Maulana Yahya on the ground that if he married a princess he would lose the good fortune of sleeping on the floor. A generation later, Maulana Yahya's son Maulana Zakariya, the well-known *hadith* scholar, was courted by the Mirza family. This time a match was being sought for Qaisar Jahan's daughter. But once again, it was met with refusal because Maulana Zakariya did not want to "walk behind the princess carrying her *paandaan*¹⁹⁹ in his hand".²⁰⁰

It is important to bear in mind that the Mughal family was an important patron of the Kandhlewīs.²⁰¹ Mirza Ilahi Baksh and his brothers and nephews were spiritual disciples of the Kandhlewī, especially Maulana Muzaffar Husain (d. 1866/67), the maternal grandfather of Maulana Yahya. The princes often travelled to Kandhla and

¹⁹⁸ All translations from Urdu, unless specified otherwise, are done by the author.

¹⁹⁹ *Paandaan*, typically, is a round, metal container with four or five smaller compartments to store betel leaves (*paan*), areca nuts, tobacco, slaked lime and other ingredients. It was a constant fixture in the *zenana* in South Asia. Offering *paan* to guests is a way of showing hospitality and respect. In addition to the heavy and bulky *paandaan* that was kept in the *zenana*, women also owned smaller, portable *paandaan* that they carried with them during their travels. The phrase "to walk behind the bride carrying her *paandaan*" suggests a marriage in which the woman has the upper hand.

²⁰⁰ Maulana Zakariya Kandhlewī, *Aap Beeti* (Deoband: Dar'ul Kitab, 2002), 11-12.

²⁰¹ Apart from the Mughals, the family also found favour with local elites and Muslim princely states. According to Maulana Nur ul Rashid, the states of Rohilkhand and Dhadwad were important benefactors of the family.

stayed with Muzaffar Husain's family. This arrangement was tedious for both parties so the former requested that a representative of Muzaffar Husain be permanently stationed in Delhi. As part of this arrangement, in 1854, Maulana Ismail moved to Delhi and was put up in Arab Sarai, a neighbourhood in Delhi's Nizamuddin area, by Mirza Ilahi Baksh. The land on which the Bangle Wali Mosque in Nizamuddin is built, and from which the family eventually launched its proselytizing mission of Tablighi Jamaat, was also gifted to Maulana Ismail by Mirza Ilahi Baksh.²⁰² However, close economic and spiritual ties between the two families were not further consolidated into marriage alliances.

Maulana Yahya and Maulana Zakariya's refusal to marry into the Mughals is in line with influential twentieth century *alim* Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's (d. 1943) advice to the community in his popular women's handbook *Beheshti Zewar*. In the fourth section of the book titled "Which People are Our Equals and Can Be Mixed With, and Who Is Not Our Equal?" Thanawi breaks down the broad category of *Ashraf* Muslims into Syeds, Shaikhs, Begs and Pathans. The Syeds, since they claim to be the descendants of Prophet Muhammad, rank at the top of this hierarchy. The Shaikhs trace their ancestry to the prophet's companions and are a close second. The Begs and Pathans are a distant third and fourth and, between them, are interchangeable. As per Thanawi's schema, Syeds could marry into Shaikh families

²⁰² Notes from interviews with Maulana Nur ul Rashid, Kandhla, February 2014.

and vice-versa, but a matrimonial alliance with a Beg or Pathan would be undesirable because it would breach the principle of hypergamy.

On the face of it, Maulana Thanawi's caste-like schema would seem to align well with Tirthankar Roy's model of the endogamous guild that was a particularly successful strategy for social reproduction among merchant bankers and artisan communities in pre-colonial South Asia. However, the institutional framework of the endogamous guild, with its reliance on state infrastructure and its emphasis on using marriage practices to strengthen a community's hold on material and intellectual resources, does not explain the *ulema's* strict adherence to an extremely restricted form of endogamy such that not even other Syed and Shaikh families with equally distinguished lineages were considered fit for forming marriage alliances.²⁰³ Ghaus Ansari's 1960s study of the caste-like social organization among north Indian Muslims divides the elite of the community into the four *Ashraf* groups mentioned above. The other end of the spectrum is occupied by the numerically significant *Ajlaf* groups or *jatis* that follow occupations classified as unclean. The middle space between the *Ashraf* and *Ajlaf* is occupied by Muslims belonging to "clean" occupational groups such as the Rajput Muslims. Ansari found endogamy, or marrying within the *biradari (jati)*, to be the feature of all groups. However, he writes that when the time came to choose a bride upper caste Muslims turned to a smaller pool called *biahdari* or the marriage group, which is a subgroup of the

²⁰³ Tirthankar Roy, *In Company of Kinsmen: Enterprise and Community in South Asian History 1700-1940* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 2010.

biradari. This chapter explores how, for the Syeds and Shaikhs, the limits of the *biahdari* shrank further in the nineteenth century to include only the extended family.²⁰⁴

Meshed Family Trees

Reading family trees (*shijra*, meaning a tree), especially those intended to record uninterrupted illustrious lineages across centuries and vast geographical expanses, is a difficult task. There are names that crop up in every other generation, some branches of the family terminate abruptly because the author of the *shijra* is interested in highlighting only a particular branch of the family, and the very format of the tree—often arranged as a tree, a bird or a circle—makes it indecipherable without the help of an expert. These problems are further compounded if one is looking for traces of women because family trees are records of exclusively patrilineal descent. In order to find the missing women in the Kandhlewī family tree I had to reconstruct it partly through interviews with family members and partly by reading the tree in conjunction with a twentieth century *tazkira*,²⁰⁵ *Halat e Mashaikh*

²⁰⁴ Ghaus Ansari, *Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh: A Study in Culture Contact* (Lucknow: Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society, 1960), 53-55.

²⁰⁵ *Tazkira* is a genre of Persian text that can be best described as a biographical encyclopedia. It has historically been a popular genre to document the lives of poets, kings, and Sufi mystics. The etymological root of the word is the Arabic verb z-k-r (to remember). *Tazkira* is the gerund form of z-k-r. In the context of royal courts, *tazkirat* (plural of *tazkira*) were written by scribes and were embellished narratives that described the exploits of the scribe's patron, a prince or a king. The Persian *tazkirat* from the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) and Mughal (1526-1540, 1555-1857) courts have served as valuable historical sources, though the hyperbolic nature of the genre has generated debates about their reliability as historically accurate sources. It must, however, be noted that twentieth century *tazkirat* such as *Halat e Mashaikh e Kandhla* are closer to the genre of family

e Kandhla (The History of the Shaikhs of Kandhla) that records the achievements of the male ancestors of the family. Women, when they show up in the *tazkira*, serve the purpose of shedding light on the exceptional qualities of their sons, husbands and fathers.²⁰⁶

Halat e Mashaikh e Kandhla is the most comprehensive *tazkira* for the family of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewi. It is written by Maulana Ehtesham ul Hasan Kandhlewi, the brother-in-law of Maulana Ilyas and also his *khalifa* (spiritual disciple). It is an exercise in reinforcing the family's claim as the foremost proponents of austerity and piety in Kandhla and beyond. The family claims Siddiqui descent, which means that they are the descendants of the first Caliph after Muhammad, Abu Bakr Siddiqui. The family's first known ancestor in north India is Shaikh Qutub Shah, who is said to have lived in Jhinjhana in the district of Muzaffarpur. There is no record of when, how and from whence Shaikh Qutub Shah arrived in Jhinjhana. The first details about the family's presence in Jhinjhana are available from the early Sultanate days, approximately the thirteenth century, during the time of Maulana Ashraf Jhinjhanwi, who is supposed to have laid the foundation for the family's preference for *shariat* over *tariqa*.²⁰⁷ The *tazkira* also provides a very brief sketch of

history and less like the embellished court documents, though the narrative is interrupted by poetry and the sequence of events is often not chronological.

²⁰⁶ For example, Ammi Bi (d. 1924), the maternal grandmother of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewi, is the only woman who gets four full pages in the *tazkira*, most of which is dedicated to anecdotes in which she predicted the great things Maulana Ilyas was destined for. See *Halat e Mashaikh e Kandhla*, p 46-50.

²⁰⁷ Maulana Hakim Ashraf Jhinjhanwi was the son of Shaikh Jamal Muhammad Shah, son of Shaikh Noor Muhammad or Baban Shah, son of Shaikh Bahauddin Shah, son of Maulana Shaikh Muhammad,

his son Maulana Hakim Muhammad Shareef and suggests that by the second half of the thirteenth century the family was based in Jhinjhana. It took the passing of two more generations—and two crucial marriage alliances outside the family—for the Kandhlewis to build a base in Kandhla.²⁰⁸

Maulana Shareef's son Maulana Abdul Qadir married Khan Bibi, the daughter of one Shaikh Muhammad Mudarris of Kandhla. As with other events documented in the early sections of the *tazkira*, the exact year of the marriage is not available.

However, a footnote states that Shaikh Mudarris was appointed the imam and possibly an arbiter of Kandhla by Sultan Muhammad Tughluq (r. 1324-1351) and granted 2,000 acres of land as compensation for the post.²⁰⁹ The *firman* was supposed to have been awarded in June 1391 when the Sultan was passing through Kandhla and realized that the town did not have a public mosque. An order to construct a mosque was also part of the *firman*. However, Muhammad bin Tughluq died in 1351. It is possible that the author of the *tazkira* has confused Sultan Muhammad Shah Tughluq (r. 1390-1394) with Muhammad bin Tughluq.

The son of Maulana Abdul Qadir and Khan Bibi—Maulana Hakim Qutbuddin—married Bibi Khurram, his maternal cousin and the granddaughter of Shaikh Mudarris. However, Bibi Khurram's father died without an heir and her grandfather,

son of Shaikh Muhammad Fazil, son of Shaikh Qutbuddin Shah. Refer to Appendix II for the family tree.

²⁰⁸ Maulana Muhammad Ehtesham ul Hasan Kandhlewī, *Tarikh e Mashaikh e Kandhla* (New Delhi: Idara Isha'at e Deeniyat), 17.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 18.

Shaikh Mudarris, requested her and Maulana Hakim Qutbuddin (her husband) to move to Kandhla from Jhinjhana. It was in Kandhla that their son, Maulana Shaikh ul Islam,²¹⁰ was born. He grew up to inherit his maternal great grandmother's property, his maternal grandfather's property in Kandhla as well as the share that the second wife of his grandfather held in Kandhla.²¹¹ This consolidation sealed the family's move from Jhinjhana to Kandhla, though several branches of the family continued to stay in Jhinjhana. Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewī's father, for instance, was a sixth-generation descendant of Hakim Muhammad Shareef Jhinjhanwi through his other son Maulana Muhammad Faiz, who stayed back in Jhinjhana. Maulana Ilyas, however, spent most of his childhood in Kandhla in his maternal grandmother's house. His mother, Bibi Safiyah, was the sixth generation descendant of Maulana Hakim Qutbuddin in Kandhla.

Besides the two alliances with the family of Shaikh Mudarris in Kandhla, the sparse data on women available in the *tazkira* suggests that marriages were often

²¹⁰ Shaikh ul Islam was married to Bibi Maman, the daughter of one Shaikh Bheeka from Jhinjhana. His daughter from this marriage, Bibi Mehroo was married to Shaikh Karimuddin, son of Shaikh Khairuddin of Thana Bhawan. See *Halat e Mashaikh e Kandhla*, 19.

²¹¹ The *tazkira* does not relate any other information about Khan Bibi and Bibi Khurram, except that they were property-holding women who bequeathed their wealth to Maulana Shaikh ul Islam. It would appear that Bibi Khurram came into property because her father died before bearing a son. However, the fact that the *tazkira* also mentions two other women—Khan Bibi and the second wife of Shaikh Mudarris (not named in the text)—as owners of properties large enough for their transfer to the next generation being worthy of a mention suggests that women in the family were inheriting property. This corroborates with my interview with Maulana Nur ul Rashid in Kandhla, who stated that his family had always been very particular about “property matters”, paying equal attention to the *shariat* guidelines and *pucca* paperwork (land registration, tax, etc.). See *Halat e Mashaikh e Kandhla*, 18-19.

contracted with families of *maulvis* and *ulema* in Thana Bhawan and Jhinhana.²¹² For instance, two of the three daughters of Mufti Ilahi Baksh, the son of Shaikh ul Islam, were married outside the family. In the absence of dates, it is difficult to pin down the exact year of these events. However, the *tazkira* states that Mufti Ilahi Baksh was born in 1749, making it likely that his daughters were married in late eighteenth century. The last reference in the *tazkira* to a marriage outside the family is more prestigious and is likely to have taken place in mid-nineteenth century. Bibi Khairan, the great granddaughter of Mufti Ilahi Baksh, married Haji Imdadullah Muhajir Makki (d.1899), the famous *alim* among whose disciples were Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi and the founder of the Deoband *madrassa*, Maulana Qasim Nanautawi.

As *Halat e Mashaikh e Kandhla* makes its way into the late nineteenth century, phrases such as “he married the daughter of his *haqiqi khala* or *haqiqi mamu* (his maternal uncle or aunt’s daughter)” become far more frequent, creating a web of relationships in which biological ties are densely overlaid with affine relations.²¹³ One reason for the *tazkira*’s documentation of cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriages in the nineteenth century may well be the proximity of these events to the

²¹² Ameeran Bi, daughter of Mufti Ilahi Baksh (son of Shaikh ul Islam), was married to Maulvi Ghulam Moinuddin (son of Khairuddin) of Thana Bhawan. Bibi Ayesha, another daughter of Ilahi Baksh, married Imam Baksh (son of Shamshuddin) of Jhinhana. See *Halat e Mashaikh e Kandhla*, 133.

²¹³ For instance, Maulana Ilyas married his maternal uncle’s (Maulana Rauf ul Hasan) daughter. His cousin Maulana Zakariya married the other daughter of Maulana Rauf ul Hasan. Maulana Yusuf, the son of Maulana Ilyas, married the eldest daughter of Maulana Zakariya. On her death, Maulana Yusuf married the third daughter of Maulana Zakariya. Maulana Zakariya’s second daughter was married to Maulana Inam ul Hasan, a cousin of Maulana Yusuf on the maternal side.

author's own time. The twentieth-century compilers of family histories knew much more about their grandparents and great grandparents than about more distant ancestors. In comparison, they had only a dim memory, in all likelihood, of Shaikh Qutub Shah, who most likely set foot in Jhinhana in the tenth century. In addition to the historical proximity of the nineteenth-century kin networks to the author's own time, we must confront another possible reason for the increasing density of these relationships: and that was that marriages between cousins did become more frequent in the nineteenth century. Over a period of nine centuries Shaikh Qutub Shah's descendants had settled in several towns in the western parts of the United Provinces, finding both material prosperity as well as spiritual acclaim. They formed an influential clan that produced renowned scholars and teachers in every generation.²¹⁴ There is, therefore, no reason to disbelieve the most frequent explanation that I was offered in my interviews for marriages within the extended family: there are always suitable brides and grooms available within the family. There is no need to look further afar.

And yet the nineteenth century was not just the moment for the flourishing of isolated lineages of *ulema*. On the contrary, the rapid spread of modern-style *madrasas* and the ease of travel and communication through the introduction of the railways, print, and postal services created a very thick network of accomplished scholars and public figures stretching across north India. As part of this network,

²¹⁴ The same can be said for families of *ulema* in Lucknow, Deoband, Bareilly, etc.

men like Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, Maulana Zakariya or Maulana Ilyas could travel between Delhi, Kandhla, Gangoh, Nanatau, Saharanpur, Deoband, Kanpur, Aligarh, Lucknow or any other town where a train could take them, and be assured of a ride from the station and accommodation at a friend or disciple's house.²¹⁵ The phrase "*ghar jaise taluqat* (relations as close as family)" was often used by *ulema* to describe their ties with men and older women from other families. However, these influential and close networks rarely, if ever, doubled up as marriage pools.²¹⁶

Hoping to find why that was the case I visited the family of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewi. The nephews and great-grandchildren of Maulana Ilyas live behind the organization's headquarters, commonly referred to as the *markaz*, in Nizamuddin, Delhi. The residential quarters of the family are connected by corridors with the great assembly hall, where arrangements are made for women from different parts of the world to gather and receive training before they set out on proselytizing tours. The Kandhlewi family's highly regimented daily routine meant that my initial

²¹⁵ The biographies of prominent *ulema* from this period such as Maulana Zakariya Kandhlewi (*Aap Beeti*), and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (*Ashraf us Sawaneh*), and Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani (*Naqsh e Hayat*) reveal a world of great physical mobility made possible by rail and road travel. In fact, it can be argued that a movement like Tablighi Jamaat, whose key innovation was the itinerant lay preacher, would not have been possible without the development of the infrastructure that made mass movement of people possible and cheap.

²¹⁶ A notable example of an alliance contracted in this manner is Shaikh Abdullah's marriage with Waheed Jahan Begum of Delhi. As a convert to Islam, Shaikh Abdullah had distanced himself from his family in Kashmir. Waheed Jahan was the sister of his classmate and friend from Aligarh, Bashir Beg. According to the memoir of the couple's daughter Begum Khurshid Mirza, Bashir Beg played an important role in convincing his parents to agree to Shaikh Abdullah's marriage proposal for Waheed Jahan. Famous novelist and reformer Nazir Ahmad married the granddaughter of his Sufi master Abdul Khaliq despite protestations from his family. Similarly, Karamat Husain, the educationist from Lucknow, married the daughter his teacher Syed Muhammad. For details about these matches, read the foreword of Gail Minault to Begum Khurshid Mirza's memoir. Mirza, Begum Khurshid. *A Woman of Substance: The Memoirs of Begum Khurshid Mirza* (1918-1989), ed. Lubna Kazim (New Delhi: Zuban, 2005).

visits involved talking to other visitors and household help such as Munibun Apa, who has been associated with the family since her childhood. She used to work in the *zenana*, but in her old age now, she primarily kept herself busy with ritual prayers. Munibun Apa was old enough to have witnessed many weddings and deaths in the family in the twentieth century. She helped me construct the skeleton of the family tree, whose defining feature was the practice of marrying within the family. During one of my visits I asked her why this was the case and her explanation closely echoed my conversations with the *ulema* in Lucknow, Kandhla, and Saharanpur. "It is better this way. When we look only in the *khandan* (marry only within the family), we bring home a girl who is well acquainted with the family members. She knows how we live. One does not have to train her," she said.²¹⁷

However, the training Munibun Apa talked about had less to do with cooking and keeping the house in order and more to do with *deendari* (piety) and *pardehdari* (veiling). By way of further explanation, she asserted, "The women of this family follow strict *purdah*. People remember the piety and sincerity of Maulana Ilyas, but he would always say that his wife's *pardehdari* had done half the job of transforming him into a *maulana*. 'My *deen* stems from your *pardehdari*,' he would say to her. Few women can take *purdah* as seriously as this family." The coupling of *deendari* and *pardehdari* (or piety and *purdah*) by Munibun Apa is reminiscent of the reformist discourse in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

²¹⁷ Notes from fieldwork in Nizamuddin, New Delhi, during February - April 2013. The names of all the informants have been changed.

Purdah Debates in Colonial India

In 1905 *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, a Madras-based journal, published a short story entitled *Sultana's Dream*. The author of the story, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain of Calcutta, was an activist and educationist and has been hailed as a "Muslim feminist" by her biographers and later scholars. *Sultana's Dream* is a world-upside-down vision of society in which men are confined indoors in the *mardana* (men's quarters), while women step out of the house to receive education, achieve scientific innovations and stop wars. *Sultana's Dream* is a scathing critique of the practice of *purdah* and seclusion that, its author argued, stood in the way of women's self-realization. In 1911 Rokeya Hossain founded a school in Calcutta, Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School, in memory of her deceased husband. The school was successful and began receiving a grant-in-aid from the government within a year.²¹⁸ In what would seem to be a contradiction with her position in *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya's school required its girls to observe *purdah*.²¹⁹ This in itself attests to the salience of *purdah*—as both an ideology and practice—in late-colonial India. Discussions of veiling were most insistent among the *Ashraf*, particularly *Ashraf* men who were worried that their women were abandoning the veil even as the occupational and the emerging classes were secluding their women.

²¹⁸ Jamia Milia Islamia archives, Mohammad Ali papers: MOH/L 1321-1322, File No 2, 15/12/1913, Hyderabad.

²¹⁹ Geraldine Forbes, "Education for Women," in *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader*, ed. Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 70.

Even those caste and professional associations that stood in opposition to Ashraf groups in the political domain recognized the usefulness of appropriating the upper class practice of female seclusion. Thus, the All-India Momin Conference was formed in April 1928 with an intent to arrest the decline of the Muslim weaving community, a far larger group compared to the Ashraf. In its first meeting held in Calcutta on April 11, 1928 the Committee passed several resolutions, including an appeal to the community to use fabric made by local weavers, especially on important occasions such as marriage ceremonies.²²⁰ Another noteworthy resolution was an appeal to the *ulema* to “induce the Momins to give up extravagant marriages and other expenses.”²²¹ Over the next years, the Momin Conference was held in various towns across north India such as Agra, Ghazipur, Saharanpur, Azamgarh and Kanpur (Cawnpore) during which the organization fine-tuned its political strategy, positioning itself against the Muslim League and the *ulema*. Ten years later when the All-India Momin Conference met in Bijnor, it maintained its distance from the *ulema*, blaming them for the “downfall of Musalmans”. However, the organization continued to advocate “purdah among Momin ladies”.²²²

²²⁰ The All-India Momin Conference’s call to the community to purchase fabric produced by local weavers as a gesture of support was similar to the hallmark strategy of the Swadeshi Movement of Bengal (1903-1908), also built around economic boycott of British goods and consumption of domestic goods. The Momin call for local goods differed from the Swadeshi Movement to the extent that the former was crystallized around socio-economic and religious solidarities, unlike the nationalist politics of the latter. For a history of Swadeshi Movement, see Sumit Sarkar’s monograph. Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi: Permanent Black), 2010.

²²¹ UP CID archives: XLVI, Naini, April 28, File No. 16, p 158, 1928.

²²² UP CID archives: LVI, Lucknow, April 16, File No. 15, p 98, 1938.

A more complex debate on *purdah* unfolded in the pages of the women's magazines that had become influential in the print sphere by the first decade of the twentieth century. The first Urdu magazine for women, *Akhbar un Nissa* (Newspaper for Women), was launched in 1887 by poet and lexicographer Syed Ahmad Dehlavi (d. 1918). Close on its heels, Hyderabad-based Maulvi Muhibb-i-Husain, an educationist who originally hailed from the United Provinces, launched *Mu'allim i Niswan* (The Women's Teacher) in the 1880s. Neither *Akhbar un Nissa* nor *Mu'allim i Niswan* had a long run. The former is supposed to have shut down almost immediately after its launch, while the latter ran into trouble with the Hyderabad government in 1901.²²³ The next few magazines to be launched—*Tehzeeb e Niswan* (Refinement of Women) in 1898, *Khatun* (Woman) in 1904, and *Ismat* (Modesty) in 1908—had better runs, largely because of the groundwork done by their predecessors. Two of the three magazines were published by men in partnerships with their wives and all three actively solicited contributions from women. They had vibrant 'Letters to the Editor' sections where readers commented on articles and shared advice, including recipes.

One has to be cautious about any simplistic reading of the views on *purdah* expressed in these magazines as the unmediated voices of women. This is particularly the case since women's reading of and writing in these magazines was still considered potentially disruptive and caused discomfort among men as ideologically apart as the nationalist poet, Mohammad Allama Iqbal, and Maulana

²²³ Gail Minault, *The Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 109.

