Docile Agents in *Mirāt ul-'arūs* : Rethinking the Position of *Sharīf* Women in Nineteenth Century Urdu Literature

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Deputy Naẓīr Aḥmad (1830-1912) published the book *Mirāt ul-ʿArūs* - translated in English as *The Bride's Mirror* - in 1869. The book addressed, broadly, the lack of education among young Muslim women and sought to expand the reformist tones of the Aligarh Movement's educational aims to include the education of women. The story conveyed its aims through a fictitious narration of two sisters, one of whom has benefited from education in her home and the other who eschewed such an education. That same year, John Stuart Mills published *The Subjection of Women*, neither France nor Britain, nor any French or British colony afforded women the right to vote. Similar to the reaction to Mills' treatise on the equality of sexes, *Mirāt ul-ʿArūs*, was not warmly welcomed by even Aḥmad's closest political allies. As a member of the Aligarh movement, Aḥmad was an influential force in the organization's push for education reform, a political endeavour that he believed should extend such a right to Muslim women in colonial India. The leader of this movement, Sir Syed Aḥmad Khan, did not agree with Naẓīr Aḥmad on this issue, and thus in 1875, 6 years after the publication of *Mirāt ul-'arūs* the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental School - which would later become Aligarh Muslim University - opened as a male-only institution of higher education. Though, strikingly, the first chancellor of the university was Sultān Shāh Jahān Begum, an influential female ruler of the princely state of Bhopal in what is today central India, it did not add a women's college until 1906.

The Indian revolt of 1857, which had spread across much of the Indian subcontinent, led to the dissolution of the East India Company and, once suppressed, facilitated the takeover of Indian affairs by the British government and the expulsion of the last Mughal emperor. Of course it is important to note that the role of the emperor had been significantly curtailed since the death of the Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707.[1] It also led to the intensification of efforts of "Anglicists" in their promotion of scientific knowledge (*'ilm*) and English as the means of organizing educational affairs as opposed to the "Orientalist" camp which had favoured preserving Arabic and Persian as the primary languages of conducting state affairs.

This shift in the wake of the rebellion drastically changed the landscape of the governmental and bureaucratic apparatus, resulting in significant ramifications for the educational system and shifts in the manner of preparing students for work in this new era. Deputy Naẓīr Aḥmad was one such young man whose biographical details reflect this moment well. First trained "Islamically," meaning he attended more traditional schools under the *maulavīs* and *muftīs*, among them his father, of his native Bijnor, he later traveled to Delhi to study at the Delhi college. Here too he focussed his studies primarily on Arabic language and literature as well as Islamic sciences - calculus, trigonometry, natural philosophy. He avoided English at Delhi College, at the behest of his father and it was not until many years later when working for the Department of Public Instruction that he acquired a knowledge of English.[2] it was his command of the English language and his translation work of British legal

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[1]   For a discussion of the state of authority of the sovereign in the Indian subcontinent between 1707 and 1857 see Muzzafar Alam's account of the early decades of this shifting political landscape in *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India*, (1986) and for an account of the years up until the revolt, Chapters 1-4 in Barbara Metcalf and Thomas Metcalf's *A Concise History of Modern India*, (2006) and Percival Spear's *Twilight of the Mughals*, (1951)

[2]   These biographical details are drawn from C.M. Naim's *Prize Winning Adab* in Barbara Metcalf's *Moral Conduct*

codes into Urdu that eventually gained him a high position with the Revenue Service in the early 1860s. In this regard, Deputy Naẓīr Aḥmad represents in many ways, the epitome of this paradigmatic shift that was undertaken in his generation.

The book, *Mirāt ul 'arūs* was written, according to the author, in response to a prize being offered by the Lieutenant-governor of the Northwestern provinces Sir William Muir, who offered monetary prizes for the "production of useful works in the vernacular, of approved design and style, in any branch of science or literature."[3] *Mirāt ul-ʿArūs* was one of the first books awarded the prize from the North Western Frontier lieutenant-governor. As part of the prize offered to Naẓīr Aḥmad, the government purchased 2,000 copies of the book and included it in its official recommendations for school syllabi. An estimated 100,000 copies were purchased in the initial few years of publication and to this day the book remains part of the Urdu literature curriculum in the Indian subcontinent. In Naẓīr Aḥmad's sequel to the book, *Banāt un-Naʿsh*, he described how "*Mirāt* was intended to teach ethics (*akhlāq*) and good housekeeping (*khānadārī*)," topics that might not immediately seem ripe for republishing. From the author's own summation of the work, it would seem that the message of the story

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and Authority.

[3]   There is debate over wether Aḥmad penned the text for his daughters as he suggests in the text itself or whether the preface of the book resembles a classical manner of introducing the authors motive in writing. He writes, "having satisfied myself that the book was really very useful for women, and that they took great interest in reading it or hearing it read, I then submitted it." p. 2

See Pritchett p. 206 in *Mirāt ul-'arūs* who refers to Siddīqī p. 47 quoted in Russell's *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature* p. 115

was a combination of the mundane and the morally guiding, yet the impact of the story on its readers was profound and remains so nearly a century and a half later.