Ashraf Ali Thanawi.²²⁴ It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the fear of censure from family and community may have given women reason to moderate their opinions. There is also the issue of tracing the articles and letters to real women because it is clear that often contributions attributed to women were actually written by the male magazine staff.²²⁵

In spite of these caveats, however, there is a lot to be gleaned from the writings on *purdah* in women's magazines because they differ in tenor and content from much of the writing on the subject during this period in other, more exclusively male, fora. In the July 13, 1901 issue of *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, its editor, Muhammadi Begum, wrote a long piece entitled "Burqah", which largely described the different patterns, embroidery and fabrics that were in vogue in the Northwest Province and the Doab²²⁶ region. The piece ends with an appeal to women to send in designs for a new style of *burqah* that would add some sort of sleeves to the flowing cape without turning it into a man's coat.²²⁷ Muhammadi Begum wrote that the *burqah* was in need of innovation because a flowing head-to-toe cape without sleeves was

²²⁴ Contributing to the poetry section of *Tehzeeb e Niswan*'s February 16, 1924 issue, Iqbal wrote: *Dastoor Tha Ke Hota Tha Pehle Zamane Mein* (The Tradition in the Era Gone By Was Such) *Mullah Ka, Muhtasib Ka, Khuda Ka, Nabi Ka Darr* (People Were Scared of the Mullah, the Tax Collector, God and His Prophet)

Do Khauf Reh Gayen Hain Hamare Zamane Mein (Only Two Fears Remain in our Times) *Mazmoon Nigar Biwi Ka, C.I.D Ka Darr* (That of The Columnist Wife, and the CID)

²²⁵ In the year of Rashid ul Khairi's death (1936), his son Raziq ul Khairi published a collection of his father's essays that had previously appeared in the woman's magazine *Asmat*. In the introduction to the volume, Raziq ul Khairi reveals that his father often wrote in *Asmat* under pseudonyms because he wanted the readers to focus on the issues raised in the articles instead of getting fixated by the author's identity. See Rashid ul Khairi, *Gudri Mein La'al (Gem in a Patched Quilt)*, 5th ed, ed. Raziq ul Khairi (Karachi: Anjuman Press, 1969), 4-5.

²²⁶ The Doab region refers to the fertile tract of land between Ganga and Yamuna, the two major rivers of north India.

²²⁷ Muhammadi Begum, "Burqah," *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, July 13, 1901, Vol 4, No 28, 218-219.

inconvenient if a woman wanted to lift something in public or simply carry her baby in her arms because in doing she would risk lifting her *burqah* up and thus exposing herself to the male gaze.

In the same year, a short essay simply attributed to “a girl” raised objections against the practice of forcing unmarried girls to veil themselves from women and household help of other families. The practice, according to the author, turned girls into prisoners in their own homes when a guest visited the *zenana*. It also deprived them of the chance to cultivate their conversational and social skills. Girls brought up under such strict *purdah* remained tongue-tied when they found themselves in the company of other women.²²⁸ The article concluded by asking readers to send in their opinion supporting or protesting the practice, and for the next several years, a steady stream of women did write back to the magazine. Most writers termed the practice as excessive and a perversion of the *sharia* that was based on local custom. A woman who identified herself as “a Tehzeeb reader” complained that parents of plain-looking girls or girls with an illness or deformity exploited this practice to get them married by hiding their daughters from the grooms’ families.²²⁹

Another lively debate on *purdah* was triggered after the magazine printed Maulvi Shaikh Abdullah’s speech on women’s education. Shaikh Abdullah, an educational activist and the founder of Aligarh’s Muslim Girls’ School, was addressing the Provincial Educational Conference in Badayun on March 23, 1924. *Tehzeeb e Niswan*

²²⁸ Tehzeeb e Niswan, November 16, 1901, Vol 4, No 42, 364-365.

²²⁹ Tehzeeb e Niswan, September 6, 1919, 573-576.

published his speech in two installments and followed it up with responses from subscribers. Shaikh Abdullah raised the usual concerns in his speech. Attributing Europe's achievements in commerce and science to the advances women had made in the West, he called for a similar push for women's education in Hindustan. He did not see girls' education as un-Islamic and rebuked those who used *pardah* restrictions as an excuse to keep girls and women locked in the *zenana*. He cited the examples of Turkey and the Middle East as Islamic societies where women had emerged as equal citizens in the public space without breaching the *sharia* requirements on *pardah*.²³⁰

The readers of *Tehzeeb e Niswan* largely agreed with Shaikh Abdullah's "prognosis of the illness". However, one reader went further: he / she agreed with the diagnosis but added that Shaikh Abdullah "had misrecognized" the cause of the ailment.²³¹

Pardah, according to this writer, was not the real cause of women's backwardness in India. By asking the Muslims of India to blindly imitate Turkey and the Middle East, Shaikh Abdullah was exposing women to the dangers of *sharia yi pardah* or *pardah* practiced strictly in accordance with the *shariat*. It was *sharia yi pardah* that had led to the spread of social depravity in Egypt and reduced the status of women in that country, making them as debased as the women in Europe and America. In closing the argument, the author warned that *sharia yi pardah* could only work in a society whose morals were attuned to Islam. Unfortunately, since Muslim society in South

²³⁰ *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, April 12, 1924 and April 19, 1924.

²³¹ *Tehzeeb-e-Niswan*, May 17, 1924, 314-315.

Asia was in a state of social and moral decay its members first had to tighten their grip on Islam before releasing their women from the hold of customary *pardah* or *riwaji pardah*.²³²

It is clear that the readers were aware that local custom dictated practices of seclusion whose scriptural backing was precarious. To understand why this was the case—that is practices of seclusion that were in excess of the requirements found in the Quran and *hadith* literature were preferred over *shariat*-prescribed veiling, this chapter now turns to a different archive from the nineteenth and twentieth century: namely, the writings of *ulema* on the topic of *pardah*.

The Experts' Opinion on Purdah

The essays in *Tehzeeb e Niswan* routinely debated the connection between seclusion and the backwardness of Muslim women. In contrast to the independent and confident women of Europe, or Parsi women for that matter, Muslim women were portrayed as uninformed, uneducated, and socially awkward as a result of excessive *pardah*. However, the debates left untouched the assumption that *pardah* was an important Islamic requirement. At no point in these discussions did writers—both men and women—ever question the legitimacy of *pardah*, though its limits and excesses were debated. The standpoint for or against *pardah* was based on the writer's everyday experiences, travels abroad or newspaper reports about the real

²³² Ibid.

or perceived progress made by women in foreign countries. Further, there was little scrutiny of the exact nature of the *shariat* stipulations on *purdah*. No Quranic verses were cited and no reference was made to the *hadith* and *fiqh* literature within the genre and readership of women's secular periodicals.

At the other end of the spectrum were writings by the *ulema* and religious reformers that were thick with references to scriptures and legal texts. They appeared in the form of *fatawa* and tracts. Perhaps the most widely circulated of these was Abul Ala Maududi's (d. 1979) *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*, first published in book form in 1939.²³³ Maududi, however, was not a formally-trained *alim*. He began his career as a journalist and in 1941 launched the Jamaat e Islami as a political alternative to the Congress, the Jamiat e Ulema e Hind and the Muslim League.²³⁴

Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam reflects his twin intellectual affiliations: the

²³³ The text presents Maududi's vision of an Islamic social order in which men and women are bestowed with moral equality but play complementary roles in every other sphere. At the heart of *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*—originally published as a series of articles—is Maududi's argument for seclusion and veiling of women. Once stripped of the exaggerated accounts of nudist beaches of Europe and America and the mental instability that grips menstruating women, Maududi's argument can be reduced to one clause: any civilization allows its women to step out of the house at its own peril. The cornerstone of a stable community, according to Maududi, is the family where men and women come together in a lifelong union the purpose of which is to provide a nurturing environment for children and, create a "society and system of community life". This system collapses when women cast aside their veils for work or recreational purposes. For details, see Abul 'Ala Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd, 1972), 88.

²³⁴ The Congress and the Muslim League were the two major political groups that negotiated with and eventually inherited power from the British. While Congress was, and is, a Hindu normative party largely committed to secular democracy, the Muslim League came into being around the Pakistan question. Nonetheless, on the eve of the creation of Pakistan, the leader of Muslim League, Mohammad Ali Jinnah declared Pakistan a secular state. Jamiat e Ulema e Hind was a party of *ulema* who rejected Jinnah's Two Nation Theory and believed that Muslims could co-exist with the Hindus. Led by Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, the Jamiat aligned itself with the Congress. For detailed history of this period, see Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

Quran and *hadith* literature on the one hand and a strategic selection of medical and sociological scholarship from Europe and America on the other.

Then there were texts like Shabbir Ahmad Usmani's (d. 1949) *Hijab e Sharia yi* published between 1926 and 1933 by Dabhel's Jamia Islamia, where Usmani taught for seven years. Usmani, who graduated from Darul Uloom, Deoband in 1908, was a fervent proponent of Pakistan. He authored commentaries on Sahih Muslim's *hadith* canon and penned several smaller tracts on the social and political problems facing Muslims in South Asia. *Hijab e Sharia yi* is one such tract in which Usmani claims to present a comprehensive and learned discussion on the topic of *purdah*. The aim of the tract, writes Usmani, is to find out what Prophet Muhammad had to say about women stepping out of their homes. While this may seem odd given the title of the tract, it illustrates a key point. The main concern articulated by the proponents of strict veiling was that in the absence of *purdah* women would participate in political rallies, dance parties, hunting expeditions, cinema trips and sporting events.²³⁵ In other words, discarding the veil would facilitate women's access to public spaces where they did not belong rightfully. The solution to this problem was to keep the women at home. If they did not venture out of their homes they were less likely to discard their veils. Or at least the lifting of the veil would not be a public spectacle. However, the problem, as Usmani admits, was that there was no injunction in the

²³⁵ Some other texts on *purdah* in circulation in the twentieth century include Muhammad Mahmood's 1927 tract *Haqeeqat e Purdah* (The Reality of Purdah), Ali Khan Asgar's *Purdah aur Islam* (Purdah and Islam) printed in 1927 or 1928, *Purdah wa Taleem* (Purdah and Education), which was authored by Nasiruddin Ahmad in 1932.

Quran or *hadith* literature that confined women to the four walls of their homes. On the contrary, a cursory study of Imam Bukhari's²³⁶ canonical *hadith* collection alone would prove that women were out and about in the early period of Islamic history.²³⁷ Usmani, nonetheless, proceeds to argue that in contemporary society Muslim women should stay at home because even if Muhammad did not directly ask them to do so, it was certainly something he must have desired. In order to ascertain the wishes of the prophet, Usmani wants Muslims to grasp the deeper "soul or intent" behind the "laws and instructions for women" openly laid out by Muhammad.²³⁸ He goes on to demonstrate this exercise in the following manner:

He first cites a *hadith* from Sahih Bukhari that states that when your wife seeks permission to visit the mosque in the night allow her the visit. Here, Usmani highlights the fact that it is within the husband's right to deny or grant permission to his wife, though the Prophet preferred that men did the latter.

At the same time, however, Muhammad wanted women to draw as little unwanted attention to themselves as possible when they stepped out of the house, which Usmani illustrates through the next two *hadith* citations: the first asks women not to wear perfume during their night-time visits to the mosque and the second instructs women to wear drab and dirty clothes to the mosque for the post-sunset prayer.

²³⁶ Imam Muhammad al Bukhari (d. 870) was a scholar and compiler of *hadith*. His *Sahih Bukhari* is one of two most widely accepted collections of *hadith* narratives, the other being Imam Muslim al Hajjaj's (d. 875) *Sahih Muslim*.

²³⁷ Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, *Hijab e Sharia y* (Bijnor: Medina Press), 4.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, 4.

Usmani fortifies his position further with the help of verse 31 from Sura't 24 of the Quran, that asks women to "not strike their feet [I]n order to draw attention [T]o their concealed ornaments"²³⁹ and verse 59 from Sura't 33 that asks Muhammad to tell his wives, daughters and "the believing women, [T]hat they should cast [T]heir outer garments over [T]heir persons (when abroad)."²⁴⁰

Upon following these stipulations, once the women reached the mosque at night, they were asked to form a line behind the men and were instructed to prostrate themselves only after the men ahead of them had done so.²⁴¹ Further, despite these precautions, when a woman told Muhammad that she wanted to pray with him in the mosque he told her that the prayer that she offered in the innermost room of her house was better than her prayers with him in the mosque. Usmani reasons that the logic behind this decision was Muhammad's fear of *fitna*; the promiscuity and collapse of social order that would ensue from the free mixing of men and women. Following this line of argument, Usmani argues that several centuries after the death of Muhammad, when the social and moral compass of the community was in tatters, if the *hukma e ummat* (the wise men of the community / leaders of the community) were asking women to "step out of their homes only under dire circumstances and that too in complete *hijab* they were not going against the *wishes* of the prophet".²⁴²

²³⁹ The Qur'an. 24:31.

²⁴⁰ The Qur'an. 33:59.

²⁴¹ Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, *Hijab e Sharia yi* (Bijnor: Medina Press), 7-8.

²⁴² *Ibid*, 9.

The crux of Usmani's argument here is his faith in the ability of *hukma e ummat* to accomplish two feats: the first is to deduce what Muhammad had really wanted, especially in cases when he did not make his wishes explicit. The second feat was to translate his desires into actions, based on the social and political contingencies of the day. Usmani argued that in formulating *purdah* stipulations for women in colonial north India the *ulema* had to take into account that contemporary society was separated from the golden age of Islam by more than a millennium. Throughout this interval, the moral comportment of men and women had been in a state of decline. Furthermore, the restrictions that Muhammad had explicitly set in place about how and when women could step out of the house had been abandoned by Westernised reformers. If in order to correct the inappropriate behavior of women in the twentieth century the *ulema* forbade them from stepping out of the house except under dire circumstances and that too in complete hijab, then, Usmani asserted, those *ulema* were guided by Muhammad's unspoken desires, even if their decree exceeded Muhammad's explicit regulations for women.

Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's *Beheshti Zewar* is the clearest and most popular articulation of this excessive stipulation. In the section on appropriate clothing and *purdah* for women, Thanawi writes:

Women are ordered to cover their entire bodies, from head to toe. It is not appropriate for a woman to uncover / unveil her body in the presence of a non-mehram. An old woman can expose her face, her palms, and her foot from ankle downwards but she absolutely should not uncover other parts of her body. Often times a woman's *dupatta* (scarf) slips from her head and a non-

mehram gets the chance to see her exposed. This is not permitted. A non-*mehram* should not see even a single strand of a woman's hair. In fact, the hair that gets caught in the comb and the nails that are clipped should be disposed in such a way that no non-*mehram* can see it or else you will be a sinner.²⁴³

The rest of the section continues in a similar vein. Remarkably, Maulana Thanawi asks his female readers to treat Hindu women as equivalent non-*mehram* men. This would then require Thanawi's observant female readers to cover their entire bodies—with the exception of the face and palms—in the presence of Hindu women.²⁴⁴ Thanawi further stipulated that in cases of child birth where the doctor was a Hindu woman or an English woman the pregnant Muslim woman should only expose “the area from where the child is born”. All other parts of the body, including the head, were enjoined to be behind the veil during labour.

A lot has been written about the intent and audience of *Beheshti Zewar*.²⁴⁵ Like Usmani's *Hijab e Sharia yi*, *Beheshti Zewar* too addresses “Muslim women” in general. Thanawi positioned the text simply as a guidebook for “women and girls”.

²⁴³ Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Beheshti Zewar* (Delhi: Farid Book Depot), 179.

²⁴⁴ The categories of Hindu (kaafir) women that Thanawi lists are mainly women belonging to occupational classes such as washerwomen, vegetable sellers, oil sellers, women belonging to the milk-selling Ahir communities, bangle sellers, etc.

²⁴⁵ Barbara Metcalf, in the commentary on her partial translation of *Beheshti Zewar*, suggests that though the text is addressed to respectable women, it presents a single moral standard for both men and women, a claim that is made by Maulana Thanawi himself in the introduction to *Beheshti Zewar*. Thanawi was apparently asked by his disciples to pen a similar text for men. In a reply that is as popular as *Beheshti Zewar*, he said that the guide book was good enough for men as well. However, Thanawi's statement has to be contextualized against his schema for moral capacities that may not have discriminated between all men and all women but it certainly tied moral capabilities to a person's lineage and socio-economic standing. While it is true that through *Beheshti Zewar* he sought to impart correct knowledge to women (and men), it is equally true that he was guided by the belief that not everybody had the same potential to learn. For details, read his sermon *Fawaid us Sohbat*. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Fawaid us Sohbat: Allah Walon ki Sohbat ke Fawaid aur Samrat* (Karachi: Jamia Ashraf ul Madaris).

Upon closer scrutiny, however, it becomes apparent that Thanawi assumes his target readers to inhabit an upper middle class world, socially and materially. There is little in the text to suggest that Thanawi was selling his book to *Ashraf* women specifically. This would be in line with Gail Minault's assertion that the political reconfiguration in the decades after 1857 ensured that *Ashraf* ceased to be a quality that defined superior lineage and was instead a quality of being *sharif* or virtuous that could be cultivated by every Muslim regardless of her station in life.²⁴⁶ However, I would like to suggest that even with that reformulation of status away from exclusive consideration of birth, Maulana Thanawi would still have been appalled at the prospect of such radical social mobility. While being considered "sharif" had become an accessible goal for more and more non-Ashraf men and women—and texts like *Beheshti Zewar* helped them attain this goal—at no point did the virtue of being *sharif* replace the privilege of belonging to an *Ashraf* family. Birth remained salient, particularly for orthodox-oriented *ulema* like Maulana Thanawi. To understand the continued claims of *Ashraf* superiority made on the basis of the seclusion of their women, one needs to invoke Maulana Thanawi's work in a domain that is usually ignored by feminist scholars, probably because of the immense popularity of *Beheshti Zewar*. While *Beheshti Zewar* was specifically written for lay readers or for women (and the two categories were often used interchangeably), among his peers Thanawi was better known as the author of *Imdad ul Fatawa*, a six-

²⁴⁶ Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4-5.

volume collection of *fatawa* on every imaginable problem that a colonial subject could possibly face. The work runs into thousands of pages and unlike the simplified bullet points of *Beheshti Zewar* that are locked within the paradigm of sin and merit (*gunah* and *sawab*), the *fatawa*, as texts of juridical interpretation that define the boundaries of legality, are remarkably nuanced. It is not surprising, therefore, that in *Imdad ul Fatawa* Thanawi admits that *pardah* can have two connotations: in the first sense it means covering one's private parts (*satar*) such that a man was allowed to see any part of another man's body except the region from the navel down to the knees. The same held true for women. But more importantly in times of need, and if there was no fear of *fitna*, a man could also see a non-mehram woman's face, hands and feet. This would be what Usmani and the readers of *Tehzeeb e Niswan* have identified as *pardah* in accordance with *sharia* stipulations.

The second understanding of *pardah*, according to Thanawi, is *hijab*, which was initially imposed specifically on the wives of Muhammad. This entails complete segregation of men and women. In the former understanding of *pardah* a man could accidentally glance upon a woman's face and hands without committing a sin as long as the rest of her body was appropriately covered. In the latter understanding of *pardah* the very possibility of a man running into a woman is eliminated.

Interestingly, even as Thanawi acknowledges *hijab* as a special case of covering reserved only for Muhammad's wives, he recommends it as a better practice and is

quick to add that it is the form of *purdah* practiced only by the Ashraf women in South Asia.²⁴⁷

Questions about appropriate forms of veiling for respectable women emerged in the period when fierce debates were raging about the education of girls and the possible forms in which women could participate in community affairs. The East India Company Act of 1813, apart from allowing missionaries to work in the field of education and religious proselytization, also allotted funds to the Company to propagate education among the masses. But it was only after Charles Wood's Despatch on Education of 1854 that departments of education were established in every administrative province and universities were founded in the key cities of Allahabad, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, and Punjab. The Despatch is also important because it is the government's first "official pronouncement on the subject of women's education".²⁴⁸

The pronouncement was listed as an example by Syed Ahmad Khan in *Asbab e Bagawat e Hind* (The Causes of Indian Rebellion), published in 1873, as one of Company's fallacies of interfering in native affairs. According to him, the Company's push for female education was one of the factors that led to the revolt of 1857.²⁴⁹ His apathy towards women's education and reform had an adverse impact upon his

²⁴⁷ Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Imdad ul Fatawa*, Vol 4, (Karachi: Maktaba Darul Uloom, 2010), 172-201.

²⁴⁸ Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 161.

²⁴⁹ Syed Ahmad Khan, *Causes of Indian Rebellion 1857*, trans. Jaweed Ashraf (New Delhi: Asha Jyoti Publishers, 2007).

relationship with younger men like Karamat Husain, Mumtaz Ali and Shaikh Abdullah, whose careers and reputations rested on their commitment to the cause of women's education. However, Syed Ahmad Khan's resistance to female education found few takers and, in fact, after his death in 1898 Aligarh was at the forefront of the movement, in large measure due to the efforts of Shaikh Abdullah. The Muhammadan Educational Conference, formed by Syed Ahmad Khan in 1886 with the mandate to meet every year to discuss the educational needs of the community, passed resolutions that included cursory references to female education every once in a while. Finally, in 1896, a Women's Education Section was formed following a resolution moved by Karamat Husain, a lawyer from Lucknow. But it was only in the early years of the twentieth century when Shaikh Abdullah, a student of Karamat Husain, took over as the head of the Women's Section that some progress was made on the ground. The Aligarh Zenana School (Aligarh Girls' School) was established 1906 and in the year 1914 it was converted into a boarding school. In the following decades, schools for girls that combined the study of Urdu, arithmetic, some form of history and geography with the reading of the Quran and theology (deeniyyat) were set up in cities like Lucknow, Lahore, Jalandhar, and Calcutta, each supported by the local network of activists, reformers and sympathetic government officials.²⁵⁰

By the second quarter of the twentieth century resistance to the idea of girls' education had petered out, though there was still no consensus on what and how

²⁵⁰ For a detailed history of the movement for girls' school, see Gail Minault's *Secluded Scholars*.

this goal could be achieved.²⁵¹ Maulana Thanawi, for instance, wanted women to receive basic education in Urdu and religious rituals at home. He did not want girls to be taught history or geography. “Who is to say that our women would not up and leave when they realized that Delhi was only a few hundred kilometers away and there were trains that could take them there in a matter of a few hours,” he asked in a 1929 sermon.²⁵² Thanawi’s fear about runaway women betrays a deeper anxiety about their presence in the public space where they apparently did not belong: in trains, cinema halls, sports clubs, political rallies, in magazine and newspaper bylines, and educational institutes.

²⁵¹ The reformists’ treatment of women’s education as a domestic good that was severed from its potential to train women to take up paying jobs outside their homes had real, long-term implications. The biggest impact was on the textbooks and curricula designed for girls. Guided by the belief that women did not have to work to earn a living because they would always be provided for by men, reformists recommended curricula for girls that were strikingly different from those designed for boys. To begin with there was near consensus among activists, reformers and the government that girls had to receive practical education as opposed to opposed to literary, legal or theological learning. Maulana Thanawi reiterated this view in sermon after sermon. He argued that as future government employees, judges, and engineers, boys had to go through the modern education system. Girls, on the other hand, had no such need. Everything they had to know about leading a successful life was enclosed in his *Beheshti Zewar*. He introduces *Beheshti Zewar* as the only book a woman needs to read. A slightly different approach to girls’ education is reflected in the model syllabus recommended in the Urdu monthly, *Al Aziz*, in May 1910. The publication put forth two courses for Muslim girls: a basic six-year course that would include the “reading of the Koran and some other religious books, the first four Urdu readers, the first and second book of Persian, the *Gulistan* and the *Bostan*, the geography of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the history of India, and arithmetic up to fractions, as well as English up to sixth standard and some drawing”. The second course, called special course, would consist of technical and professional education specially suited for women. For details, see UP State Archives’ Vernacular Newspapers Collection, volume 46, 1910, 543.

²⁵² Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Al Tabligh*. No 11, Vol 3 (Deoband: Idara Ta’alefat e Auliya), 5.

Public Sphere vs Public Space

Farkhunda Banu, the protagonist of *Bint ul Waqt* (Daughter of the Moment), Rashid ul Khairi's 1918 novel, is one such woman. Her father puts her through the English education system and encourages her to socialize with English women. In the novel, Farkhunda Banu assists missionaries in the charity work they want to launch in her neighbourhood but she lacks the same commitment towards her religious and marital duties. She spends her evenings in the club even when her husband is sick, starving, and alone at home. As the title of the novel suggests, Rashid ul Khairi was modeling his heroine along the lines of the protagonist of Nazir Ahmad's 1888 novel *Ibn ul Waqt* (Son of the Moment). A similar combination of modern education and fraternizing with the British misleads Nazir Ahmad's hero to believe that he could play the interlocutor between the government and his community. In short, he aspires to become a reformer. Farkhunda Banu, on the other hand, only aspires to be a socialite. While *Ibn ul Waqt* is a critique of the British government, *Bint ul Waqt* is a chastisement of women who get swayed by Western lifestyle: her husband and father's deaths leave Farkhunda Banu penniless on the streets where she serves as a public warning.

Like Asghari, the protagonist of another Nazir Ahmad novel *Mirat ul Uroos* (The Bride's Mirror), Farkhunda Banu too is encouraged and groomed by a supportive father who believes in the power of education. However, it is the difference in the kind of education the two women receive that leads them down two dramatically

different paths. Asghari, trained in religion, language, and home management, becomes a model *Ashraf* woman. In *Bana'at ul Nash* (The Daughters of the Bier), the sequel to *Mirat ul Uroos*, she runs a full-fledged school for girls from her home. When she receives an offer to reform the daughter of a rich neighbor she turns it down because it would not behoove an *Ashraf* woman to visit other people's houses. Instead, she convinces the neighbor to send her daughter to the home school where she joins other girls in daily lessons.

It would seem that even as reformers made a case to educate women and broaden their sphere of influence they attempted to undercut their potential by putting restrictions on the physical mobility of women. However, starting in the early years of the twentieth century, many women – especially those belonging to elite families—were participating in meetings and fundraisers organized especially for *pardah nasheen* women.²⁵³ Columnist and diplomat Shaista Suhrawardy describes the *pardah* meetings that she attended as a teenager with her mother, as the events that initiated her into the world of politics.²⁵⁴ The early women's associations or *anjumans*—such as Lahore's *Anjuman i Khawateen i Islam* (founded in 1913) and *Anjuman i Khawateen i Dakkan* (founded in 1919)—that were formed in cities like Hyderabad, Lahore, Bombay and Aligarh were modeled on similar organizations

²⁵³ Geraldine Forbes' work in the Bengal province reveals striking parallels. Women from politically active families in Bengal were taking the lead in participating in voluntary organizations in the nineteenth century. See Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁵⁴ Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *From Purdah to Parliament* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 45.

established by men in the previous century.²⁵⁵ Such associations focused on social issues, mainly offering reformist critiques on issues such as the lack of education among Muslim women, the hold of customary practices and the general backwardness of the community. They were run by women hailing from prominent families, such as the Tyabjis of Bombay, the Hydaris of Hyderabad and the Bilgrami family from Bilgram.

It was the Khilafat and Gandhian Non-Cooperation movements of the early 1920s that enabled women, and many more men, to participate in mass political mobilization.²⁵⁶ Bi Amman (Abadi Banu Begum), the mother of Maulana Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, rose to prominence during this period as the mother of the movement's leaders. Bi Amman's public career began at the *purdah* meetings of the *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Kaaba*, a volunteer organization floated by her sons to raise funds for the maintenance and defense of the holy shrines of Islam in Hejaz. She made the transition from *purdah* meetings to Khilafat rallies while staying behind the veil, but in 1921 at a rally in Punjab she stepped out of *purdah* to address a mixed crowd of men and women. Minault argues that Bi Amman's breach of *purdah* at a public rally was likely made possible by her advanced age and her status as the mother of Muhammad and Shaukat Ali. It was further legitimized by her claim that

²⁵⁵ Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 210-213.

²⁵⁶ Patel, Sujata. 1988. "Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi". *Economic and Political Weekly* 23 (8). *Economic and Political Weekly*: 377-87.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4378142>.

“all present were her sons and daughters”.²⁵⁷ This was an astute move, which, in one sweep, sought to turn a public rally into a gathering of familiars where Bi Amman presided over her children, from whom no *purdah* was necessary. In many ways, this move runs counter to the *purdah* restrictions suggested by the *ulema* and male reformers that I have described in the previous section. On the one hand, Bi Amman justified her presence at a public rally by expanding her network of kin to include, for the duration of the rally, unrelated men and women. On the other hand, at the same historical moment, religious reformers’ recommendations of extreme *purdah* had the effect of isolating women and girls in their own homes. *Beheshti Zewar*, for instance, in asking women to observe *purdah* from non-*Ashraf*, Hindu and Christian women was paradoxically, turning the *zenana* into a public space. Even those women who were a constant presence in the house, such as the washerwoman, the vegetable sellers, the cleaning women, etc, were to be avoided. The result, as one woman wrote in the *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, was that young girls rushed to hide in the washroom every time somebody was at the door. And if a guest decided to stay for dinner, the miserable girls were condemned to spend the rest of their day locked in the bathroom.²⁵⁸ However, it can be argued that Bi Amman and the religious reformers had more in common than is immediately apparent. Despite their

²⁵⁷Gail Minault, *Gender, Language and Learning: Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2009), 30-33.

²⁵⁸A Girl. “Kunwari Ladkiyon Ka Purdah Aurton Se.” *Tehzeeb e Niswan*. Nov 16, 1901, No 46, Vol 4, 366-367.

opposing goals, they were both invested in reordering the public and private space through a re-articulation of embodied practices and reconfiguration of relations.

The shifting boundaries in colonial South Asia between the public domain, understood to be political and identified as masculine, and the private domain, which was the abode of women and culture, has been theorized from various perspectives. Partha Chatterjee's 1989 essay entitled 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question' is the most influential articulation of this shift in dynamics in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In this essay Chatterjee argues that an emerging nationalist movement responded to its subjugation in the political sphere by reconfiguring the domestic space, making the latter a repository of spiritual and affective ties. He rightly identifies the first half of the nineteenth century as a period of controversial, and often bitter, public debates about the status of women in Bengal. A political investment in improving the position of women brought together the colonial state and Indian reformers from the upper classes and castes, though women were systematically kept out of state institutions and political debates. Sweeping legislative changes in this phase—also called the Bengal renaissance—abolished the practice of Sati, legalized widow remarriage and increased the age of consent for girls. This phase of legal reforms, however, was followed by a lull in legislation in the second half of the century, which coincided with the emergence of the nationalist movement.

Chatterjee connects the two developments to argue that Indian nationalists responded to colonial domination by splitting the 'domain of culture' into material and spiritual spheres. The former encompassed the outer world in which the economic, scientific and commercial might of Britain was acknowledged, envied, and even emulated. But the household became the refuge of the spiritual, where state intervention became unacceptable. This marked the beginning of the 'new patriarchy', argues Chatterjee; one that claimed to resolve the women's question within the community and away from the arena of state politics.

Faisal Devji understands the push for women's reform among Muslims in India after 1857 as a politics of space. He compares the orthodox discourse of reform in colonial India with the early Islamic legal and Sufi discourses that worked within the framework of *shariat's* separation of social space into the moral city of the Muslim public (free, adult, male) and the private space of the pagan (comprising women, youth and slaves). The space of the moral city was discursive, regulated and the domain of men. The non-discursive domestic domain, on the other hand, was unregulated. The colonial order disrupted this separation and forced the *shurufa* (*Ashraf*) to create their own private polity in which mosques and schools joined the domestic domain. A direct result of this, argues Devji, was the rush to Islamize women and the youth.

In both Chatterjee and Devji's formulation, the public sphere is a male space that is discursive, regulated, political, and the site of action. The colonial domination of the

mid-nineteenth century reconfigured this public sphere, forcing Indian men to find refuge in private polity. In her work on reformist and anti-reformist anxieties about the sartorial practices of middle class women in Bengal, Himani Bannerji uses the concept of “emergence” to talk about women’s presence in the male domain and pairs it with a similar movement in the opposite direction that saw the “entrance of men in the household”.²⁵⁹ Bannerji, like Devji and Chatterjee, accepts the public domain as the intellectual space of male activity that witnessed an invasion of women in the nineteenth century. This despite her observation that both upper and lower class women were commonly present in “public spaces for reasons of pilgrimage and other religious as well as social rituals, or for practical reasons such as that of bathing, washing clothes or fetching water, long before the ‘emergence’.”²⁶⁰ What apparently is different about the presence of women in the public domain before and after ‘emergence’ is that post-emergence women aspired to be intellectual interlocutors, professionals and students and were, therefore, in a position of transgression.

The collapsing of public space with public sphere on the one hand and a simultaneous valorization of the public sphere as the site of “located action” presents several difficulties in understanding the real import of the reordering of the boundary between the public and the private in colonial north India. In

²⁵⁹ Himani Bannerje, “Attired in Virtue: Discourse in Shame (lajja) and Clothing of the Gentlewoman (bhadramahila) in Colonial Bengal,” in *Inventing Subjects: Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy and Colonialism* (London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 2002) 99-134.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 112.

identifying the public space as primarily a space of male action it disregards the presence of women, who Devji bundles together with slaves and youth under the category of 'the *zaiif* or the weak.'²⁶¹

Michael Warner's framework of a discourse public (or a public) as articulated in his essay "Publics and Counterpublics", is much more helpful in imagining the social world of north India in the nineteenth and twentieth century. A discourse public is self-organized, autotelic, and comes into existence simply by virtue of being addressed. It exists only in "relation to texts and their circulation" and in this sense is different from the bourgeois public sphere that assumes an "actually existing set of potentially enumerable humans".²⁶² A public does not assume the dimension of social totality, neither is it a tightly-bound group. On the contrary, all its members have to do is to pay "some degree of attention, however notional" to the discourse. As organizers of a discourse public, texts (however they are defined) play an important role. As Warner explains a public "must be organized by something other than the state" and this something is a discourse that turns strangers into a public by addressing them in a manner that is personal and impersonal at once.

²⁶¹ In talking about the north Indian ecumene, Chris Bayly argues that the public sphere in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, influenced by the egalitarian traditions of Islam, was open to more than "just men of power". Artisans and people of the bazaars could become prominent poets and noblewomen, courtesans, performers from poor backgrounds could rise to important political positions in court. C.A. Bayly, "The Indian Ecumene: An Indigenous Public Sphere," in *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 196.

²⁶² Warner, Michael. "Public and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002), 49-90.

Warner's framework allows us to imagine a public evolving around the creation, consumption and circulation of reformist texts that straddle across the public and private domains. It creates and accounts for the many ways in which one could be part of a public by broadening the very idea of participation. A woman reading, commenting on or listening to the paraphrased sermon that was delivered in a mosque would be interpellated into the discourse public by putting her in a relation with the text. It is this centrality of a text and the possibility of its reproduction, dissemination, and its accessibility that make the appearance of a discourse public a difficult proposition in the pre-print media world, according to Warner.

In addition to the rapid proliferation of printed texts and the formation of publics around those texts, colonial north India also witnessed the opening of new kinds of public spaces in the form of modern offices, railway stations and train carriages, classrooms and hostels, hill stations and recreational clubs, cinema halls and theatres, etc. The conventional historical explanation has tied the greater visibility of women in public to emergence of stricter forms of *purdah*. However, this historiographical consensus overlooks the fact that both men and women were venturing into these spaces for the first time. Political rallies, theatre screenings, railway platforms and hostels were new, and often times frightening spaces, because of the constant scrutiny that came with being in such spaces and the impossibility of controlling who one would have to socialize with. A glimpse of the anxiety about being pushed beyond one's comfort zone, amidst people who were

different—and difference here could be defined as social, cultural, economic, religious, racial and, of course, gendered—can be caught in various genres of literature from this period. For instance, in 1909, one Maulvi Nizamuddin Husain Badayuni published an Urdu *nazm* (poem) *Mirza Phooya* through his press. In the epilogue to the published verses, , Maulvi Nizamuddin writes that though the *nazm* was first recited in 1900 by Aligarh College’s famous alumni Sajjad Waheed, it remained relevant a decade later because it addressed a deep-rooted problem that continued to hold the community back: ignorant mothers’ lack of appreciation for the education of their sons.²⁶³ The *nazm* is a satire about Mirza Phooya, an aristocrat from Lucknow, who reaches the age of twenty without receiving any education. He spends his days in pointless aristocratic pursuits and is spoilt silly by his mother, aunts and sisters. His life takes a frightening turn when his father attends a rally by Mohsin ul Mulk, the secretary of Aligarh College, in Lucknow and decides to send his son to Aligarh. The bulk of *nazm* is a letter that Mirza Phooya writes to his family, listing the strange ways of the students at Aligarh. He is struck by the sheer linguistic and economic diversity of his new peers. But he is appalled by the radical egalitarianism on campus, the emphasis on sportsmanship, the casualness in dressing, and rigor of college life.²⁶⁴ He complains that he has to take his meals at fixed hours in the hostel canteen and is often yelled at for breaking rules. Despite the early shocks, Mirza Phooya does not want to return to Lucknow. Instead he

²⁶³ Sajjad Waheed, *Mirza Phooya: Aligarh College Mein* (Badayun: Nizami Press, 1909).

²⁶⁴ David Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996). In particular, see the fifth and sixth chapters.

requests that a few provisions be sent up to him in Aligarh, including shoe laces, a bottle of ink and a jar of pickles.²⁶⁵

The satirical *nazm*'s description of Mirza Phooya's days in Lucknow is instructive, for it reveals the new methods of male socialization that were considered appropriate; in the process, the older, aristocratic forms were not only mocked but also feminized. Mirza Phooya is berated for spending all his time in play. He has received no education and is not capable of holding his own in a conversation. He is terribly shy in the presence of strangers and is fond of expensive clothes and perfumes. In other words, even though Mirza Phooya, as a twenty-year-old man, was not likely to have been restricted to the *zenana*, he is plagued by the same imperfections that haunt a young girl raised under strict *purdah*. It is impossible to miss the contrast set up by the poet between Mirza Phooya's unproductive, leisurely and decadent lifestyle in Lucknow, marked by the overwhelming presence of women represented as frequently sobbing, and the intellectually stimulating, egalitarian, and athletic world of Aligarh College. In many ways, his arrival in Aligarh can be seen as his reluctant departure from the increasingly discredited ways of 'being in public' and his "emergence" into the modern public space of college hostels and university campuses.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Sajjad Waheed, *Mirza Phooya: Aligarh College Mein* (Badayun: Nizami Press, 1909). 6-8.

²⁶⁶ The friendships and connections forged on campuses, and institutionalized through the formation of alumni associations, allowed the college graduates to shape the political and social movements by giving them access to government and voluntary organizations. In 1916, when the education department was weighing in on the decision to form provincial maktab committees in various

As spaces away from home, campuses and hostels evoked anxiety because of their potential to present young men, and eventually women, with temptations in the form of Christianity, Westernization and reckless modernity. The 1913 Report issued by the Department of Education recommended measures to increase the enrollment of Muslim men in higher education institutions. The Report took cognizance of this point and suggested that hostels for Muslim students should be under private management who could also—if need be—arrange for religious instructions.²⁶⁷ This echoed the solution recommended by Maulana Thanawi, who bemoaned the trend that saw more and more Muslim boys being packed away to English boarding schools. Though he never suggested that young men shy away from British education and government jobs, he did urge parents to send their impressionable sons to another kind of hostel during summer breaks: the *khanqah* (a Sufi hospice). Thanawi argued that the time spent in the company of pious Muslim teachers would make the community's youth impervious to the ill influence of science and English when they returned to schools.²⁶⁸

districts of the United Provinces, the department of education asked Syed Abdur Rauf, a pro-Muslim League lawyer from Allahabad, to put together a team of community leaders who would advise the government on the structure and goals of the maktab committee. The committee recommended by Abdur Rauf, and accepted by the government, included men like Karamat Husain, Maulvi Habib ur Rahman Sherwani, Sahebzada Aftab Ahmad Khan, and Shaikh Abdullah. See File 161 / 1920, Education A, Part I, folio 78, State Archives, Lucknow. Similar configuration of men came into play for committees formed to deliberate on other matters pertaining to the community. Many of these men were also members of the Muhammadan Educational Conference and were affiliated either the Congress or the Muslims League. For further details, see Gail Minault's *The Khilafat Movement* and David Lelyveld's *Aligarh's First Generation*.

²⁶⁷ File 131 / 1913 Muhammadan Education, Education A, State Archives, Lucknow.

²⁶⁸ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Fawaid us Sohbat: Allah Walon ki Sohbat ke Fawaid aur Samrat* (Karachi: Jamia Ashraf ul Madaris), 70.

Similar unease about the unpredictability of events is evident in literature about train travel and railway stations. More than any other public space, train coaches and railway stations presented the possibility of encountering people from any and every class, gender and occupational group. There was also the occasional danger of having to travel with a gentleman and his dog. Depending on whom one had the fortune or misfortune of travelling with a train carriage could turn into a venue for political and religious debate, or the site of public shaming. An example of the former is represented in the fictional debate in versified form between an English-educated Muslim man and a maulvi, *Mister Aur Maulvi*. The text was published by Jamiat e Ulema e Hind, the pro-Congress political party of *ulema*.

A debate between the Mister and Maulvi begins when the former, a Muslim League supporter, accuses the Maulvi of raising obstacles in the community's path to progress by asking Muslims to give up government jobs and education (a reference to the Gandhian Non Co-operation Movement) and by joining hands with the Congress. In turn, the Maulvi launches a scathing attack by accusing members of the League of being interested only in personal progress and lucrative government jobs. According to him, the party does not have the vision or the political agenda to enable the progress of the community. That battle, argues the Maulvi, had been fought by the *ulema* since 1857 and they had found the Congress to be a worthy ally

in the fight. The text ends with the Mister conceding defeat and departing with the promise that he would thoroughly analyze every aspect of the Muslim problem.²⁶⁹

The possibility of such unplanned encounters that provided public figures an opportunity to shine was not entirely the stuff of fiction. Maulana Thanawi reminisces about several incidents of this nature in his writings and sermons. Khwaja Aziz ul Hasan, his biographer, dedicated a large section of the biography to Maulana's train travels, during which he routinely "ran into people of different affiliations and dispositions invariably leading to a debate".²⁷⁰ Thanawi narrated one such incident as an aside during his sermon *Fawaid us Sohbat* (The Benefits of Good Company), which he delivered in Kandhla in October 1912. Once during a train journey Thanawi was drawn into a conversation by a gentleman who was travelling with his dog. He asked Thanawi why dogs were considered *haram* in Islam despite their many wonderful qualities. Thanawi replied that he could offer two answers to this question: a common-sense response and a specialist's response. This apparently whetted the gentleman's curiosity and he was eager to hear both answers. The common-sense response, Thanawi said, was that dogs were declared *haram* by Prophet Muhammad and would, therefore, remain so for Muslims till the end of time. Thanawi, while recalling this incident, added that this reason was all that mattered for a Muslim, but his companion dismissed this as an act of faith and asked for the specialist's response. To this Thanawi answered that dogs did not have a

²⁶⁹ Mister Aur Maulvi, Ishaat Jamiat e Ulema.

²⁷⁰ Aziz ul Hasan, *Ashraf us Sawaneh*, Vol 1-4 (Deoband: Maktaba e Thanawi, 2009), 140.

sense of community. They barked at each other and marked their territories. This answer impressed him but the story continues further. When the train reached Etawah, the tehsildar who was waiting at the station to receive Maulana Thanawi asked him if he had had a conversation about dogs with a fellow passenger because the news about his fitting response had reached Aligarh and the students were talking about it.²⁷¹

Other innovations—in practice rather than technology—created avenues of leisure for men and women that put them in the public gaze. The evening walks in the parks, the summer vacations in the hill stations, and club memberships, seen as essentially English practices, became popular among Indian bureaucrats and the middle classes as well. They became the hallmark of the man who had embraced modern education or *jadeed taleem*. The term *jadeed taleem* became shorthand for a wide range of social and political preferences such as a man's choice of profession, the woman he married, the extent of *purdah* his wife practiced, the choice of furniture in his living room and the clothes he wore.²⁷² Akbar Allahabadi (d.1921), the satirist who used poetry to draw attention to the cultural double-bind in which the middle class found itself under colonial rule, highlights the slippery slope that

²⁷¹ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Fawaid us Sohbat: Allah Walon ki Sohbat ke Fawaid aur Samrat* (Karachi: Jamia Ashraf ul Madaris), 30-31.

²⁷² When Ibn ul Waqt, the protagonist of Nazir Ahmad's novel by the same name, befriends a British officer among the changes he makes to his lifestyle is his wardrobe. He also moves houses and furnishes his new residence in line with English tastes. This means floor sitting is replaced by sofas, chairs and dining tables. Ibn ul Waqt (or Son of the Moment) is a modern man, educated at the Delhi College with a special interest in History as opposed to the unproductive, old school pursuit of poetry.

was modern education in his poem *Miss Seimeen Badan* (The Silver Bodied Dame). The poem is written from the perspective of a native who travels to England for education at the behest of his elders. However, once in England he finds himself dancing in majestic ballrooms, dining at fine restaurants and playing cards with British women. Before long he is married to a white woman but is quickly accused by the very same elders of being a rogue and a degenerate. The frustration of the English-educated native is voiced in the concluding couplet of the poem:

First you push me into the river, bound hand and foot,
Then you say, “beware, beware,” the water is too deep.²⁷³

In *Miss Seimeen Badan*, like in his other work, Allahabadi draws attention to what he thinks is the impossibility of remaining true to eastern values and religion after “drink[ing] the wine of western culture”.²⁷⁴ However, *Miss Seimeen Badan* is also striking for the connection it draws between *jadeed taleem* and “western wine” through access to new public spaces and cultural experiences.

The evening walk, often in the company of one’s wife, was probably the most public articulation of *jadeed taleem*. It was also the most ridiculed for being nothing but a pointless exercise in shamelessness. In another fictitious debate written in the style

²⁷³ KC Kanda, *Master Couplets of Urdu Poetry* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2010), 35.

²⁷⁴ One of the better known quartets of Allahabadi is a satire masking as advice to a young man who works as a lowly clerk in the colonial state. He writes:

Chor Literature ko, Apni History ko Bhool Ja (Forget Literature, Set Aside Your History)

Shaikh o Masjid se Ta’alluq Tark Kar, School Ja (Sever Your Ties with the Mosque and the Priest, Go to School Instead)

Char Din ki Zindagi Hai, Koft se Kya Fayda (Life is Short, Strive is Pointless)

Kha Double Roti, Clerki Kar, Khushi se Phool Ja (Eat bread, And Be Happy to Serve as a Clerk).

of an argument between a Maulvi and an English-educated man, the Maulvi complains:

Tamashe hain, club hain, park hain, aur sair gahen hain (There are Dramas, Clubs, Parks and Tourist Destinations)

Bas Ab Toh Ishq ki Sab Manzilein Tai Hain Ba Asaani (Now, All the Milestones of Romance Can Be Achieved With Ease)

It is difficult to find in the literary productions of this time references to *sair* or evening walks that are not disparaging. The fictional worlds created by Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi, in line with the authors' belief that respectable women should not leave their homes except when absolutely necessary, rarely allowed female protagonists into spaces beyond the *zenana*. Exceptions were only made when demonstrating female depravity, in which case the wayward protagonist, remiss of her duties towards her husband and children, spent her evenings at the club.²⁷⁵ Women authors writing several decades after the publication of early reformist literature continued to depict public excursions by a man with his wife as a morally ambiguous spectacle. Rashid ul Khairi's daughter-in-law Khatun Akram's *Peekar e Wafa*, published posthumously in 1928, contrasts the public presence of an English woman with that of a respectable Muslim woman in a particularly mawkish scene. The English 'memsaheb', who marries the husband of the novel's protagonist while he is studying medicine in England, walks hand in hand with him in the garden and laughs boisterously as the servants watch the couple. She sits next to him in the

²⁷⁵ Rashid ul Khairi, *Bint ul Waqt* (Delhi: Mehboob al Matabae, 1941).

carriage and accompanies him to the club. Saeeda, the infinitely patient first wife, watches all this from a distance wrapped in a *burqah*. Even as she faints from the shock of discovering her husband's infidelity she does so quietly and discreetly and without drawing any attention to herself.

The caution that a moping Saeeda exercises to remain hidden from public view, even as she collapses on the sidewalk, while a fictional representation of her modesty, draws our attention to the extent of scrutiny women and men could face in a public space. The scope of surveillance can be gauged from an article printed in *Tehzeeb e Niswan* in 1923. Headlined *Pahadon pe Purdah* (Purdah in the Hills), it illustrates that a man or a woman could not escape the surveying eyes of the peers even when vacationing away from home. The article classifies *purdah nasheen* women into three categories. The strictest *purdah* is followed by women who adopt customary veiling and total segregation between men and women. The second group comprises women who veil themselves appropriately in public but are comfortable talking to their husbands' male friends from behind the curtain. The women in the third group barely cover their heads in public and are happy to comeingle with the male friends of their spouses. The essay is a diatribe against women, who, regardless of the group they belong to in their home towns abandon the veils when vacationing in the hills. The author threatens to name a "*purdah nasheen* woman known for reprimanding others for insufficient veiling in her

hometown” but who was seen at a hill station, riding in an open carriage with her husband without *purdah*.

However, towards the middle of the 1920s magazines and self-help guides were giving outdoor walks and outstation trips a twist of health benefit. A *Tehzeeb e Niswan* article from 1923 advises women to hold on to their *burqah* and their *haya* (modesty) but give up the palanquin rides and instead cover short distances, like a trip to the local market or to a friend’s house, on foot. The article admits that contemporary society does not allow women to take up walking as a form of exercise for good health, but it argues that once women in large numbers adopt this practice it would gain wider acceptance, allowing them to walk longer distances and reap greater benefits. The same issue of the magazine also ran a feature that encouraged Muslim women to embark upon train travel with greater confidence and enthusiasm. The ideal train travelers, according to the author, were the cheerful Parsi and English women, who sang songs and took in the sounds and sights of the journey. Travel for them was an opportunity to expand their horizon. The Muslim women, in contrast, sat stiff on the edge of the seat, closed the windows shut, yelled at their children incessantly and cursed their luck for having had to board the train.²⁷⁶

Muslim women’s supposed inability to master the art of train travel was also noticed by Thanawi. Though he usually encouraged aspiring disciples to visit his

²⁷⁶ A Reader, “Sair o Safar,” *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, April 5, 1924. Vol 27, No 14.

hospice, he did not want women to travel to Thana Bhawan where his hospice was located because they “skipped the ritual prayers during travel and did not maintain appropriate *purdah*”.²⁷⁷ For these reasons he often sent women back without initiating them and instructed them to be in touch through letters.²⁷⁸ In contrast, the men who accompanied Thanawi on his frequent train travels apparently never missed a single prayer. Khwaja Aziz ul Hasan, Maulana Thanawi’s biographer, considers this a sign of the Maulana’s *barakat* or his grace because even in very crowded train coaches, people moved aside to create room so that Thanawi and his entourage could offer their prayer in a congregation.²⁷⁹ Also, the disciples followed Maulana Thanawi’s strict instruction to lower their gaze when the train pulled in or out of the platform in order to avoid glancing even accidentally upon an unveiled woman. The inability of women to pray and veil appropriately in a public space stands in stark contrast with the ability of men to do so largely because the latter are guided by the wisdom and *barakat* of Maulana Thanawi. In fact, such was the power of Thanawi’s piety that it gave his disciples the courage to remain steadfast and unscathed even in the midst of grave temptation, as Aziz ul Hasan writes:

After becoming a disciple of Hazratwala (Maulana Thanawi), I was blessed with such concern for the purity of my faith that I remember that once when I was walking through the neighbourhood of Chowk [a neighbourhood famous for its courtesan houses] in Lucknow my eyes were glued to the ground and I was constantly pinching my arms till they were sore just to make sure that I

²⁷⁷ Majzoob Khwaja Aziz ul Hasan, *Ashraf us Sawaneh*, Vol 2, (Deoband: Maktaba Thanawai, 2009), 198.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Majzoob Khwaja Aziz ul Hasan, *Ashraf us Sawaneh*, Vol 1, (Deoband: Maktaba Thanawai, 2009), 149.

would not cast a glance in the direction of the fallen women or get distracted by the sounds of singing and musical instruments that were echoing from every street.²⁸⁰

Coupling of Piety and *Purdah*

The relation between the social mobility of the middling castes and the male preoccupation with controlling female sexuality has been well documented.²⁸¹ The middle class reformist project to civilize women was based on educating them and granting them some rights. However, the content of this education and these rights dovetailed with the patriarchal desire to create a female subject who, as the wife and mother, would shoulder the weight of the community's aspirations. The ideal woman, as imagined by reformers, was industrious, hyper efficient, pious and chaste. She shunned recreational activity of any kind. Visits to shrines, fairs, or drama performances were anathema to her because they were sites of bawdy revelry. Even social visits to friends and relations were rare because a gathering of women invariably led to gossip, back-biting, and ostentatious display of gold and silk.²⁸² Her rather lonely day was packed with household chores and was

²⁸⁰ Majzoob Khwaja Aziz ul Hasan, *Ashraf us Sawaneh*, Vol 2, (Deoband: Maktaba Thanawai, 2009), 63.

²⁸¹ Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005).

²⁸² Reformist criticism of rituals, festivals, and visits to shrines had the effect of shrinking the spaces and practices of socialization available to women. Shaista Suhrawardy, in a 1937 essay published in women's magazine *Asmat*, called for a moderation in reformist austerity because it was dulling women's lives. See Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah ki Muntakhib Tehreerein (The Selected Writings of Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah)*, ed and introduction Ahmad Saleem (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 178.

punctuated by ritual prayers. She never missed a single prayer, just as she did not miss a spot when dusting the house. Her resourcefulness was astounding, given that she never stepped out of the house²⁸³.

The epithet ‘queen of the house’ (*ghar ki malika*) is frequently used to describe women in reformist literature from the late nineteenth century. It reinforces the idea that the proper domain of a woman is her home. An axiom worked into this proposition is that women are outside their comfort zone when they cross the threshold of their homes. Their faint hearts and excessive kindness make them ill-equipped to handle the harsh realities of the world. Shabbir Usmani’s tract reasons that even though *pardah* imprisons the *Ashraf* women it is a prison of their liking because it provides them comfort and protection. He berates the “western-style reformers” who disregard the innate shyness of respectable women by forcing an emancipatory agenda on them. Discarding the veil, therefore, was tantamount to breaching the natural order. When the caste associations of the nineteenth and twentieth century pressurized the women of their community to adopt *pardah* the

²⁸³ The importance of marrying an industrious and resourceful woman is explained in Hadi Mirza Ruswa’s *Sharif Zada*, a tale about the resilience of Mirza Sahib, a Syed boy whose life takes a difficult turn when his parents die early. Though Mirza has to drop out of college he perseveres and finally clears the engineering exam. The novel—the most didactic of Ruswa’s works—ends with Mirza and his wife moving outside the city, where the family owns acres and acres of land. Here, away from the corruption of the city, Mirza pursues his passion of chemical research. While the novel is a testimony of Mirza’s hard work, the foundation for his success is laid by his wife Ruqaiyya Begum, who puts food on the table in the early days when Mirza is jobless. She sews and embroiders skull caps which she passes on to her neighbour (literally through a window in the common wall), hoping that the neighbour’s husband would find a buyer for the cap. As luck would have it, the cap fetches a good price and fresh orders trickle in. In this manner, without ever having left home, Mirza’s wife becomes the bread winner of the family for a brief period. See Mirza, Hadi Ruswa, *Sharif Zada*, compiled Hafeez Abbas (New Delhi: Taraqqi Urdu Board).

move was conceived as an appeal to re-establish this natural order. Their plea was based on the twin assumptions that in the distant, golden past their communities had a higher social status and their women practiced seclusion.

The mounting pressure on women from the occupational castes to retreat to the *zenana* is one piece of the story of increased social mobility in colonial north India. The extreme forms of seclusion that came into play in *Ashraf* households constitute the other piece. It was no longer enough to claim that the women of *Ashraf* families were never seen or heard outside the *zenana*. In the nineteenth century, the veil was stretched to bring under its scope unmarried girls who could no longer be seen by women other than those belonging to their own families. Similarly, adult, married women were asked to show greater discretion in the presence of non-Muslim household help, especially the masseuse.

However, the more significant shift in the understanding of *purdah* in this period was its coupling with piety such that *purdah* turned into a practice that could be used to measure, manage, and display piety in concrete and public ways. The nineteenth and twentieth century saw a proliferation of formal and informal spaces that provided men and women new ways to be in public. It introduced them to unprecedented and powerful tools of influence even as it exposed them to rigorous surveillance from friends and strangers. An article in a magazine or a casual conversation with a fellow passenger had the potential to travel much farther and

faster than had been possible in the previous centuries.²⁸⁴ The coupling of piety and *purdah* became the distinguishing feature of this surveillance. Seen against this background, it is understandable that Maulana Thanawi's primary criticism of unreliable Sufi *pirs* was that they did not maintain *purdah* from their female disciples. While contemporary reformers like Nazir Ahmad chided women for wasting scarce family resources in the service of charlatans disguised as Sufi saints, Maulana Thanawi was horrified that women massaged the feet of their *pirs* while their husbands were away at work.

In contrast, Maulana Thanawi ensured that he was never in the presence of a woman to whom he was not related as a *mehram*. This was quite a feat considering that he belonged to the generation of public figures who adapted quickly to the advent of the railways to build a base of followers across the subcontinent. He travelled extensively to give sermons that often attracted women, but the women sat in the *zenana*. However, every once in a while, he did face the threat of being in the company of unrelated women. Recounting one such incident to his disciple, he states:

²⁸⁴ The men and women occupying this new public space were aware of its potential and staked claims accordingly as is apparent from an argument that unfolded in the pages of *Tehzeeb e Niswan*. The argument began when a male reader of the magazine (one Maulvi Faiz Ali) wrote an article in the January 12, 1924 issue of the weekly in response to a travel piece printed in the previous issue. He complained that the magazine was wasting precious space by including articles that were of the nature of personal opinions fit to be shared in the privacy of the *zenana*. He compared the magazine to a public park and printing readers' travelogues and recipes was akin to allowing people to squat in the park. The article drew criticism from many readers and from Mumtaz Ali (in the March 1, 1924 issue), the manager and owner of the magazine. Ali suggested that a better analogy for the magazine would be a salon or a parlor where women congregate every week to share experiences and tips. Articles relevant to this debate can be read in the Jan 12, 26, March 1 and March 15 issues of the weekly.

A while ago I travelling in Surat's Rander district. While I was there I was invited to the prize distribution ceremony of a girls' *madrassa*. I accepted the invitation but later found out that the students included girls who were fourteen or fifteen years old, who were going to be present in the crowd to accept the awards. I laid down the condition that no girl older than seven should come in my presence. Only then would I attend the award ceremony. My condition was accepted.²⁸⁵

The coupling of piety with *purdah* led to the dislocation of *purdah* from its moorings in the *zenana* and repositioned it as a virtue that completed the piety of women as well men. As the distinction between public and private spaces blurred in the nineteenth century the practice of *purdah* among the *Ashraf* community underwent a transformation. Customary veiling practices far in excess of the *shariat* prescriptions sought to make the *Ashraf* women invisible even inside the *zenana* quarters of their homes. On the other hand, the men, seeking greater visibility in the public space, embraced *purdah* by adopting strategies that disregarded the presence of women who did step out into the world. Prostitutes, female students, and women travelers were ignored, avoided and denied audience. The unveiled woman in the public space was met by a determined *alim* whose lowered gaze and hushed voice were the embodied and public interpretation of the veil. After all, the Quranic verse 31 in surah four that asks women to lower their gaze and guide their private parts—the one that is most frequently deployed to make a case for female seclusion and

²⁸⁵ Majzoob Khwaja Aziz ul Hasan, *Ashrafus Sawaneh*, Vol 1, (Deoband: Maktaba Thanawai, 2009), 128.

veiling—is preceded by a verse that asks men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts as well.

The lowering of the male gaze in public, translated into Urdu as *nazar ka purdah* or veiling of the eyes, became an important aspect of the comportment of an *alim*. It became a marker that differentiated *Ashraf* men like Maulana Thanawi and Maulana Ilyas from the lower caste Muslims. In early twentieth century, when conversion and counter-conversion movements were launched by Islamic and Hindu organizations, the discourse on both sides of the religious divide referred to the communities they were trying to convert as people capable of less than perfect piety. Even Tablighi Jamaat, in contrast to its current insistence on moral egalitarianism, started as a reform movement led by *ulema* who were to guide the lapsed Muslims of Mewat. Just as its founder Maulana Ilyas' piety was fortified by his lineage that could be traced to Islam's first Caliph Abu Bakr Siddiqui, the absence of Islamic fervor among the nominal Muslims of Mewat lay in their humble origins in South Asia. The latter inherited the names, clothing and customs of their Hindu forefathers, which weakened their status as Muslims. The most reprehensible of the Hindu vestiges among Mewat Muslims, according to Tablighi literature, were their polytheistic streak and the absence of *purdah* and modesty among Meo men and women.²⁸⁶ Not

²⁸⁶ On the issue of *purdah*, the views of organizations like Tablighi Jamaat converged with those of Hindu revivalist movements and Orientalists who claimed that the practice of gender segregation among the upper caste Hindus was the result of the corrupting influence of Islam. According to this position, before the onset of the Islamic medieval age in South Asia Hindu women were equal members of the society. However, the seclusion of the medieval era removed women from public life and led to ignorance, moral weakness and cunning among them.

surprisingly, a dogged pursuance of *nazar ka purdah* among men and the all-encompassing *burqah* complete with gloves and socks for women eventually became the defining features of Tablighi Jamaat in South Asia.²⁸⁷

Unlike the dynamics between the *Ashraf* and *Ajlaf* Muslims that was clearly defined, the insertion of hierarchy among the different clans of *ulema* was trickier. A simple assertion of an ancestral link to Hejaz or Central Asia could not be grounds enough to stake a claim of superiority vis-à-vis a rival who could furnish an equally distinguished family tree. It became important to proclaim that the descent from the heartlands of Islam to the *qasaba* towns of South Asia had been uninterrupted and untainted by any matrimonial alliance with the non-*Ashraf* population. The preoccupation with creating the perfect family tree in this period is a result of the anxiety surrounding the purity of one's *Ashraf* status.²⁸⁸ Biographies and introductions of *ulema* from this period are careful about pointing to the Syed or

²⁸⁷ Segregation of gender and stringent *purdah* distinguish Tablighi Jamaat from other Islamic organizations in South Asia. Members of the Jamaat go to extreme lengths to ensure that they do not come in contact with non-*mehram* members of the opposite sex. This often includes changing the layout of their apartments, hiring only senior citizens as household help and using only the texting feature of the mobile phone. My fieldwork in Bombay and Delhi required me to spend long hours with women from the Jamaat. During the course of the day when it was time to offer ritual prayers I would line up with them in prayer for which I won praise and approval from them. But my lack of veiling was a cause of concern for them. I was made aware on several occasions that I would be considered a novice till such time that I started wearing a *burqah*. "May Allah give you the good sense to veil yourself (*Allah tumhe purdah ki taufiq ataa farmaye*)," was the refrain with which I was greeted most frequently by the older women.

²⁸⁸ I would like to thank Matin Ansari from Firangi Mahal for raising the point about the importance of family trees among the *Ashraf* families in the *qasaba* towns of north India. "Marriage alliances between families were contracted only after studying the *shijra* in great detail. Every *Ashraf* family in the *qasaba* has a *shijra*. Even a single controversial alliance in the distant past could mar the marriage prospects of family for generations to come. This was the reason that once a marriage is arranged between two families, it opens doors for future alliances between them because subsequent matches do not require investigation of lineage. The same logic underpinned the preference of many clans to marry within the family." Interview with Matin Ansari, February 2013.

Shaikh heritage on the father and mother's side. The rare autobiography that does not indulge in lineage boasting is Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani's *Naqsh e Hayat*. In fact, Madani uses his text to launch an attack on the practice among South Asian *ulema* of giving disproportionate importance to preservation of their foreign connection. He argued that it was incorrect to adjudge a person's moral stature and his piety based on his place of origin and the status of their ancestors. It was reprehensible, wrote Madani, that *Ashraf* families investigated each other's family trees to ensure that there was no history of undesirable mingling with the lower caste Muslims in the family's past before fixing a marriage alliance. "Didn't many of the contemporary *Ashraf* trace their origins to ancestors in Hejaz who were sons of a slave girl?" he asks. In fact, Ismail, the forefather of all the clans of Arabia, was born to Hajar, who was a slave girl. More importantly, when the Shaikhs and Syeds migrated to South Asia during the Sultanate and Mughal period they usually did not travel with their women. It is, therefore, more than likely, argued Madani, that even the purest lineages of *ulema* in South Asia have a history of local marriages in the early centuries. Therefore, in addition to being against the egalitarian principles of Islam, the obsession with purity of descent also flew in the face of the history of migration of Muslims to South Asia, he concluded.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani's tirade against Ashraf snobbery may have something to do with the fact that his family's Ashraf status remained precarious because its *shijra* had holes that could not be filled. Madani's biography suggests that he is a Syed, claiming descent from Muhammad through his grandson Husain and daughter Fatema. However, he could reliably trace his lineage back only to one Shah Nur ul Haq, who is supposed to have migrated to 'Ihahdadpur' in qasaba Tanda of Jaunpur district in Uttar Pradesh. Further, his family did not possess any document that would indicate when,

Conclusion

As the close scrutiny of the family tree of Maulana Ilyas reveals, marriages were contracted outside the clan as far back as the family tree reaches in time and as late as the nineteenth century. But the twentieth-century discourse about piety and purity of descent erased that history in order to create a narrative of a lineage free of imperfect pieties. The narrative of the unblemished family tree intersected with that of the hard-to-follow *purdah* arrangements of the family's women in the practice of choosing brides only from the close family circle. While the women of respectable families were not to be seen outside the *zenana*, the form of strict endogamy practiced by the families of *ulema* sought to ensure that no woman from outside the family would ever see the inside of their *zenana*, especially their unmarried girls. Apart from creating tight endogamous units that shunned alliances with the Mughals, Pathans and Muslims of South Asian origin, this coupling of piety with *purdah* in the nineteenth century also allowed the *ulema* to distinguish themselves as first among equals with respect to other Syeds and Shaikhs.

from where and why did Shah Nur ul Haq travel to Tanda. Also, the reputation of Tanda as a textile town with a large population of Muslim weavers made it difficult for Madani's family to assert its Syed status because people assumed that every Muslim hailing from Tanda had *julaha* ancestry. Madani writes about his father's recurring dreams in which Fatema and Husain endorse him as one of them. Madani, while acknowledging that dreams cannot be admitted as documentary evidence, suggests they do count for something. See Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naqsh e Hayat* (Deoband: Maktaba Shaikh ul Islam, 2007) 18–32.

CHAPTER 4: PIETY AND FEMALE FIDELITY

Dear Mohammad Ali,

I return with thanks Miss Ellison's book which I have read with much interest. Its perusal has raised definitely a question which has always been at the back of my mind, namely the spiritual position of women in Islam. The paradise of the Muhammadans, peopled as I understand, with beautiful maidens of supernatural origins appears to offer no place to the earthly woman. Yet if women have souls which persist after death, where is their abiding place?²⁹⁰

Yours sincerely

DA Barker, Landsowne, Garhwal, UP

The letter was sent to Mohammad Ali while he was under house arrest in Garhwal for his involvement in the Khilafat Movement. The Mohammad Ali collection in the Premchand Archives at Delhi's Jamia Milia Islamia holds one more letter from Barker, indicating that he was probably in regular contact with Mohammad Ali, who had apparently piqued his interest in Islam. Mohammad Ali's reply is lost to us but Barker's query about the "spiritual position of women in Islam" and the "abiding place" for the souls of Muslim women is in keeping with the debates in colonial India about the treatment of women in Islam. When Christian missionaries and later Hindu revivalist movements used the trope of the oppressed Muslim woman as the stick with which to beat Muslim men in the nineteenth century, the case for moral and spiritual equality between Muslim men and women was made with greater urgency. Maulana Thanawi's *Beheshti Zewar* is based on the premise that correct

²⁹⁰ MOH / L 2006 – 2007, F No 2, 5 /9/15.

performance of religious rituals was as much an obligation for women as it was for men because both would be judged by the same yardstick on Judgment Day. This moral equality between genders did not translate to social and economic parity. Instead, as Barbara Metcalf points out, Maulana Thanawi and other reformists envisioned a complementarity in relations, such that men and women balanced the strengths and weaknesses of each other.

This chapter argues that the complementarity that became the hallmark of the reformist imagination of male-female partnership was not just about the unequal division of rights and duties. It rested firmly on the assumption that men and women possessed certain fixed, innate traits. Further, the entire reformist enterprise—the novels, the sermons, the guidebooks and the textbooks—was geared towards naturalizing these traits. This chapter will look at the literary and legal infrastructures that underpinned the idea of female fidelity even as they masked the practices and discourses that created financial dependence among women.

The Tragic Figure of the Virtuous Reformist Heroine

The exercise of reading Maulana Thanawi's sermons on the topic of household reforms can be frustrating. In his speeches and writings, Maulana Thanawi swings from blaming women for the fall of Muslim dominance in Hindustan to calling them

repositories of virtue and affect, as demonstrated by this quote from a sermon in 1932:

Women are foul mouths. That is by far their biggest flaw, but they possess one wonderful quality: the wretched ones love their husbands to death.²⁹¹

Maulana Thanawi's work is littered with such contradictions, but he is not alone in this schizophrenia. Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, a very different kind of scholar and the founder of *Jamiat e Ulema e Hind*, also writes about "Hindustani women" in similar broad strokes, comparing them favourably to the independent and luxury-loving women of Medina. Maulana Madani's family hailed from Faizabad in Uttar Pradesh. His last name is an acknowledgement of his father's migration to Medina in the twentieth century. The practice of moving to Medina in one's old age was not uncommon among a certain class of Muslims at this time, except in Maulana Madani's case his father insisted that his entire family move with him. Within a few years of the migration, Maulana Madani's wife passed away. When he decided to marry again he was clear that he would not marry a local woman or even a South Asian immigrant accustomed to the Arab way of life because Arab women loved afternoon picnics and disliked hard work. The women from Hindustan, in contrast, stayed by their husbands' sides through thick and thin, braving poverty and discomfort.²⁹² The process of bringing a bride from Hindustan proved to be tougher than Maulana Madani and his family had anticipated, eventually forcing him to look

²⁹¹ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Kasa un Nisa* (Deoband: Idarat e Taleefat e Akabir, 1932), 60-61.

²⁹² Husain Ahmad Madani, *Naqsh e Hayat* (Deoband: Maktaba Shaikh ul Islam, 2007), 163-165.

for a suitable match outside his kin group. Madani writes extensively about this in his biography:

When my first wife died in AH 1326 my father said that it was clear that no woman from Medina, whether she was an immigrant or a local, would agree to marry me because of the poverty and hardship our family was going through. He recommended that I travel to Hindustan to find a bride. So I left for India at the end of 1326 AH and reached Deoband in AH 1327. On getting there, I sent letters to many relatives and tried to initiate conversations in several places. My father also sent letters to families in our native village but none of them agreed to marry their daughter to me. Every family had the same concern: if I were to marry their daughter and stay in India they would agree to the match but nobody wanted to marry their daughter off to a man who had migrated to Medina. After wasting about six months in corresponding with the extended family without any success we decided to expand to families outside our kin network.²⁹³

Maulana Madani and his brothers eventually did manage to find Indian brides, but by his own admission their Indian origin did not prevent the domestic situation from getting turbulent. The lack of resources and the back-breaking work created tension among family members and soon resulted in separate kitchens. However, years after his stay in Medina, when he was writing his biography, Maulana Madani could not help but think of Indian women as uncomplaining, sympathetic, and hard workers.

A similar evocation of the loyalty and kindness of women can be seen in reformist fiction. Starting in the late nineteenth century, in novel after novel reformers brought to life the ideal woman who looked past her husband's infidelities and misdemeanours. Guided by her faith and her *Ashraf* upbringing, she knew that her

²⁹³ Ibid, 163.

husband would eventually repent and return to her, if only on her deathbed. The trope of a repentant husband rushing to the side of his dying wife was so common in Rashid ul Khairi's writings that he was given the title of *Musavvir e Gham* (one who paints a picture of gloom). The didactic novel was an important vehicle of reform in colonial India. Apart from pushing forward the reformist agenda, a successful novel could also catapult its author into the limelight. It could launch the novelist's career as an activist, a printer-publisher or both.²⁹⁴ The Department of Public Instruction's incorporation of reformist novels into school syllabi for girls played a key role in popularizing the works of authors like Nazir Ahmad, Altaf Hussain Hali and Rashid ul Khairi. Acting on the belief that there was a dearth of appropriate reading and teaching material for girls from respectable families, in 1868 the newly-appointed lieutenant of the North Western Provinces, William Muir, announced that the government would award cash prize to authors of original and useful works in the vernacular languages. The government would also purchase copies of the winning works for circulation in its educational institutions.²⁹⁵ In 1869, Nazir Ahmad's *Mirat ul Uroos* was published and was awarded a cash prize of one thousand rupees. He won the award again for *Banat un Nash* and *Taubat un Nasuh*. The authors of many

²⁹⁴ The public careers of Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi are testimonies to the power of print media in colonial India. An alumnus of Delhi College, Nazir Ahmad was active in the Aligarh circle and a regular at the Muhammadan Educational Conference. Rashid ul Khairi gave up his job at the postal department to concentrate on writing doleful and chastising novels for women. His decision to launch *Asmat*, a monthly women's magazine that was published from Delhi, established his reputation as a reformer.

²⁹⁵ C.M. Naim, "Prize-Winning Adab," in *Texts and Contexts* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 121-125.

award-winning novels and textbooks were government servants who had a sideline in writing.²⁹⁶

Reformist novels stuck to uncomplicated plots and were populated by one-dimensional characters that remained unfazed by the events unfolding around them.²⁹⁷ The texts were simplified battlegrounds between the good and evil, in which the former was defined by an unshakeable belief in *tauhid* (the oneness of God) and the latter was exemplified by a gullible and unthinking disciple of an impious Sufi shaikh (*pir*). While minor details varied from one novel to another, some tropes remained enduring features of reformist fiction: for instance, the protagonist was always a young and recently-married *Ashraf* woman. The marriage of the protagonist and her arrival in her affine home set the stage for the battle between the *mouhid* (one who believes in the unity of God) and the *mushrik* (one who associates other gods to God). The education imparted to the girl by her parents laid the foundation for her behavior in her husband's house. In *Mirat ul Uroos*, Asghari's industriousness, resourcefulness and piety were the result of the attention and training she received from her father. Her sister Akbari, on the other hand, was pampered by her grandmother. As a result, Akbari turned out to be immature, spoiled and lazy. She proved to be inadequate as a wife and was an awful daughter-in-law. Nonetheless, while Akbari, along with her husband, is

²⁹⁶ Stark, Ulrike. *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008.

²⁹⁷ For a critical survey of Urdu literature from this period, read Shaista Suhrawardy's *A Critical Survey of the Development of the Urdu Novel and Short Story*.

inconvenienced and humiliated for her indiscretions, her suffering pales in comparison to the misfortunes that Nazir Ahmad heaps on Asghari. In what seems to be a particularly sadistic streak of reformist novels, the 'good woman' is always at the receiving end of every cruel blow that life can possibly land on a young married woman. A quick survey of reformist literature reveals that the scale and depth of misfortunes a woman suffered is directly proportional to her virtues: the nicer a woman is, the more grievous are the miseries she faces. She suffers at the hands of a cheating or ignorant husband. She watches her young children die. She lives in utter poverty and is accused of robbery. She, however, confronts the tragedies that befall her with fortitude and forbearance. She does not seek help from another mortal because to do so would be to compromise her faith in God.

Allama Rashid ul Khairi was relentless in this regard. His tales of chastisement of wayward women pushed the limits of a genre that already specialized in making women suffer. In *Toofan e Hayat* (The Storm of Life), Allama Khairi briefly brings to life the perfect *Ashraf* woman in the form of Sadiqa, only to condemn her to painful death. Sadiqa is the impoverished cousin of the male protagonist of the novel, Inam. The author informs us that Sadiqa is an incorruptible *mouhid*, who has led an unblemished life. She was loved in her parents' house and was respected and cherished by her parents-in-law. A series of unfortunate deaths and family loans leave Sadiqa alone in this world with an infant to look after. However, even in poverty, she holds on to her *Ashraf* values and dignity. She does not seek alms

neither does she ask for help. When Inam invites her to attend the ceremony to celebrate his wife's pregnancy, Sadiqa is reluctant but she joins in the celebrations, watching from a distance. Tragedy strikes the poor woman when a set of gold bangles go missing from a young girl's hands at the party and she is accused of stealing them. The Sufi *pir* of Inam's wife Hajra is called to "investigate" the matter and he confirms her suspicion even as a mortified Sadiqa refutes the charges. The *pir* asks Inam to report the case to the police. Sadiqa immediately falls into prostration and asks Allah to save her honor. When she hears that the police are at the door she gasps and dies, leaving her son an orphan.²⁹⁸ As a true *Ashraf*, Sadiqa chooses death over the humiliation of facing the police. What makes her truly remarkable, according to Allama Khairi, however, is she that wills herself to death instead of getting involved in a police investigation that could potentially prove her innocence. She bypasses the court of law to directly appeal in the highest court of justice and receives divine help in the form of sudden death that apparently absolves her from the charges of robbery.

The sub-plot involving Sadiqa is not essential to the main narrative of *Toofan e Hayat*. The author uses this digression only to set up a comparison between Sadiqa and Hajra, the superstitious and irresponsible wife of Inam whose trust in her *pir* borders on *shirk*. Within a few years of arriving in Inam's house as a young bride Hajra exhausts the family's savings, mortgages the ancestral home, and convinces

²⁹⁸ Sadiqa's son eventually goes to Deoband to train as an *alim* and returns to the town to meet Inam.

her now jobless husband to borrow large sums of money to host numerous un-Islamic ceremonies that are supposed to ensure the well being of the couple's unborn child. The expensive rituals and ceremonies recommended by the *pir* amount to nothing as Hajra and Inam lose two children in quick succession.

However, the deaths of the two girls have no apparent effect on Hajra. Neither does the queue of impatient creditors outside the house embarrass her. Like mentioned earlier, the shocks and surprises of life do not make the slightest dent in Hajra's high estimation of her *pir*.

The family recovers from some of the economic and emotional trauma when Inam and Hajra's only surviving child, their daughter Mushrika, grows up into a responsible young girl. Mushrika receives lessons in *tauhid* and austerity from an old family acquaintance who is simply introduced to the readers as Bade Miyan (a senior, respected man). Under Bade Miyan's tutelage, she learns to balance the household budget and by the time she is ten years old she is already managing her father's salary. She sets up a schedule to pay back the many debts her wasteful parents have accumulated over the years. Soon the family has enough savings to help other *Ashraf* relatives who are in financial trouble. This turnaround is as impressive as the one that Asghari achieves in *Mirat ul Uroos*. Further, like in the case of Asghari, Mushrika's commitment to religious reform only brings her further hardships. The family she is married into is in the clutches of another fraudulent *pir*, who immediately marks the *mouhid* Mushrika as an opponent. He plots to create a

rift between Mushrika and her husband and succeeds in isolating Mushrika in the new household. Her movement is restricted to one room and her infant son is taken away from her care on his orders. When this too fails to break Mushrika's belief in the unity of god, the *pir* instructs that she be sent back to her parents' house.

Mushrika spends the next ten years living with her mother, separated from her husband and son. During this period, the servants from her husband's house bring her food, suggesting that he was providing for at least her basic needs.

Rashid ul Khairi's decision to cut Mushrika off from access to money after she is married is particularly jarring given the time he spends in building her character as a fiscally responsible young woman in her parents' house. It is also in contradistinction to the essays he wrote for his women's magazine *Asmat* in which he argues that managing her husband's hard-earned income is the primary responsibility of a married woman. However, in *Toofan e Hayat* Mushrika is outnumbered by her husband's family and outmaneuvered by his *pir*. However, unlike his other works, Rashid ul Khairi does end *Toofan e Hayat* on a happy note. The *pir* overplays his hand when he tries to poison Mushrika's son and is shown the door. Her parents-in-law migrate to Medina. Mushrika is finally the queen of the household but her turnaround from a fierce, intelligent and independent girl, who gave an impromptu speech against customary practices at a *zenana* gathering, to a weeping wife waiting for her husband to experience a change of heart is dramatic and points to the limits of social reform as a tool for gender equality.

Reformist literature pushed the idea of economically stable households. However, women, despite being the financial managers of the domestic enterprise, were not entitled to personal financial independence. Non-fiction writing by Rashid ul Khairi is very clear about the fact that women are only safe-keepers of their husband's income. Under no circumstance are they entitled to spend the resources in their care without their husband's permission. In fact, Allama Khairi believes that the indigence faced by *Ashraf* families is the result of women's misguided belief that they can lay a claim on their husband's wealth. Maulana Thanawi concurred with Khairi, and also provided religious justification for refusing women access to their husbands' incomes. He reminds his readers and listeners that women who spend money that does not belong to them in this life would have to account for every penny in the Afterlife. He was particularly concerned about women getting emotionally carried away during *zenana* fund-raisers and donating gold jewellery for various social causes. While he blamed the speakers at these events for manipulating the kindness of women, he blamed the latter for often times giving away wealth that belonged to their husbands.²⁹⁹

A woman was free to donate the assets that belonged to her. This could include the possessions she brought with her at the time of her marriage, the cash or jewellery she received as dower (*mahr*) from her husband. It could also include money she

²⁹⁹ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Kasa un Nisa*, (Deoband: Idarat e Taleefat e Akabir, 1932).

received from her husband for her personal expenses³⁰⁰ or wealth she might have accumulated through an independent source of income. Though it is difficult to back the claim with precise data, it can be assumed that a substantial majority of women at this point did not have access to a steady source of independent income. Many, however, were looking for ways to supplement the household income, especially money for which they would not be accountable to their husbands. An example is a series of articles in *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, starting in the 1920s, about breeding leghorn chicken. The leghorn breed was introduced in Britain from Italy via the United States in 1870.³⁰¹ It was valued for its ability to lay up to two hundred and eighty eggs in a year, making its breeding a profitable enterprise. The *Tehzeeb e Niswan* articles discussed the risks and benefits associated with poultry farming, tips to succeed in the venture, and precautions that had to be taken to keep the birds away from illness. It would be another decade before the magazine openly debated women's financial independence,³⁰² but the articles on leghorn chicken in the 1920s already signaled to the reality that women, both Ashraf and non-Ashraf, were often

³⁰⁰ Cash allowance to given to the wife was also known as paandaan kharch or allowance to refill the betel leaves and areca nut container which symbolizes the zenana social gathering. The stipulation to receive a fixed amount as paandaan kharch was often included in the marriage contract.

³⁰¹ See the entry on leghorn chicken in Dohner's encyclopedia on livestock and poultry (Dohner, Janet Vorwald. *The encyclopedia of historic and endangered livestock and poultry breeds*. Yale University Press, 2001, 434-435.

³⁰² In March 1938, novelist and columnist Hijab Imtiaz Ali (d. 1999), the wife of Imtiaz Ali and daughter-in-law of Mumtaz Ali, debated with Bashir Ahmad Hashmi, a professor at Lahore's training college. The topic of the debate was whether women should have financial independence and the discussion was broadcast live on Lahore Radio Station. In its April 16, 1938 issue, *Tehzeeb e Niswan* published the transcript of the debate. Hijab Imtiaz Ali, popular among her readers as the author of romantic novels, argued in favour of financial independence for women. She pointed out that mankind was the only species in which half of the population was not responsible—and was not trained—to fend for itself.

looking for ways to secure independent sources of income, no matter how meager.³⁰³ Further, the advertisements pages also suggest that banks and business houses were aware of this trend and were selling the idea of financial independence to women. An advertisement in *The Comrade* that appeared in many consecutive issues in 1912 sought clients who were willing to perform light work from home that would augment their income by as much as rupees sixty per month. It emphasized that the work was easy—using Durbar Auto-knitter to make stockings and other pieces of clothing—and did not require training as long as the instructions were followed. Though the advertisement called for “Man, Woman, Boy or Girl,” the visuals of the commercial made it clear that the target audience was women.³⁰⁴ Regardless of the claims made in the advertisement, it was not easy, and often not even possible, for women to earn money from home. There was the problem of access to money-making ventures, the issue of respectability, and sometimes just the lack of skills and network. A *Tehzeeb e Niswan* reader faced each of these problems in 1923 and she wrote to her community of fellow subscribers for help. The woman, who identified herself simply as *Ek Musibat Zadah* (The Troubled One), asked the readers and the manager (Maulvi Mumtaz Ali) of the magazine to recommend investment options for her savings. She had saved rupees two thousand, which was the only asset she had. She wanted to invest the money in a venture that would give her a return of at least a couple of hundred rupees every

³⁰³ See the January 27, 1923 and February 23, 1923 issues of *Tehzeeb e Niswan* for discussions on breeding leghorn chicken.

³⁰⁴ See *The Comrade*, March 2, 1914, 201 (Jamia Archives).

month. By her own admission, she did have relatives living in the same city as hers but she did not trust them and had hidden the money from them. The rest of the article gives vent to the woman's frustration about being helpless despite having the physical strength to work and being in possession of money to launch a business. She speculated that women from lower castes would be able to earn a higher return on their investment because they had the knowledge and the skills.³⁰⁵ Her claim cannot be verified, but it is indeed true that women from the occupational castes—the vegetable sellers, the cooks, the oil pressers, etc—had greater mobility and were present in the public space. More importantly, they were active in the economic sphere, potentially giving them access to independent income.³⁰⁶ The picture that emerges from the newspaper archives from the early decades of the twentieth century is one in which *Ashraf* women were increasingly giving voice to their desire for financial autonomy, citing Queen Elizabeth, the European 'woman' in general, and women from early Islamic history as role models who could be emulated. However, in the imagination of male reformers, *Ashraf* women, even when they worked, did not receive (or desire) monetary compensations. Asghari in *Mirat ul Uroos* runs a flourishing *madrassa* for girls at home that keeps her busy through the

³⁰⁵ Tehzeeb e Niswan, Lahore April 14, 1923, Vol 26, No 15, p 237-238.

³⁰⁶ In the same period in which "The Troubled One" wrote her piece a spate of articles appeared in *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, complaining about the sudden disappearance of 'mama' or cooks. Apparently, there were no mama / cooks available for hire and the ones still in business were demanding an exorbitant salary. The general theory put forth in the articles was that a rising trend of shopping at home—a reference to the upper class practice of making arrangements for shopkeepers to send their wares to the *zenana* quarters of the family instead of the women visiting the shops—had opened up the market for hawkers. Many professional cooks had jumped at the opportunity and turned into small-time businesswoman, hawking their wares door to door.

day. However, she does not charge a fee because the *madrassa* is providing a service to the community.³⁰⁷ The same is true for the protagonist of Rashid ul Khairi's novel *Bint ul Waqt*, Farkhanda Begum. The text describes Farkhanda as a volunteer and friend of Christian missionaries, helping them in their outreach activities.³⁰⁸ Interestingly, for a roughly similar job profile—playing the interlocutor between the community and the government, the protagonist Ibn ul Waqt in Nazir Ahmad's novel by the same time is handsomely rewarded.³⁰⁹

As mentioned earlier, by the turn of the century women could find employment as teachers, headmistresses and matrons of girls' schools. The generation of women who were born after the reforms—women like Roshan Jahan and Hijab Imtiaz Ali—could also aspire to be doctors and writers. But the early emphasis by reformists of all streaks on women's education as a domestic good severed from its potential to train women in taking up paying jobs outside their homes had real, long-term implications. The biggest impact was on the textbooks and curricula designed for girls. Guided by the belief that women did not have to work to earn a living because they would always be provided for by the men responsible for them, reformists recommended curricula for girls that were strikingly different from those designed for boys. To begin with there was near consensus among activists, reformers and the government that girls had to receive practical education as opposed to literary,

³⁰⁷ Ahmad, Nazir Deputy. *Banat un Nash*. New Delhi: Kitabi Duniya, 2003.

³⁰⁸ Khairi, Allama Rashid. *Bint ul Waqt (The Daughter of the Moment)*. New Delhi: Asmat Book Agency, 1942 (18th edition).

³⁰⁹ Ahmad, Nazir Deputy. *Ibn ul Waqt (The Son of the Moment)*. Delhi: Kitabi Duniya, 2000.

legal or theological learning. Maulana Thanawi reiterated this view in sermon after sermon. He saw no point in educating girls in geography and history. To be sure, he believed that boys did not have to be taught those subjects either. Geography and History were topics of study best suited for emperors and conquerors. However, Maulana Thanawi realized that as future government employees, judges, and engineers, boys had to go through the modern education system.³¹⁰ In fact, many of his disciples, including the author of his biography, Khwaja Aziz ul Hasan, had worked for the government. Girls, on the other hand, had no such need. Everything they had to know about leading a successful life was enclosed in his *Beheshti Zewar*.

A slightly different approach to girls' education is reflected in the model syllabus recommended in the Urdu monthly, *Al Aziz*, in May 1910. The publication put forth two courses for Muslim girls: a basic six-year course that would include the "reading of the Koran and some other religious books, the first four Urdu readers, the first and second book of Persian, the *Gulistan* and the *Bostan*, the geography of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the history of India, and arithmetic up to fractions, as well as English up to sixth standard and some drawing". The second course, called the special course, would consist of technical and professional education specially suited for women.³¹¹

³¹⁰ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi. "Naveed Javed" in *Al Tabligh*, Vol 3, No 11. Thana Bhawan: Ashraf ul Matba'a, 1929.

³¹¹ UP State Archives, Lucknow, Vernacular newspapers, Volume 46, 543, 1910.

By the first quarter of the twentieth century, teaching and medical professions were seen as acceptable fields for women, and newspapers and magazines routinely carried job listings for women. The April 22, 1939 issue of *Tehzeeb e Niswan* ran an advertisement by one Haji Munshi Mal Khan from Katni Central Province. Khan was the president of the local Islamia School and was looking to appoint a headmistress for the institute's primary Urdu section.³¹² The February 25, 1939 issue of the magazine printed an urgent job listing for multiple positions to be filled at Sialkot's Muslim Girls' School. The listing asked "applicants belonging to new fashion" to not bother applying because the school was looking for pious and practicing Muslims.³¹³ Another advertisement in the May 19, 1923 issue of the magazine was looking for an *ustani* (a female teacher) who would be provided boarding, food and a monthly salary in lieu of teaching Urdu and the reading of the Quran to a five-year-old girl, probably the daughter of the man responsible for the advertisement, one Haji Yusuf Karim Seth from Bombay. The advertisement seeks response only from women who are over forty years old and single.³¹⁴ It is of some interest that none of the employers spell out the educational qualifications or professional experience they are looking for in their prospective employees, whereas an emphasis on their piety and Muslim-ness comes up more than once.

The May 1923 call for an *ustani* is peculiar in one more respect. It solicits response only from single women who are over forty years of age, which would mean that the

³¹² *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, April 22, 1939, Volume 42, No 16.

³¹³ *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, February 25, 1939, Volume 42, No 9.

³¹⁴ *Tehzeeb e Niswan*, May 19, 1923, Vol 26, No 20, 304.

applicants would either have to have never been married or would have to be widowed or divorced. In a more traditional set-up, such women would have found refuge in a large household of an affluent relative or a member of the community. They would be responsible for introducing the young children—both boys and girls—of the household and neighborhood to basic literacy. The setting up of *madrastas* and schools shifted the educational infrastructure outside the house. The same processes also created teaching opportunities for women outside the household. In the beginning such positions were filled by English and Hindu women. By the early decades of the twentieth century, however, a thin fraction of Muslim women were working as teachers and matrons in public and private institutions. Begum Abdullah, the wife of Shaikh Abdullah and the co-founder of Aligarh Girls' School, was the most prominent of such women. The scholar of Urdu literature, C.M. Naim has written about the life and career of Bibi Ashraf, who, as the name suggests, hailed from an *Ashraf* family. Her decision to educate herself and eventually support her children financially by working as a tutor was met with resistance from her family.

Upper class reformers and public figures saw *Ashraf* women as appropriate targets for education but few imagined them as financially independent professionals. This would explain the letters and proposals that appeared in the newspapers in the wake of the famines in United Provinces, urging the British government to provide financial relief in the form of a monthly stipend to poor but respectable women who

had no male guardians. Other suggestions included providing Ashraf women with spinning wheels and yarns at home so they could earn a livelihood without having to step out of the house.³¹⁵

The absolute impossibility of imagining women having regular, independent access to liquid money—as opposed to fixed assets in the form of ancestral home, land, or jewellery—is most starkly visible in the will that Maulana Thanawi drafted for posterity. In keeping with his firm belief in transparency and clarity of conduct, he left behind a detailed document that contained instructions on various topics for his students, friends and colleagues. The most interesting section of the will pertains to his wives. It begins with a *hadith* narrated by Prophet Muhammad’s youngest wife Aisha that states that a man who, during his lifetime, worries about his wife’s well-being after his eventual death is following one of Muhammad’s *sunnat*. Accordingly, Maulana Thanawi, in his will, pleads with twenty of his closest friends—the ones who would hold him in high regard even after his death—to contribute a rupee a month to support his first wife and another twenty rupees for his second wife to whom he got married in 1916. Alternatively, they could raise rupees thirty every month, allotting rupees fifteen each to the two widows.³¹⁶ It is impossible to ascertain from the will if the wives inherited any other source of monthly income from Maulana Thanawi, such as rent from commercial, agricultural or residential

³¹⁵ See US State Vernacular Newspaper Reports: *Kashi Vaibhava*, December 31, 1897), Vol 30, 13, Bharat Jiwan, January 4, 1898, Vol 30, 15, and Karnamah, September 10, 1898, Vol 30, 588,

³¹⁶ Majzoob Khwaja Aziz ul Hasan, *Ashrafus Sawaneh*, Vol 3, (Deoband: Maktaba Thanawai, 2009), 177.

property. The text does mention that to each wife he bequeathed a house to live in. A plea to his friends to step up as financial guardians of his spouses after his death is likely to have created permanent relationships of dependence between his wives and his disciples. This would be at variance with Maulana Thanawi's opinion that monetary autonomy was essential to moral probity, a point to which he returned to in many sermons.³¹⁷ This then weakens the argument that Maulana Thanawi, in particular, and the reform movements, in general, believed in moral and ethical equality between men and women even if they left the social and economic disparity between them intact.³¹⁸ A closer reading of Maulana Thanawi's works reveals that the moral scale he envisioned was far more hierarchical and differentiated. It was inflected by his views on class and gender. While he may have argued that all men and women have equal capacities to be pious, he clearly believed that the *ulema* had better faculties and facilities (economic freedom) to fulfill this capacity. In Maulana Thanawi's framework, the social and economic dependence of women on men (and the poor on the rich) translated into moral superiority of the latter. More importantly, this dependence is couched in the language of affect and fidelity, which has the effect of naturalizing the deep-seated structural disparities that mark the unequal access that men and women have to economic resources. For instance,

³¹⁷ During my fieldwork in Lucknow, Deoband and Delhi I met several *madrassa* students and *ulema* who narrated the anecdote about Maulana Thanawi never leaving home without at least hundred rupees in his pocket. In some versions the amount was as high as rupees five hundred, which seems unlikely given that the average monthly salary of a middle ranking government officer in the twentieth century was rupees hundred. The anecdote was often cited in the context of conversations about the relationship between poverty and piety. For Maulana Thanawi's views on this topic, read his sermon *Fawaid us Sohbat*.

³¹⁸ See the introduction of Barbara Metcalf's partial translation of Maulana Thanawi's *Beheshti Zewar*.

mahr or dower is an important component of the Islamic marriage contract. Often translated as bride price, it is the sum of money that is payable—in cash, jewellery or other forms of assets—to the bride by the groom³¹⁹. The amount is fixed at the time of contracting the marriage, but the actual transaction can take place later even though its immediate payment at the time of signing the marriage contract is one of Prophet Muhammad's *sunnat* and is, therefore, preferable. In South Asia in particular the payment of *mahr* is often delayed. It is usually paid at the time of divorce or close to the death of the husband. In an interesting comparison between Arab and South Asian (Hindustani) women, Maulana Thanawi speaks about a woman's demand for *mahr* in the following manner:

Arab women make sure that their husbands pay them the *mahr*. In India, on the other hand, a woman's demand for *mahr* is considered in poor taste. It is, therefore, not surprising that women in India do not even utter the word *mahr* and in most cases they exempt the husband from paying the sum on his death bed. Indian women are angels. I don't say this because they are beautiful but because of their dedication to their husbands.....³²⁰

The above excerpt is culled from a sermon in which Maulana Thanawi spoke about the need to educate women in religious obligations. He reminded his audience,

³¹⁹ The payment of *mahr* by the groom to the bride is a Quranic injunction (verses 4 and 24 of *surah* 4). There is near consensus among Hanafi jurists about the minimum *mahr* (10 silver dirhams, each silver dirham is approximately 3.06 grams of silver), but there is no maximum limit set in the legal texts. An amount too low or unreasonably high is generally frowned upon, though setting a very *mahr* as a way to prevent unilateral divorce is not unheard of. For the most part, however, *mahr* is seen as a way to compensate women for the laws of inheritance. A trend popularized by the reform movements in South Asia was the setting of *mahr Fatimi*, which is the amount stipulated as *mahr* for the marriage contract between Prophet's daughter Fatima and Ali. The amount is supposed to be 480 dirhams (1469 grams of silver).

³²⁰ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Kasa un Nisa*, (Deoband: Idarat e Taleefat e Akabir, 1932), 51.

many of whom were women, that the inhabitants of the *zenana* were devoted and kind-hearted, but generous to a fault. They were easily fooled and vulnerable to deception, especially when it came to parting with their husband's money. As discussed above, Maulana Thanawi saw this not just as an example of bad asset management but as a serious moral flaw because the women were giving away what did not rightfully belong to them. On the other hand, he admired them for not demanding what is rightfully theirs. He praised them for foregoing the *mahr* even though its payment is a religious obligation for men and is an important avenue for women to acquire assets in the new household. Further, Maulana Thanawi tacitly condones the stigma attached to a wife's demand for *mahr* in South Asia, which he compares to the situation in Arab where women demand *mahr* more openly.³²¹ This is yet another instance in which the scholar deviates from the reformist maxim that Islam existed, and continues to exist, in its pure form in Arabia. The accretions of customary practices to the religion in South Asia were the result of centuries of intermingling with the Hindus. The reformist propaganda against women's customary practices was a call to return to this purer form of faith. However, when it came to desirable qualities in women, the reformers rejected the Arab ideals. The Bedouin women were seen as free-spirited and proud. Stereotypes about Arab women divorcing their husbands at the slightest sparring abounded. Their presence

³²¹ In complete contrast to Thanawi's claim, many women were approaching the colonial courts to demand the payment of *mahr* following a divorce or death of her husband. Some of them were also dragging their husbands and parents-in-law to court for payment of *paandaan kharch* (see footnote 12) that had fallen into arrears. See Flavia Agnes' *Family Law, Vol I: Family Laws and Constitutional Claims*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011, pages 41 to 64.

in public spaces was seen as shameful and a sign of untamed independence. The Hindustani woman, in contrast, was shy, timid and completely devoted to her husband, even when she was financially secure, as was the case of Saeeda, the protagonist of the 1928 novel *Peekar e Wafa* (The Model of Fidelity).

Unlike its predecessors, *Peekar e Wafa* was not a reformist novel. Nor was it the result of the Progressive Writers' Movement. Lodged between these two major phases in Urdu literature, *Peekar e Wafa* carried the baggage of some of the values and anxieties of reformist fiction even as it foreshadowed the changes that would become more prominent in the 1930s following the success of the Progressive Writers' Movement. Its author, Khatun Akram, the daughter-in-law of Rashid ul Khairi, creates an early example of a working woman in *Peekar e Wafa*. Saeeda is the daughter of a rich merchant. She is intelligent, beautiful and has been trained well in matters of the household. The novel begins with Saeeda's marriage to Zafar, a promising young man. Soon after her marriage, Saeeda's father passes away. Meanwhile her husband is unable to pick an occupation that he would like to pursue. Saeeda recommends that he take over her father's textile business, but Zafar loathes the idea of becoming a merchant. Instead, he wants to study medicine. Falling short of funds, he asks Saeeda to help him out financially. When she refuses, Zafar steals her jewellery and sets off to London to study medicine. During his stay in London he writes to Saeeda twice, on each occasion he is looking for financial assistance, which Saeeda reluctantly provides. Zafar finally finishes his education

and returns to India with an Englishwoman. Saeeda hears of his arrival from the family servant and is crushed. However, Zafar soon finds himself in financial trouble because his income falls short of the expenses of his British wife. Soon his house is auction and the second wife abandons him. Once again, Saeeda comes to his financial rescue. She also nurses him back to health. Zafar finally sees the good in Saeeda and promises to make amends. The couple decides to move to another city to make a fresh start. We do not know what happens to Saeeda's business, which she takes over after her father's death and which makes her financially independent.

Peekar e Wafa stands apart from reformist fiction of the late nineteenth century in many respects. To begin with, it does not end with the death of the female protagonist. Also, Saeeda is not simply the repository of *Ashraf* virtue in the novel. She also holds the purse strings. She is aware that Zafar is abusing her goodwill and fleecing her of the money. She voices her resentment on more than one occasion, though she pulls him out of debt every time. Payment of *mahr* is not a part of the plot of the novel, but if one is to speculate based on Saeeda's choices it seems very likely that she would have let Zafar off the hook. Both Saeeda and Mushrika of *Toofan e Hayat* have difficult early years in their respective marriages. They receive little or no affection and respect from their husbands. They face periods of abandonment and infidelity. The women respond to the grave injustices with unwavering commitment to their husbands. If Saeeda and Mushrika were women of

flesh and blood, they would be Maulana Thanawi's ideal because they possessed the highly prized virtue of fidelity, as he explains in a 1918 sermon:

A wise old man (*buzurg*) was married to a wasteful woman, but he put up with her improvidence. He was lenient toward her and called her a "little fool". He would say "my little fool does this" and "my little fool does that". He was a man of great piety so he ignored her flaws and focused on the one virtue that compensated for all her defects, namely her complete devotion to him. By the grace of god that virtue is present in all our *sharif* women, and for that we should cherish them. A husband may walk out on his wife because he does not care for her, or has picked a fight with her, or he prefers the life of a mystic, or he has been arrested. He could have been missing for fifty years during which he does not provide for her nor does he stay in touch. However, when he returns home, if he returns home, he will find her sitting in the same corner where he had left her. He will see that the hapless woman he had left behind is dying, is rotting, is in a condition far worse than death, but she has not wavered in her commitment to him. She has not entertained even the thought of another man forget casting a glance in another direction.³²²

The disturbing valorization of the misfortunes of an abandoned woman aside, the passage glosses over the fact that according to *Hanafi* law a woman whose husband has gone missing cannot seek divorce immediately. The legal and social expectation from a woman in this situation was to wait. In the context of a large household, this could mean living as a dependent of her brothers or her missing husband's brothers. If she did not have an independent source of income, she, and her children, if she had any, would have a precarious existence. Maulana Thanawi's claim that an abandoned *sharif* woman stays chaste and committed to her missing husband does not take into the account the reality of sexual preying and the complicated relationships of dependency and reciprocity that take shape in situations like

³²² Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Kasa un Nisa* (Deoband: Idarat e Taleefat e Akabir, 1932).

these.³²³ Once again, fidelity for Maulana Thanawi is an individual quality, one that inheres in *sharif* women. It is not a dialectical attribute that takes shape in a relationship between two people. When writing in *Beheshti Zewar*, a didactic text that addresses its lay audience, once again women, mainly through instructions, Maulana Thanawi drops the discussion of female fidelity and adopts the language of duty and religious obligation. His brief discussion on the choices available to an abandoned woman is indexed under the section that instructs women in the correct performance of the *iddat*, the period of waiting that a woman has to observe following the death of her husband or a divorce. He informs the readers that the wife of a missing man has to wait for him to return. When she has waited for a period during which her husband, were he to be alive, would have turned ninety years of age, it will be assumed that he is dead. At this point if the woman is still young and wishes to remarry, she can do so after ensuring that her missing husband has been declared dead by a jurist well-versed in *shariat*.³²⁴ A slightly different interpretation orders the woman to wait till all the men and women in the community who were the same age as her missing husband had died before she could remarry.

The texts discussed so far—the novels, sermons, didactic literature, and biographies—belong to different genres and were written from diverse perspectives

³²³ Guha, Ranajit. "Chandra's Death." In *Subaltern Studies V*, edited by Ranajit Guha. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, 135-165.

³²⁴ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Beheshti Zewar* (Delhi: Farid Book Depot), 215.

but they are unified in their non-specialist focus. In fact, with the exception of the biographies, all the texts explicitly address Muslim women and assume that their female readers possess the very qualities that they seek to instill in them. The texts are pared down, simplified, decontextualized discourses composed in colloquial Urdu that wax eloquent about the merits of fidelity and chastity, patience and piety. They assume that women are simpleminded beings, incapable of understanding complicated and technical discourses. They are also supposed to be irresponsible with money. Accordingly, the texts position them as perpetual intellectual and financial dependents of the male guardians around them, who are nonetheless redeemed by their intense loyalty towards their husbands. Women, in particular *Ashraf* women, are also to be cherished for their forbearance in the face of tragedies that test the limits of human endurance. The combined virtues of loyalty and forbearance came in handy if a woman was trapped in a bad marriage.

The reformist idealization of female fidelity did not square with the reality on the ground in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Women then, just as they do now, were keen to escape unhappy marriages by seeking divorce. Islamic law considers marriage a social and legal contract and, accordingly, prescribes detailed rules to dissolve the contract either due to the death of a spouse or through divorce (*talaq*, from the Arabic root “to release”). While both the husband and wife have the right to dissolve the marriage, it is easier for men to pronounce divorce without judicial

intervention.³²⁵ A man may initiate divorce by pronouncing “I divorce you” or a similar phrasing in the presence of his wife. The initiation is followed by two more pronouncements. The wait time between each utterance is one menstrual cycle and sexual relations between the couple are prohibited during this period. Family and community members typically try to effect reconciliation between the couple during the waiting period. However, after the third pronouncement the divorce becomes final and the man and wife become non-*mahram* for each other. Upon divorce, the payment of *mahr*, if still pending, becomes obligatory on the man.

In certain instances a woman can also initiate the process of divorce through *khula* (to let go), though she risks losing the *mahr* and the custody of her children. If the husband refuses to grant divorce to the woman under *khula*, she can approach the court for a judicial divorce or *fashk*. Hanafi fiqh considers impotence a ground for women to pursue divorce.³²⁶ The man, in contrast, can divorce his wife on any or no grounds at all. Also, in comparison to other legal schools, Hanafi fiqh requires that both *khula* and *fashk* be overseen by a Muslim jurist trained in matters of *shariat*.

³²⁵ Most Muslim nation-states are signatories to the United Nations’ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Pushed by local mobilization by feminist groups, the national governments have instituted safeguards to protect women’s rights in marriage and divorce. Some measures include passing laws that include stipulations and mandatory clauses in marriage contracts that give women the right to divorce without judicial intervention, restrain men from pronouncing unilateral divorce and outlawing polygamy. For an overview of the history of personal law across the Muslim world, see Abdullahi A. An-Na’im’s *Islamic Family Law in a Changing World*. (1992). New York: Zed Books, 2002.

³²⁶ In comparison, the Maliki school provides a much wider room for women to seek divorce. Madness and cruelty are considered legitimate grounds for women to initiate divorce proceedings. The wife of an absent husband can seek divorce, even if his whereabouts are known, if he has refused to shoulder his financial responsibility towards her and the children because failure to provide for family is valid ground for divorce under Maliki law.

The last stipulation made the process of getting a divorce—already cumbersome for women—a near impossibility in colonial India due to the gradual dismantling of Mughal-era Islamic legal infrastructure in the eighteenth century. In the absence of Islamic courts and *qazis*, the only avenue available to observant women looking to escape unhappy marriages was apostasy. According to Hanafi fiqh, apostasy, or the act of declaring oneself *murtadda* (one who has turned back), by either one of the partners annuls the marriage contract with immediate effect without requiring judicial intervention. Apostasy by men is punishable by death penalty. A woman who has apostatized is forced to convert back to Islam and remarry her husband. The colonial courts upheld the first part of the law and upheld the annulment of the marriage contract, but they did not have the infrastructure or the political will to push for reconversion of apostatizing women or impose a death penalty on men who had rejected Islam.³²⁷

There is no data available for the number of Muslim women who used apostasy as a loophole to end failing marriages but the issue caused enough concern for poet Muhammad Iqbal to address it in a public speech in 1924.³²⁸ About a decade later, in

³²⁷ For a discussion on Christian missionary activities and conversion in colonial north India, see Masud, Muhammad Khalid. "Apostasy and judicial separation in British India." *Islamic legal interpretation: muftis and their fatwás* (1996): 193-203.

³²⁸ In his lecture "The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam," Iqbal argues that the rule relating to apostasy in *Hedaya*, the authoritative twelfth-century Hanafi fiqh text by Burhan al-Din al-Marghinani (d. 1197) used by jurists in South Asia, are outdated and cannot be expected to meet the legal needs of modern society. He saw the rise in cases of apostasy among Muslim women in Punjab as a call for "fresh interpretation of foundational principles" because the Quran, teaches that "life is a process of progressive creation" and thereby "necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problems". Scathing as Iqbal's criticism of medieval *fiqh* texts and processes might be, he, and other modernists

1931, Maulana Thanawi spearheaded a legal campaign to reform Muslim Personal Law in order to make divorce more accessible to women who were trapped in abusive or unworkable marriages. The result of the campaign was a comprehensive collection of *fatawa* titled *al Hilat an Najiza lil Halilat al Azjiza (The Successful Legal Stratagem for Helpless Wives)*. The text is remarkable in many respects. In its scope and depth it is akin to a treatise on divorce laws. It is a result of years of work, which involved conversations with *ulema* from important theological centres across British India.³²⁹ He was also in correspondence with jurists in Hejaz about the possibilities of borrowing concessionary clauses in the domain of personal law from the Maliki school of law because the stringent requirements of Hanafi fiqh were difficult to meet in British India.³³⁰

The title and preface of *al Hilat* suggest that in putting the text together the *ulema* were moved by the plight of those women, who, in the absence of legal remedy, were struggling to escape unhappy marriages. The explicit concern of the text, however, is to recommend strategies and innovations to Hanafi fiqh in order to

like Syed Ahmad Khan, failed to imagine and conceptualize an alternate sustainable legal structure of *ijtihad* that could replace the old institutions. The lecture under consideration is one of Iqbal's more comprehensive writings on the topic of *ijtihad*. He delivered it in Lahore in December 1924 and it forms the sixth chapter of *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, a collection of Iqbal's speeches from the 1920s. See Iqbal, Mohammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Stanford University Press, 2013, 71.

³²⁹ Apart from Maulana Thanawi's disciples in Thana Bhawan who assisted him in the compilation of *al Hilat*, eleven *ulema* from Dar ul Uloom, Deoband, and four from Saharanpur's Madrasa Mazahir ul Uloom reviewed and revised the manuscript before it went to press. These include highly respected scholars and community leaders such as Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, Maulana Zakariya Khandewi, Mufti Mohammad Shafi, and Maulana Mohammad Tayyib.

³³⁰ Maulana Thanawi's interlocutor in these correspondences was Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, who, having lived and worked in Medina for several years, was better connected with the *ulema* in Hejaz. For Madani's struggle to find work and acceptance in Medina, see his biography *Naqsh e Hayat*.

arrest the trend of apostasy among such women. In other words, as much as the *ulema* might have wanted to help the women, they also wanted to ensure that any legal loophole available to them to get rid of abusive or uncaring men was closed. An example of this is a fatwa by Mufti Mohammad Shafi (d. 1976) included in *al Hilat*, in which he recommends that a non-dominant Hanafi interpretation of apostasy laws be applied in South Asia. The Hanafi law interprets the marital status of a woman, who has apostatized in one of the following ways:

1. The marriage is immediately annulled. Further, the apostatizing woman has to be converted back to Islam and made to remarry her former husband again.
2. The act of apostasy does not change the marital status of the woman.
3. The act of apostasy turns the woman into a sex slave of the now former husband.

While Mufti Shafi admitted that the first interpretation was the dominant Hanafi position in the Islamic world, he pushed for the second interpretation as a way to discourage the use of apostasy as a substitute for divorce by women in South Asia. In this, *Al Hilat* contradicts Maulana Thanawi's *fatwa* from 1913 in which he had ruled that an apostatizing woman's marriage would be annulled automatically with immediate effect. The text of the *fatwa* suggests that at this point Maulana Thanawi did not see apostasy as a social problem of a scale that would require legal intervention and reform of divorce laws. In fact, the *fatwa* solely expounds on the

theological implications of renouncing Islam. The issue of marriage and divorce is addressed in a single line at the end of the text.³³¹ Khalid Masud, who has compared the 1913 fatwa with *al Hilat*, argues that the change in Maulana Thanawi's position was triggered by the apostasy panic and the increase in missionary activities in Punjab.³³² It is true that about two decades later in 1932, the connection between the impossibility of implementing Hanafi divorce laws in South Asia and apostasy was much clearer.

Al Hilat closed the door of apostasy for women who wanted to end their marriage but it did attempt to institutionalize certain practices that could potentially rescue them from unhappy unions. It borrowed heavily from Maliki law in order to provide strategies that women did not have under the Hanafi school of law. One such strategy was the transfer of the right of divorce (*tafweez e talaq*) to the wife, giving the woman the conditional right to unilateral divorce. The transfer would have to be legalized by including a divorce clause in the marriage contract (*nikah nama* or *kabin nama*) that would give the wife the right to divorce if the husband failed to provide for her, abused her, took another wife, or breached any other condition that she may have stipulated in the contract. The divorce clause could be appended to the marriage contract before, during or after the *nikah*, though Maulana Thanawi recommended that every detail about the clause be drafted and endorsed by the

³³¹ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi. *Imdad ul Fatawa*, Vol 2, (Karachi: Maktaba Dar ul Uloom), 2011.

³³² Masud, Muhammad Khalid. "Apostasy and judicial separation in British India." *Islamic legal interpretation: muftis and their fatwás* (1996): 193-203.

spouses before or at the time of the signing of the marriage contract. Once the marriage is contracted the inclusion of the divorce clause would depend entirely on the goodwill of the husband and no longer remain a right of the wife.³³³

It would seem that Maulana Thanawi's *tafweez e talaq*, to some extent, opened the doors that Mufti Shafi's *fatwa* had shut. However, he promptly undercuts the "dangerous freedom" that a woman might enjoy once she is awarded the right to divorce and ends the chapter on *tafweez e talaq* with a string of warnings. Under the section titled "The Need to be Careful About Giving Woman the Right to Divorce," Maulana Thanawi writes that women are *naqis ul aql*, or lacking in intellect, which makes them prone to rage and poor decision-making. An absolute, unchecked right to pronounce divorce was likely to be misused by women, he argued. His solution was the formation of a committee of male guardians (up to ten men), who would be selected at the time of the *nikah*. If at a later date the husband breached the conditions stipulated in the *nikah nama*, the wife would have to approach two of the ten men listed in the contract. They would check if her grievance were real and grave enough for her to move for divorce. If they agreed with her, the woman would use the right of divorce transferred to her and end her marriage.³³⁴ The divorce in this case would be irrevocable. Maulana Thanawi follows this up with advice to women to not rush into divorce. A more mature and Islamic way of handling marital

³³³ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Al Hilat an Najiza lil Halilat al Azjiza* (The Successful Legal Stratagem for Helpless Wives), (Deoband: Maktaba Razi, 2005), 42-43.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, 45-46.

dispute, he writes, would be to spend at least a week thinking about the decision, discuss it with well-wishers, and ask Allah for guidance.

Maulana Thanawi makes unilateral divorce for women even more difficult when he recommends that men can counter *tafweez e talaq* by inserting a clause that would exempt them from paying the *mahr* if the divorce is initiated by the wife.³³⁵ It can be recalled that Islamic law already has the provision of *khula*, a form of divorce that can be initiated by the wife though she risks forfeiting the *mahr*. A wife's plea for *khula* can be rejected by an unwilling husband, thereby tying her down in an undesirable marriage against her wishes. To that extent, *tafweez e talaq* is an improvement on *khula* because once the right to divorce is transferred to the wife by the husband it cannot be taken back. However, the possibility that the man could withhold the payment of *mahr* in return puts the woman in a position of financial disadvantage and, once again, undermines the importance of *mahr* as a financial right of the wife.

It can be argued that *al Hilat* is primarily concerned with reinstating an Islamic juridical infrastructure that would be equipped to handle women's claims for divorce (*faskh* or judicial divorce). The right to unilateral divorce on par with men would be adequate as a legal remedy for women in distress. However, it is clear that both Maulana Thanawi and Mufit Shafi are not comfortable with that idea. Instead, *al Hilat* draws on Maliki law in varying degrees to create alternate structures of

³³⁵ Ibid, 49, see footnote 1.

male authority to replace the Islamic courts. The text suggests that in the absence of institutions manned by *qazis*, women could approach a *shariat* council of at least three community members for arbitration and judicial divorce. Ideally, all the members of the committee had to be trained in Islamic law, but as long as there was one *alim* on the committee who oversaw the proceedings, its decision would be considered reliable. Only observant and just Muslim men with good standing in the community could be elected to such panels.³³⁶ In cases where an *alim* was not available to serve on the committee, it became incumbent upon the people involved to procure a *fatwa* from a knowledgeable *mufti* by presenting all the aspects of the case to him.³³⁷ A unanimous decision by the *shariat* committee would have the same legal status as the verdict of a *qazi* court and would be binding on the parties involved. However, if the council was struck by discord and could only muster a minority verdict, its decision would not be considered legally binding.

Maulana Thanawi considers several scenarios under which a woman could rightfully approach the *shariat* committee for divorce. These include (1) the case of an impotent husband, (2) the case of the missing husband, (3) the case of the husband afflicted with madness, (4) the case of the financially irresponsible husband, and (5) the case of the missing husband. Each section gives details about

³³⁶ An observant Muslim is one who is not evil (*fasik*) and has not indulged in any *gunah kabira* or the major sins such as fornication, charging interest on loans, accepting bribes, giving false testimony, associating other gods to Allah, etc. He should also refrain from the smaller sins. A man who has shaved his beard or skipped the ritual prayers could not serve on the committee. *Al Hilat*, 73-74.

³³⁷ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Al Hilat an Najiza lil Halilat al Azjiza* (The Successful Legal Stratagem for Helpless Wives), (Deoband: Maktaba Razi, 2005).

the conditions under which a woman can approach the *shariat* committee, the scope and duties of the committee, the nature of evidence required in each instance, the rights of the husband and wife, the procedures to be followed to make the divorce final, and issues of maintenance, child care and custody, etc.

The Hanafi school recognizes only one of the five conditions listed above, the first one—namely, the husband’s impotence—as grounds for a woman to seek divorce.³³⁸ *Al Hilat* expanded the scope substantially to add cruelty, abuse, financial negligence and abandonment as valid grounds for divorce. The Dissolution of the Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 drew heavily on *al Hilat*. As a consequence, Muslim women in South Asia, despite the region’s affiliation to Hanafi fiqh, have been able to file for divorce in civil courts based on a far wider range of grievances.

Another significant Maliki-inspired recommendation made by Maulana Thanawi in *al Hilat* reduces the waiting time of the wife of a missing man to four years following which she can approach the *shariat* committee to dissolve her marriage. Maulana Thanawi opens the chapter “Issues Regarding Judicial Divorce for the Wife of a Missing Man” with the comment that for matters related to inheritance and division of property a missing man cannot be pronounced dead under Hanafi, Shafi and the Maliki schools until every man and woman in his neighbourhood who was the same age as him is dead. The Hanafi and Shafi schools have extended this requirement to

³³⁸ The only other circumstance in which a woman can seek divorce under Hanafi laws is if she was contracted in marriage as a minor by her male legal guardian. On attaining puberty, the woman, if she so desires, could repudiate the marriage and ask for a divorce.

the case of the wife who might want to divorce her missing husband, expecting her to wait for years before she could remarry. The exceptions to this rule are the cases in which the possibility of the missing man's death is statistically high—such as if he was travelling by sea, was ill at the time of his departure, or if he had gone missing on the battlefield. In such cases, Hanafi jurists have allowed the wife to remarry without waiting for the deaths of her husband's contemporaries. The Maliki school, on the other hand, allows women to circumvent the long waiting period regardless of the likelihood of the missing husband's death. According to Maliki fiqh, the wife of a missing man should report to the local *qazi*, where she will have to prove that she was married to the man in question and that he has been missing. The *qazi's* office will then launch a search for the woman's husband. If the search ends in failure, the woman will be asked to begin a waiting period of four years at the end of which her missing husband will be considered dead, allowing her to remarry. Maulana Thanawi points out that historically Hanafi and Shafi jurists have borrowed this Maliki provision in order to provide legal relief to abandoned women. He recommends that women in colonial South Asia be provided access to this strategy as well, particularly in cases where the woman is struggling to meet her financial needs or is in fear of sexual impropriety.³³⁹ In fact, the Maliki *ulema* in Medina who were collaborating with Maulana Thanawi, argued that in times of distress a woman could remarry even a year after the verdict of the *shariat* court. The underpinning

³³⁹ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Al Hilat an Najiza lil Halilat al Azjiza* (The Successful Legal Stratagem for Helpless Wives), (Deoband: Maktaba Razi, 2005), 106-109.

logic was that in cases where economic or sexual needs were likely to push her towards a life of sin, it was unwise to expect a woman to wait for four years before remarrying. A shorter waiting period would provide her financial and sexual comfort and protect her faith. However, Maulana Thanawi's peers in Saharanpur and Deoband, who contributed to *al Hilat* in various capacities, feared that women would exploit the Maliki legal remedies. As a result, Maulana Thanawi recommended the waiting period of four years instead of one. He also warned women against misusing a provision that was essentially a final resort. In the absence of a financial or sexual emergency, waiting for the missing husband to turn ninety years of age, as stipulated by the Hanafi school, was the more appropriate course of action, he insisted. He did nonetheless admit, in disagreement with his peers, that if rigid laws were forcing people to sin, it was better to ease the laws.

Conclusion

Maulana Thanawi firmly believed that the task of interpreting laws and scriptures should be the purview of formally-trained *ulema*. His writings and sermons are replete with warnings about the naivety of the contemporary claim that any man who could purchase and read the Quran in Urdu could deduce laws in accordance with the scriptures without assistance from a legal scholar.³⁴⁰ It can be argued that

³⁴⁰ Warning a lay believer against interpreting legal texts, or engaging in an act of *ijtihad*, without assistance from a trained scholar is a theme Maulana Thanawi returns to repeatedly. Scholars have rightly seen this as a strategy to reinforce and maintain the hegemonic status of the *ulema* in the

his *Beheshti Zewar* was an attempt to create a compendium of easy-to-understand laws about everyday rituals and practices that sought to counter the perpetuation of multiplicity of legal interpretations. While *Beheshti Zewar* is positioned as a resource for women and lay men, *al Hilat* circulated in the discourse networks spun by legal specialists. In tenor, tone and form, Maulana Thanawi's legal writings stand apart from his sermons and *Beheshti Zewar*. Unlike the latter set of texts, *al Hilat* and *Imdad ul Fatawa* are addressed to men. In particular, men trained in Islamic law and theology. Right at the outset of *al Hilat*, he warns the readers about the scholarly and dense nature of the text, which makes it unsuitable for lay Muslims. For the benefit of the readers who are not trained in Islamic fiqh, he provides a summary of the arguments in simple language at the end of *al Hilat* and urges the non-specialist

community. However, beyond the claims of hegemony, there is another aspect of reformist movements that becomes apparent in Maulana Thanawi's anxiety. It has been assumed that reformist movements, both Hindu and Islamic, were attempts by an emerging class to build a more direct and personal relationship with scriptures by empowering every believer with the tools of interpretation. The translation of the Quran into Urdu by Shah Abdul Aziz (d. 1824) and easy availability of printed *hadith* texts is seen as reformism's biggest threat to the position of the clergy as arbiters of legal and theological matters. However, reform came in all hues and Syed Ahmad Khan's modern rationalism and Ahl e Hadith's dismissal of *taqlid* were just some of the positions on the spectrum. In comparison, Maulana Thanawi's position was rather orthodox. Through texts like *Beheshti Zewar* and *al Hilat*, he sought to create a religiously-aware laity, but he did not see the average man as capable of the same level of religious commitment as the *ulema*. He strongly believed that the lay person should not contemplate complicated religious, legal or cosmological questions, and asked his peers to refrain from answering every inquiry that the public posed to them. He complained that a culture of ignorance had encouraged men to believe that they could participate in scholarly discourses with the *ulema*. The result was questions from the public about topics such as the Prophet's parents, the relation between Ali and Muwaiyah ibn Abu Sufyan; topics that had no bearing on their Afterlife. Maulana Thanawi wanted the laity to focus solely on correcting their ritual obligations and leave the finer debates of religion to the scholars. This approach has been taken to its logical conclusion in the doctrine of Tablighi Jamaat, whose members are urged to focus on the *faza'il* (meritorious acts) and stay away from discussions about law and theology (*masa'il*). For Maulana Thanawi's long exposition on this topic, see his sermon from May 1923 that he delivered in Patiala. See his lecture series Al Tabligh, Vol 9, lecture 5 (*Shart ul Tazakkur*), page 18, printed by Maktaba Thana Bhawan.

readers to only read the summary.³⁴¹ In fact, as a further measure of precaution, he asks the reader to not rely on his own intellect and approach a reliable *alim* for assistance in understanding the summary. He further instructs the *alim* to read the summary as well as the complete text to make sure he has the perfect grasp of the nuances of the many terms and conditions specific to each case of marriage and divorce. He follows these instructions with another paragraph of warnings in which he, once again, asks the reader to seek the assistance of a *mufti* when reading *al Hilat*.

Maulana Thanawi is, of course, correct in assuming that an untrained reader would find it difficult to understand *al Hilat*. It is a specialists' handbook full of technical citations, long passages in Arabic, and complicated cross referencing. Also, as a text whose primary purpose is to explain the various conditions under which a woman can seek divorce and the legal recourse she has in each of those instances, *al Hilat* represents the marital relationship in its many dimensions and complications. It talks about the abandoned wife, but also about the wife who falsely accuses her husband of impotence or madness, as well as the woman who does not inform her second husband that her first husband has gone missing. The skipping of this tiny detail makes the marriage contract between them precarious, ready to unravel the minute the first husband shows up. It also reveals a social world in which women routinely drag their husbands and their families to colonial courts for defaulting on

³⁴¹ He also promised to publish the summary as a stand-alone text under the title *Al Marqumat Li'l Mazlummat* (Shariat Solutions to the Problems of Helpless Women). I did not come across this text in the archives.

the payment of *mahr*.³⁴² Most importantly, and to the horror of religious reformers like Maulana Thanawi, it was a world in which women, when pushed to the margins by the legal system, were open to publicly renouncing Islam in an attempt to walk out of failed marriages. The public act of apostasy rarely had any connection to the apostatizing woman's faith, as it evident from the frequently cited case of the woman who was asked to eat pork in the courtroom to demonstrate for the judge that she had indeed renounced Islam. The woman, according to court records, refused to eat the forbidden meat and was, consequently, pronounced a Muslim. She lost the case and had to file for a re-appeal.³⁴³

Furthermore, the apostates had the support of the family as is evidenced from the case for which Maulana Thanawi issued his 1913 *fatwa*. According to *Imdad ul Fatawa*, the woman in question returned to her parents' house a few months after her marriage. When she was asked by her husband to come back to him she declined and asked for a *khula*. The husband refused to grant her *khula* and instead approached the court for restitution of his conjugal rights. In response, the wife announced in court that she had apostatized. The court annulled the marriage with immediate effect and asked the husband to procure a *fatwa* stating the contrary (namely, that the act of apostasy by his wife did not dissolve their marriage) if he wanted to make a claim for restitution of marital rights. The notable aspect of the

³⁴² Agnes, Flavia. *Law, Justice, and Gender: Family Law and Constitutional Provisions in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.

³⁴³ Masud, Muhammad Khalid. "Apostasy and judicial separation in British India." *Islamic legal interpretation: muftis and their fatwás* (1996): 193-203.

case is the support received by the woman from her family. She is supposed to have been taught the words of unbelief by her family. In contrast, the beleaguered women in Maulana Thanawi's sermons appear abandoned not just by their husbands but also by their biological families. The imagery of their loneliness created by the scholar—frail, impoverished women confined to a corner of the house—is striking. However, what is even more perplexing is the emotional isolation that Maulana Thanawi unwittingly assigns even to women who are not abandoned. In this, his work is in sync with women's didactic literature. Both fetishize female fidelity, but do not reward it with happiness or companionship. A woman's unflinching loyalty toward her husband is supposed to redeem her. They are foolish, jealous, gossip-mongers, loose-tongued, short-tempered, lacking in intellect and disinterested in religion, according to Maulana Thanawi. However, their absolute devotion to their husbands makes them worthy partners despite their many flaws. A man should appreciate his wife's fidelity by disregarding her shortcomings. An even better response would be to become her teacher and encourage her to take her religious duties seriously. He suggested that the husband was the best *pir* (Sufi master) for an amenable wife. The teacher of a truant wife, on the other hand, was the cane.³⁴⁴ Maulana Thanawi puts the husband in a clear position of authority over his wife. In this, he is backed by the Quran as well as the Islamic legal tradition.³⁴⁵ The Quran

³⁴⁴ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Kasa un Nisa* (Deoband: Idarat e Taleefat e Akabir, 1932).

³⁴⁵ Muslim feminists have deployed radical hermeneutical strategies to challenge the misogynistic interpretations and commentaries of the Quran. However, the biggest interpretive obstacle they face is verse 34 from chapter 4 (Surah Nisa) of the Quran, which appoints men as guardians of women and also opens the possibility of mild violence against as a way of disciplining women. The latter part

sanctions male polygamy and Islamic law makes divorce easier for men in comparison with women, as the discussion above indicates.

Islamic feminists and human right activists have often argued that Prophet Muhammad could have either built the roof or the floor. He chose to build the floor. The floor-and-roof analogy is a way of stating that despite his best intentions Muhammad could only formulate laws that would be accepted by the pre-Islamic Arab community. He did not establish gender equality or abolish slavery because his people were not ready for such radical changes. The laws that he put in place—laws that were improvements upon the pre-Islamic customs of Arabia—are the floor, or the foundation, of a just and fair society. He expected later Muslims to build on his work and create laws that truly reflect the egalitarian spirit of Islam.³⁴⁶ Given that Muhammad did not give a direct or indirect mandate to his followers to revise the laws after him, the floor-and-roof model has not been embraced by the traditional jurists and *ulema*. In fact, it can be argued that over the centuries the legal system has lost the suppleness of the early Islamic era that allowed imaginative and

of the verse—Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand—that asks men to strike disobedient women (the Arabic verb in the text is *dh-ra-ba*)—has been creatively analyzed by feminist scholars to suggest that the text, at best (or worst), allows a husband to reprimand his wife gently with a spade of grass. The asymmetry of power in the verse, however, is impossible to eliminate through progressive hermeneutics. For details, see Amina Wadud's *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 and Asma Barlas' *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.

³⁴⁶ I would like to thank Professor Valerie Hoffman from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for the floor-roof analogy.

sympathetic courts to rule in favour of women even if the legal odds were stacked against her.³⁴⁷ It would appear that Maulana Thanawi's *al Hilat* was an exercise in the same tradition. He sought to make legal remedies accessible to Muslim women in the peculiar context of colonial South Asia, but he never ever challenged the androcentric framework of the Islamic legal system. In fact, it can be argued that Maulana Thanawi bolstered the patriarchal underpinning of the legal system. This becomes clear once we piece together the financial portrait of the ideal Hindustani woman from his prescriptive writings, especially in comparison to women from Hejaz.

The cornerstone of Maulana Thanawi's reformist philosophy was the concept of *safai e muamalat* or transparency and clarity in one's transaction with others. A good Muslim does not just fulfill her religious obligations, which fell under the category of *huqooq ul Allah* or duties toward Allah. An equally important aspect of a Muslim's faith is her obligations to other creatures of Allah (*huqooq ul Ibad*). Maulana Thanawi's concept of *safai e muamalat* was based on strict accounting of the material and spiritual transactions between people. It is a philosophy that asks for relentless scrutiny of every penny borrowed, loaned out, spent, donated or accepted in charity. In the same vein, it also counts the spiritual merit accrued through good deeds as exchangeable credit that could be traded in on the Day of Judgement for offsetting unpaid material and spiritual debts one might owe

³⁴⁷ Judith Tucker's work about the flexibility of Islamic law, as practiced in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ottoman courts, is a case in point. See Tucker, Judith. *In the House of Law: Gender and Islamic Law in Ottoman Syria and Palestine*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

to God and His creatures. He goes to great lengths in his biography to explain that in his will he had assigned every single piece of worldly possession among his wives, disciples and friend. He gives the same advice to readers. In fact, he suggests that people carve their names on silverware and cooking pots so they can always be traced to their rightful owner. Contrast this with the actions of the women who get swayed at political fund raising events. Their admirable intentions notwithstanding, the women who donate jewellery belonging to their husbands fail to maintain clean transactions. It would be difficult to argue against Maulana Thanawi's simple logic that one cannot give away what rightfully belongs to another person. However, there still remains the question of how does one define ownership and rights to material goods and wealth that are generated, consumed, invested or saved in a household if the labour of men and women—emotional, physical and spiritual—is valued differently. If inheritance laws are skewed such that a married woman finds it difficult to claim a fair share in her biological family's property, especially immovable assets such as agricultural land and ancestral homes? Similarly, if widowed women lose the right to their husband's property upon remarriage?³⁴⁸

Maulana Thanawi and other reformist writers spent considerable time and print talking about the ideal respectable woman. Depending upon the reformist agenda of each writer, she could be a combination of a number of traits. She could be an

³⁴⁸ The works of scholars like Radha Kumar (Zubaan, 1993), Indrani Chatterjee (Oxford University Press, 2002), Mytheli Sreenivas (Indian University Press, 2008), and Janaki Nair (South Asia Books, 2000) show that the changing conception of family, motherhood and conjugality, aided by the colonial legal system at the turn of the century, made it difficult for women across the social and economic spectrum to remain financially independent.

educated, self-confident workhorse with a talent for housekeeping. She could be a deeply pious woman concerned about the spiritual health of the entire family. She had to be a sound fiscal manager, always saving, never splurging. However, the one thing she could not be was a financially-independent member of the household. This flies in the face of the concerns raised by the women readers of *Tehzeeb e Niswan*. It is also out of touch with the career choices that women who had the opportunities were making. Not to mention that a narrow concern with the respectable section of the society alone allowed the men to completely ignore the economic activities of women belonging to the lower class and castes. The presence of women from the occupational castes in the formal and informal labour force has a long history in South Asia. In fact, the respectable *Ashraf* households were serviced by women from the occupational castes. The *zenana*, as the space where the cook, the masseuse, the vegetable-vendor, the seamstress, the milk vendor, and the midwife, to name a few, convened regularly for business transactions was hardly a space outside the economic network. The reformers were aware of this, as is evident from their constant refrain to the *Ashraf* women to maintain fiscal austerity. One way to achieve that, they suggested, was to get rid of the numerous household helps. This would save precious resources that *Ashraf* women would have squandered away as salaries and tips. Also, a check on the comings and goings of women from lowly castes into the women's quarters would protect the privacy of the *zenana*. The work that was done by hired help could easily be performed by the *Ashraf* women, who could use this opportunity to develop robust health by engaging in physically

demanding routines.³⁴⁹ A couple of aspects of the seemingly harmless solution stand out immediately: first, is the vilification of women from the occupational castes, the most prominent example of which is Nazir Ahmad's *Mirat ul Uroos*, whose protagonist Asghari's biggest victory is her sacking of the dishonest family cook as a first step toward taking control of the family's finances.³⁵⁰ The second point is the attempt by reformers to replace the paid labour associated with the running and upkeep of the house with the free labour of the model wife. When contextualized against the rising cult of domesticity in colonial India, it becomes apparent that the reformist agenda of social mobility was predicated on the woman's role as the primary contributor of labour in the domestic domain. However, her labour was naturalized and rendered extra-economic through the discourse of affect. Kumkum Sangari has suggested that class mobilizations in the late nineteenth century created "patriarchal consensualities" across religious denominations even as it challenged the vertical consolidation of religious boundaries across class lines.³⁵¹ The newly emerging middle-class household was thus purified through a purging of its affiliation with the occupational castes. At the centre of this sanctified domestic space stood the wife—the respectable queen of the household, more isolated than

³⁴⁹ Douglas Haynes new work on the advertisement of health and hygiene products in newspapers in western India. Advertisements for laundry soaps in newspapers taught respectable women how to wash clothes at home. The laundry detergent promised to deliver the housewife from the vagaries of the *dhobi* (the washerman), though it was bound to increase her workload.

³⁵⁰ Sangari, Kumkum. *Politics of the Possible: Essays on Gender, History, Narratives and Colonial English*. London: Anthem Press, 2002.

³⁵¹ Sangari, Kumkum. *Politics of the Possible: Essays on Gender, History, Narratives and Colonial English*. London: Anthem Press, 2002, 186.

ever and more beholden to her husband than the generations before her. A telling example of this is Maulana Thanawi's reasoning behind his advice that women should dress down in plain clothes when they attend a social gathering. He was of the view that women wore fine silks and gold jewellery in order to grab the attention of other women, flaunt their wealth and make them jealous. However, a more superior and religiously-prescribed practice was to dress up in fineries only in the presence of one's husband. The Prophet had encouraged women to engage in acts of beautification for the pleasure of their husbands, but in a perversion of his advice, women presented themselves in dirty, tattered clothes in the company of their husbands but dressed up to the nines to compete with other women.

Let us once again imagine and contextualize the perfect *Ashraf* woman as she emerged in reformist writings: she was an excellent housekeeper. She was a responsible manager of her husband's income. She stayed away from social events that would bring her in contact with other women. She reigned over a *zenana* that was less and less accessible to other women. She maintained minimum relations with her parents and siblings, and that too if she had been granted permission from her husband. She walked around the house covered in silk and jewellery, but was always mindful of the fact that some of that gold might belong to her husband. She was merely a user, who was driven by the desire to please the man who owned the jewellery. She did not seek physical comfort, neither did desire financial independence. She was content to receive a monthly amount from the husband for

her personal expense. Now, let us imagine what would happen to such women if the husband died, disappeared or remarried without making provisions for her. Or, if he unilaterally decided that he was under no obligation to give her a monthly stipend. In the absence of access to material or emotional resources, she was likely to continue being dependent on the very structures of patriarchy that had created the reliance on her husband and cloaked it under the cover of female fidelity. She could also approach the colonial court or a *qazi* for a divorce. And, if her divorce plea failed she could make a public display of apostasy and walk out of a failed marriage. Maulana Thanawi's *al Hilat* tried to intervene before the matter reached the point of public renouncing of Islam. However, on account of being entrenched in the class structures that had emerged to shore up middle-class patriarchy, his text fell sorely short of suggesting remedies that could truly rescue women from unhappy or abusive marriages.

In closing, I would like to contemplate the life of Maulana Thanawi's first wife, fondly known as *Badi Pirani* (a senior female sheikh) by his disciples. Maulana Thanawi's biography suggests that she ran a tight ship at home, but she was an excellent host. She was a committed reformer, spreading her husband's message of austerity inside the *zenana* quarters of her neighbours' houses. She was not pleased with her husband's decision to remarry a young woman but is said to have relented. His biographer states that *Badi Pirani* was eventually content with her husband's second marriage because she did not have to keep his house anymore. She even

gave up her marital claims on Maulana Thanawi in favour of the second wife. She, however, stayed in his care and after his death she was looked after by his disciples in accordance with their teacher's will. She moved to Pakistan with the family of Mohammad Shafi, one of Maulana Thanawi's oldest students, displaying the kind of fidelity that reformers would approve.

CONCLUSION

The history of reformist piety can be retold as the history of the household in north India. Any analysis of reformist piety must take into account the transformations in the affective and economic structures of the household at the turn of the twentieth century. With this caveat in mind, this dissertation set out to investigate the emergence of personal piety in the time period between 1850s and 1920s. With an emphasis on individual responsibility and an intense focus on the self, personal piety is supposed to mark the privatization of religion. The public sphere, disenchanted following the retreat of religion, becomes the site of politics, economy, rational deliberation, and technological innovation. The household, on the other hand, emerges as the new refuge of religiosity and morality, and the family displaces the local community as the locus of religion. As queens of the household, women become the embodiments of this modern morality. It, therefore, became important to educate them in the right values and correct ritual practice. As keepers of their husband's income, they are to be taught fiscal caution and frugality. And as managers of the household, they need to learn the virtue of hard work and approach domestic chores with a passion and devotion reserved for religious rituals, because when performed with the right intention, domestic chores could bring spiritual rewards.

The colonial state's disinterest in continuing the patronage of religious elite, either through tax-free land grants or through stipends, forced the *ulema* to turn to the community for sustenance. The Deoband *madrasa*, established in 1866 and run entirely on donations from the community, is an example of this partnership between lay Muslims and the religious specialist. The status of *ulema* as the leaders of the community was further entrenched when, in the subsequent century, they entered the arena of popular politics.

First in imagining a Muslim community (*qaum*) that included lay men and women and then in tying the prospects of this community to the moral health of the household, the colonial-era reformers moved away from the tradition of religious revivalism in the previous centuries that had wanted to catch the attention of emperors and court nobles. Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and Shah Waliullah were invested in enlightening the ruling elite in order to create a just Islamic polity, but later-day reformer such as Maulana Thanawi, Nazir Ahmad and Rashid ul Khairi addressed women because they were designated as the moral core of the home and the community. The reformed household, as imagined by these men, was a hermetically-sealed domestic space in which the chaste, pious, industrious and self-sufficient but secluded Muslim woman fulfilled the emotional, economic and sexual obligations towards her husband, all the while maintaining a pleasing disposition.

It is easy to read the growing call for complete seclusion of women in reformist literature as a sign of increased *pardah* restrictions for Muslim women. The dangers

of reading prescriptive and aspirational manuals as descriptive text cannot be overestimated, especially when the former are more easily accessible in the archives. However, the few sources of women's writings from this period, mainly in the form of anonymous contributions to women's magazines, novels and memoirs, belie the thesis of segregated spheres. Instead, they signal to a significant shift in the understanding of *pardah*, especially its coupling with piety such that *pardah* turned into a practice that could be used to measure, manage, and display piety. The nineteenth and twentieth century saw a proliferation of formal and informal spaces that presented new ways to be in public. It introduced people to unprecedented and powerful tools of influence even as it exposed them to rigorous surveillance. An article in a magazine or a casual conversation with a fellow passenger had the potential to travel much farther and faster than had been possible in the previous centuries. The coupling of piety and *pardah* became the distinguishing feature of this surveillance. In the case of the families of elite *ulema*, the discourse of piety intersected with the valorization of extreme *pardah* routines of the family's women in order to create a narrative of endogamy and purity of lineage at a time of immense social flux.

The cultivation of middle class religiosity was an extremely public act that unfolded in the myriad spaces that opened up in the late nineteenth century. The middle class household, with the conjugal couple at its centre, was inextricably linked to these spaces, whether it was the university campus, a newspaper office, a political rally, a

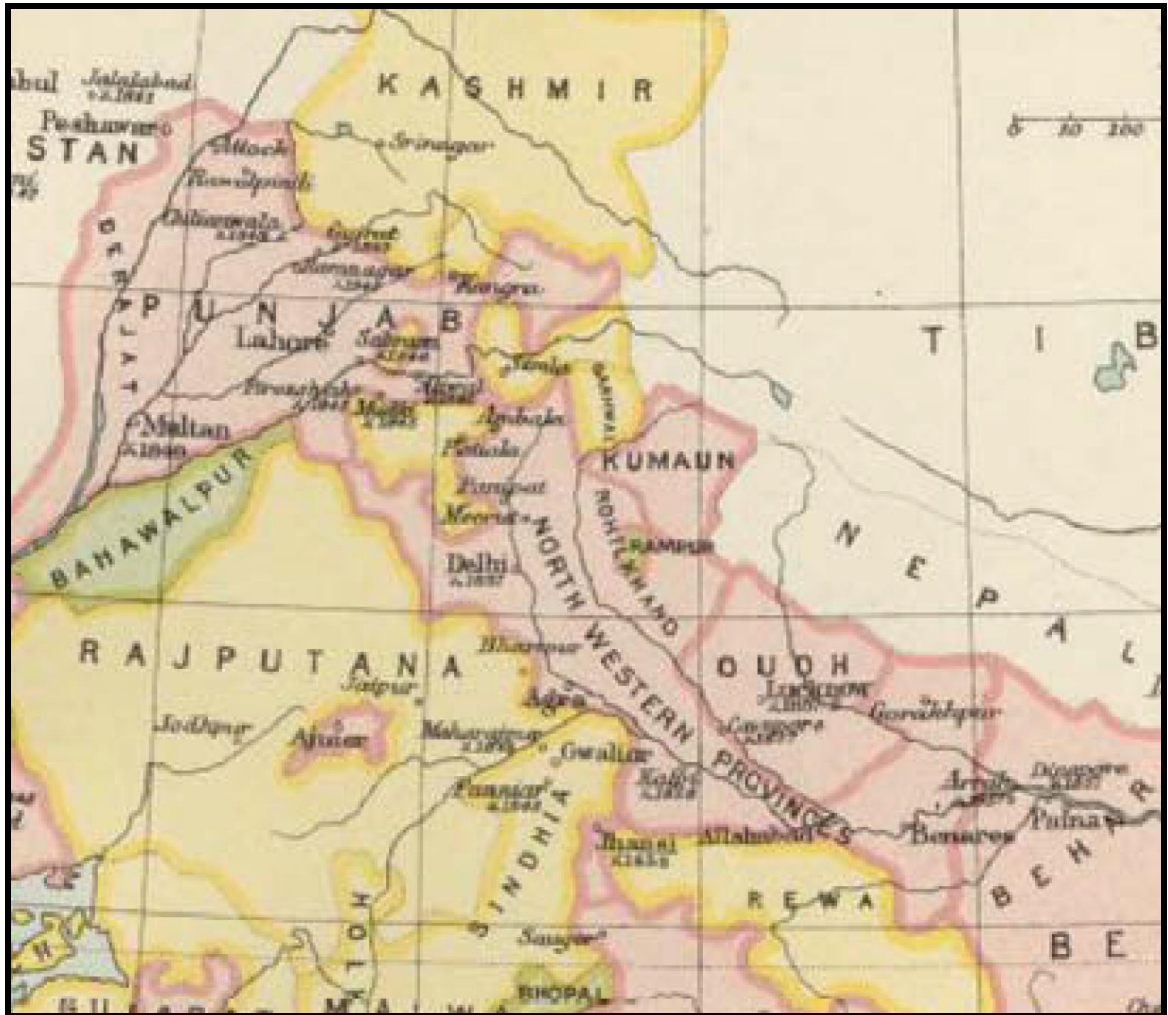
fundraiser, or an arboretum in a hill station. The reformist piety which became the hallmark of this class was fashioned under the watchful eyes of peers, superiors, and spouses. It was appraised, acknowledged, emulated and perfected through networks that did not respect the public-private divide. This dissertation has focused on the institution of the household as one such site in the network to suggest that the radical reordering of the household in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries enabled the emergence of personal piety. Furthermore, this piety was best expressed in and through the conjugal relationship between the man and woman. This articulation of piety served well the needs of the itinerant middle class couple that had moved out of the familial and familiar networks of spiritual and economic support. A framework of religiosity that replaced the company of a Sufi master with that of a pious wife brought great comfort to the bureaucrats and young professionals who had accepted employment away from home.

The re-imagination of the woman as a chaste and loyal spouse was fundamental to her elevation as an independent spiritual actor of the household. The spiritual independence of the wife, however, was predicated on her social, economic, and legal subordination to the husband that was blatantly built into the narrative of reform.

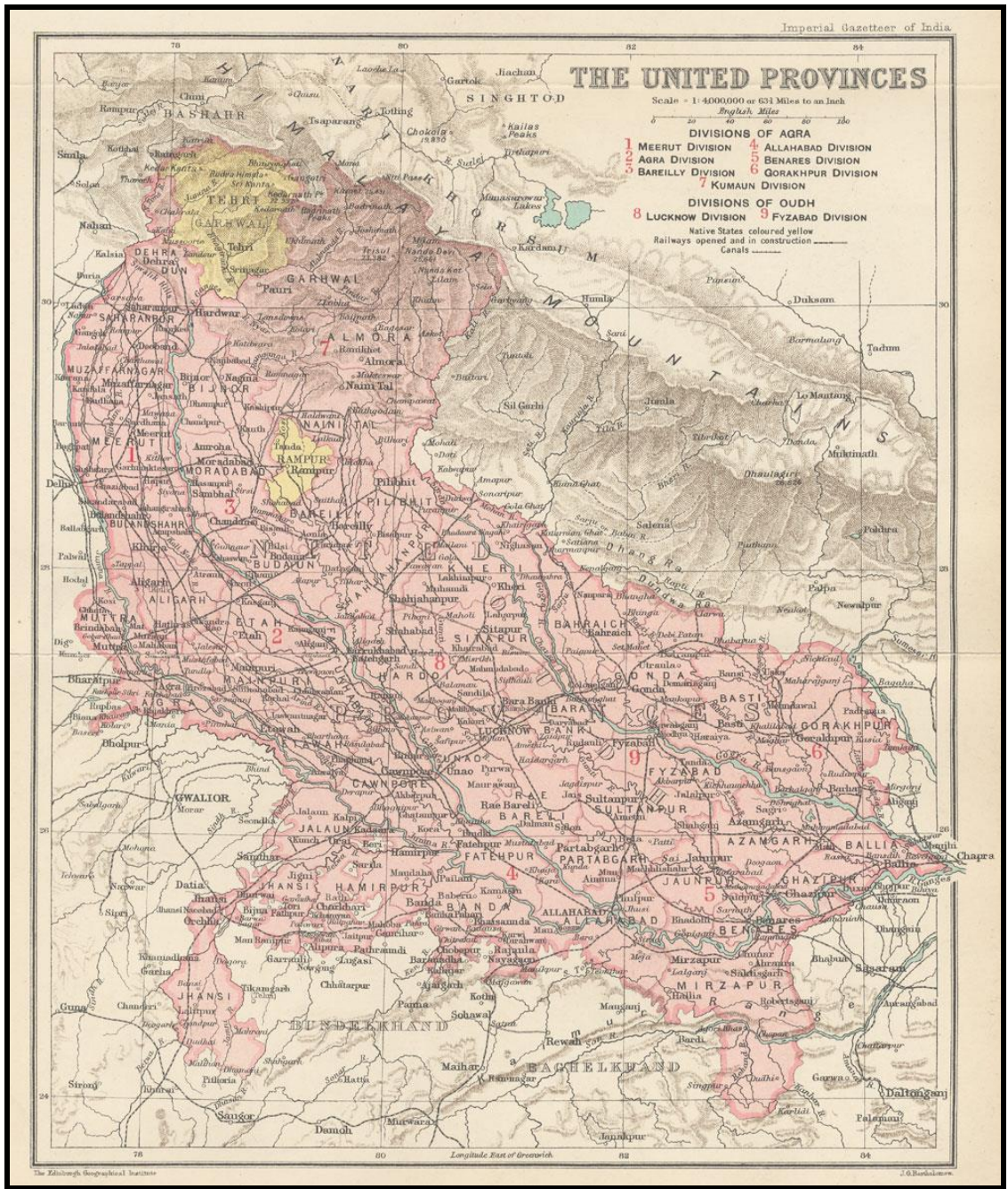
APPENDIX I



Map 1: Historical map of India, 1857 (from the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, v. 26, Atlas 1909 edition, Historical Map (1837) and Historical Map (1857), p. 28, courtesy of the Digital South Asia Library, last accessed on 12/1/2016)



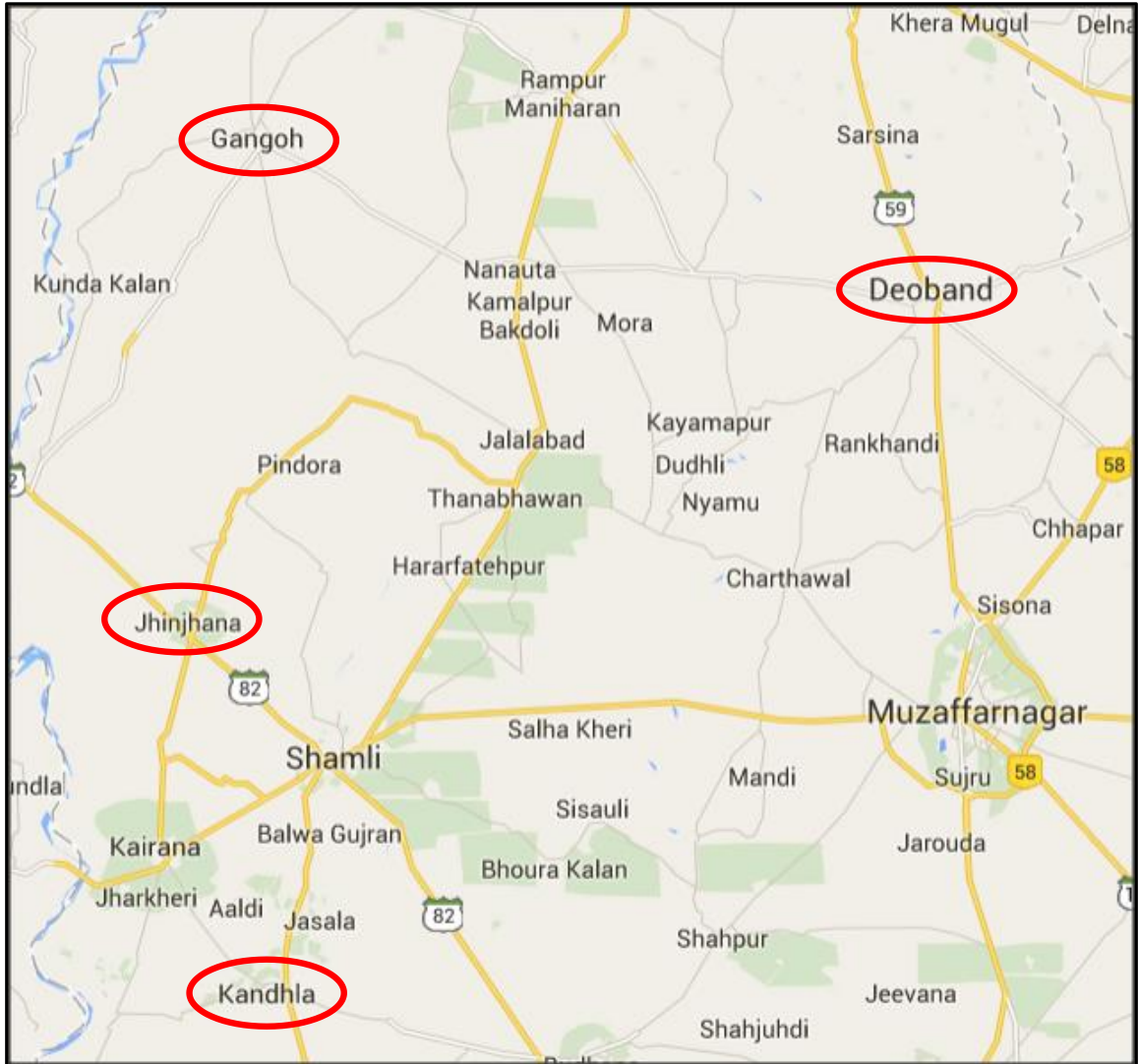
Map 2: Detail of historical map of India, 1857, for Oudh and North Western Provinces (from the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, v. 26, Atlas 1909 edition, Historical Map (1837) and Historical Map (1857), p. 28, courtesy of the Digital South Asia Library, last accessed on 12/1/2016)



Map 3: Historical map of the United Provinces, 1907-1909 (from the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, New edition, published under the authority of His Majesty's Secretary of State for India in Council. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907-1909, Volume 24, opposite page 250, courtesy of the Digital South Asia Library, last accessed on 12/1/2016)



Map 4: Map of modern Uttar Pradesh, part of the United Provinces in colonial India



Map 5: The Kandhlewis found spiritual and material success in the towns of Jhinjhana and Kandhla in western Uttar Pradesh (Marked in Map 4)

APPENDIX II

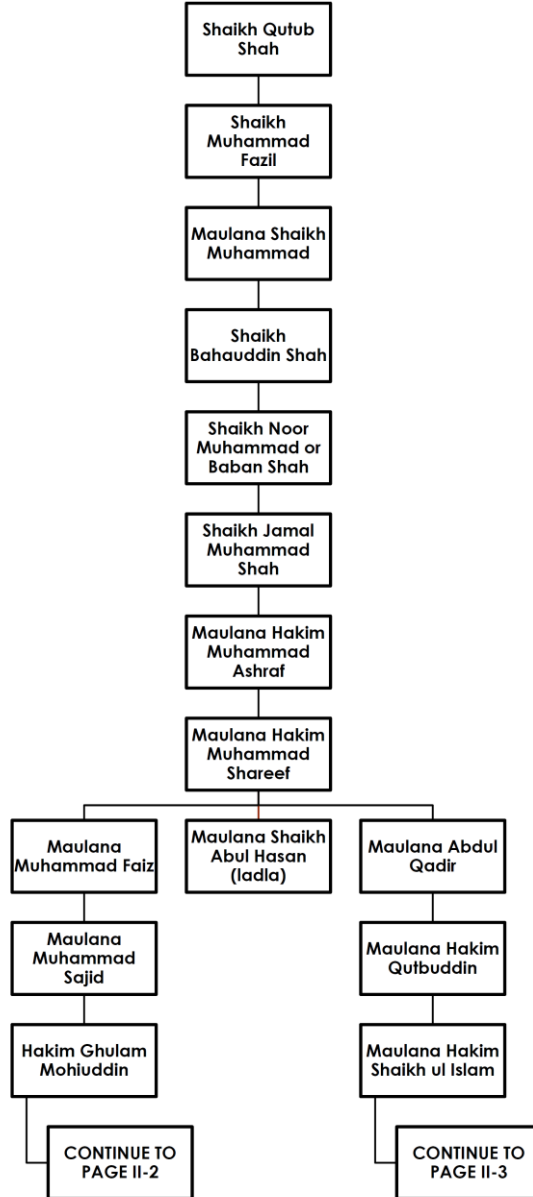


Diagram 1: Family tree of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewi, section I

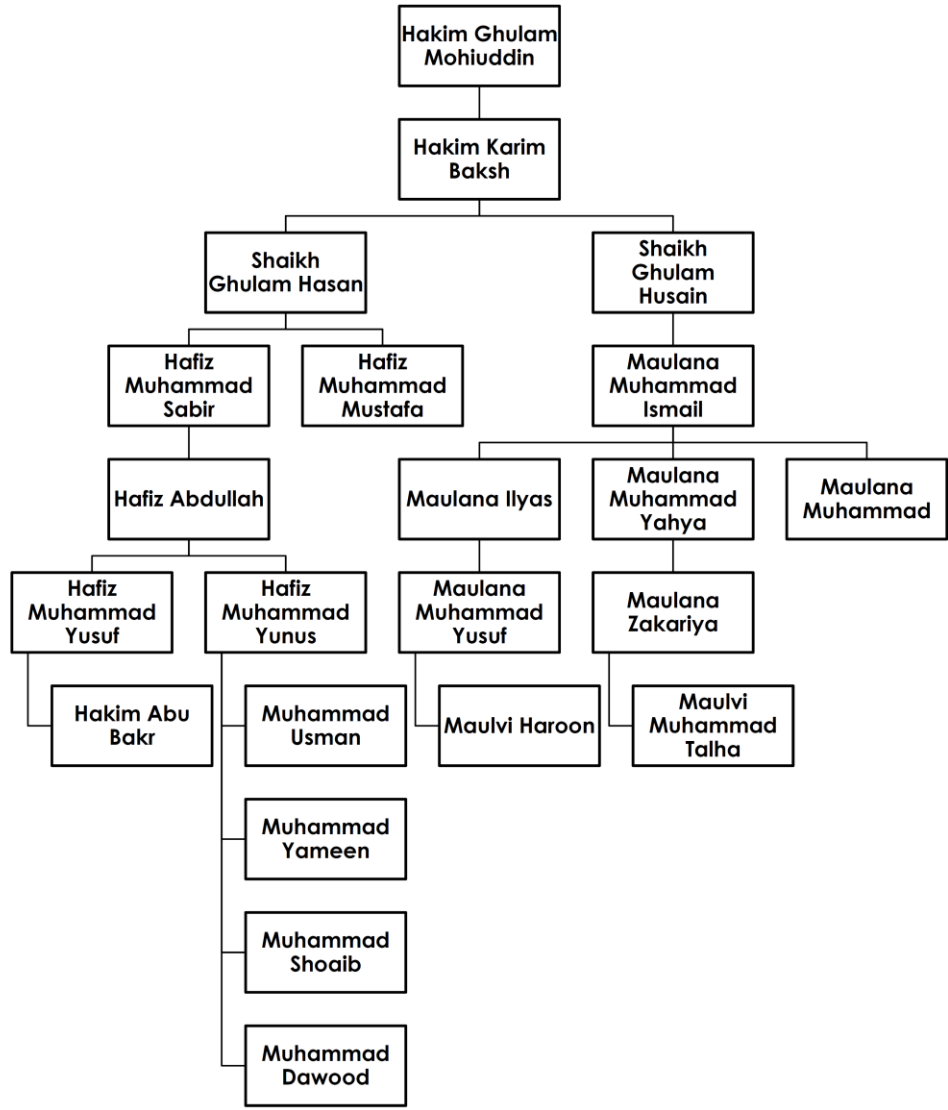


Diagram 2: Family tree of Maulana Ilyas Kandhewi, section II

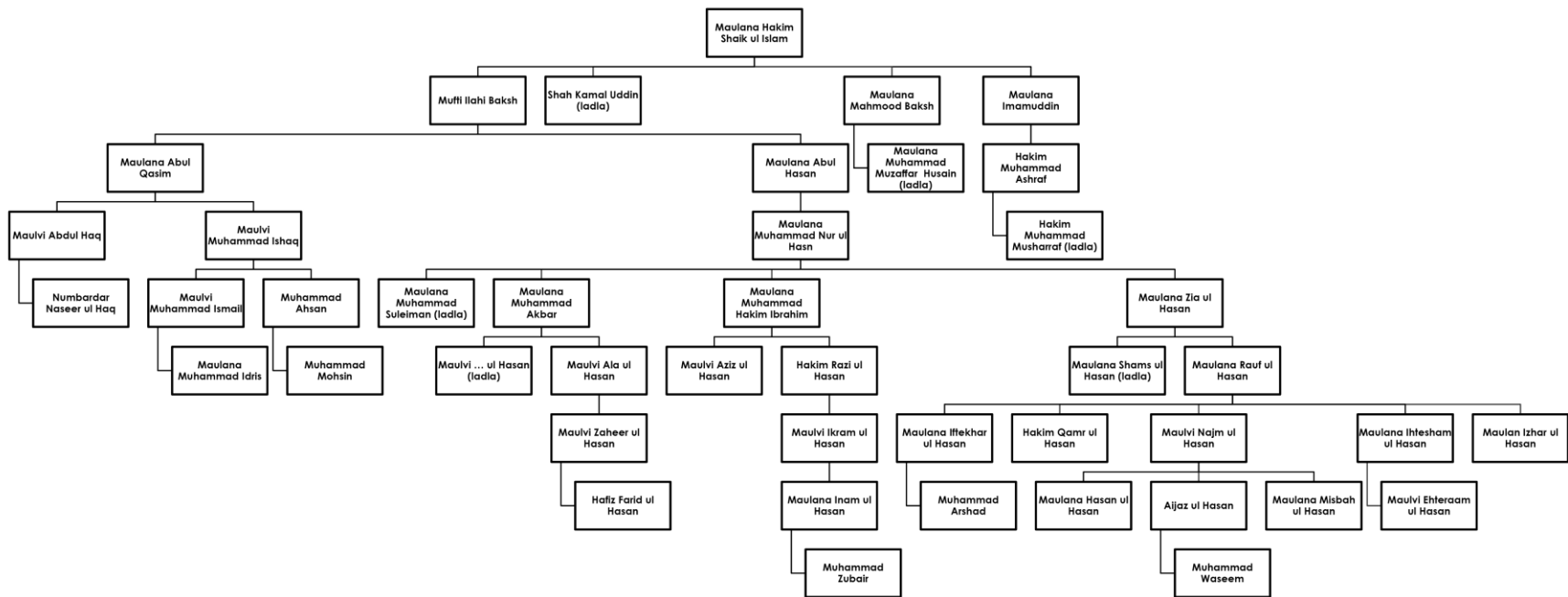


Diagram 3: Family tree of Maulana Ilyas Kandhlewī, section III

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