There has been much debate over whether *Mirāt ul-ʿArūs* is in fact a novel, and, if so, whether or not it ought to be considered the first Urdu novel. The debate and conclusions are germane. That Naẓīr Aḥmad was one of the forerunners of what was deemed a new "genre" in the Indian subcontinent, speaks to the historical moment of the book's publication, on the frontier of two eras in the literary history of the region. Several points are worth noting — the title, "a mirror for brides," speaks to an earlier form of literature, the *dāstān*, a genre of epic prose narratives common in both Persian and Urdu dating back to the 13th century. The motif of the mirror is present in a much wider spectrum of didactic genres as well. In the 18th century North India, a Persian phrasebook was published with the title *Mirāt al-Istilāh* or the "mirror of terms".[4] Many of such *dāstān* and other genres that referenced this motif, were written for young princes at the behest of their fathers who wished to convey worldly advice for their young sons on the need for virtuous and moral rule. This *mirāt*, or mirror, was offered by Naẓīr Aḥmad instead for his daughters.

It is important to consider the impact of this education reformist's decision to write such a book for his daughters. Writing in response to a British ruler's call for vernacular tales, he addresses the virtues of education for women, while harkening back to an Islamicate genre centered on the education of young sons. This thesis does not take a psychoanalytic stance on the impact of Naẓīr Aḥmad's work, but surely for women at this time, who remained largely

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4   This reference is included at the suggestion of Dr. Keshavmurthy who, in reviewing this work, brought to light how this motif of the mirror was used across many genres and not just in the the *dāstān*.

under-educated and behind purdah, the emergence of a female protagonist and female voices amidst the hegemony of male voices in literature signaled some rupture within that hegemony. [5] Moreover, at the time with an emerging movement for education behind purdah this symbolic empowerment was buttressed by concrete action in the political sphere. *Mirāt ul-'Arūs* was one attempt at broadening the practice and drawing to it wide acceptance by making it part of a wider education reform movement.

The debate on the genre of *Mirāt ul-'arūs* ranges from touting Naẕīr Aḥmad as Urdu's first and finest novelist, to attributing certain flaws in his work to the adherence to a strict didacticism. Some critics reject him as wholly a novelist, instead calling him "founder of the modern Urdu novel," given his contributions to establishing new paradigms of acceptable prose writings in lieu of Persianate genres.[6] Given, however, the flexibility of the genre, what can definitely be said is that he left his mark on forging a new tradition that incorporated this genre into the literary milieu of the time. The details of this debate and a new interpretation of the text, that very much understands it to be a novel, will be discussed in Chapter One.

The story itself, which will be discussed below in detail, revolves around the married lives of two sisters, Akbarī and Asgharī. Both are only recently married and we quickly learn that while Asgharī, the younger, is well-equipped to help run her new household, Akbarī is, conversely, incredibly unprepared for her new life. In the first few chapters she continuously

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[5]   This term is used to denote the gender-based segregation inside the home and also for the isolation within the home from the outside world that women experienced.

[6]   See Russell (1999) who argues that Aḥmad precipitated the genre, but wasn't quite writing novels himself. For an overview of the diversity of opinions offered in this debate see Suhrawardy, (1945) Schimmel (1975) and Oesterheld, (2001)

makes grave mistakes that cost her and her new family both financially and in terms of respectability. She is cheated by devious maid-servants, acts with greed to move with her husband into new quarters only to face financial ruin, and is disrespectful to the elders of her own family and that of her in-laws. In no attempt to hide his didactic intent, Naẓīr Aḥmad crafts the other sister, Asgharī, as a bearer of virtue, piety and devotion, to her own family and to the family of her husband. In depicting her successes, the clear intent of the author is to suggest that with humility and a good education, a young *sharīf* woman will be able to succeed in life. Yet, as has been noted by several scholars who have discussed or referenced this book, her actions exceed mere replications of the expectations of the day. Her character is par excellence that of a *sharīf* woman. Not only does she take care of her new household's finances, she discovers and cleverly outwits a rogue house staff who steals a little off the top of each and every purchase made by the house. Not only does she pass long the education that had been given to her, she builds a small school for a group of young women who she educates dutifully and drastically transforms their lives. Throughout the story it is Asgharī who enacts substantial economic and structural change for the family. On the merits of a younger protégé's intellect and *adab* - moral comportment - she secures a marriage into a much more respected family. On another occasion she leaves home to move in with her husband whose career with the British requires of him to live away from home with an appointment in the colonial government in Lahore but who has fallen into bad habits with both his piety and his financial affairs. Asgharī, in many ways, controls the family estate, towering above her male peers, and does so in a dignified and respected fashion. Yet, in the narrative she clearly transcends the role cast as "traditional" in her milieu. Her character both defines and defies

the trope which gender scholars and historians more generally have used to characterize the quintessential Indian Muslim woman of the period.

So perhaps other readings of the book are possible, ones that reveal certain actions of Asgharī narrated in the story that constitute transgressions of the male-dominated world she lives in. Such a reading might also see Asgharī's actions, though cast as idyllic behaviour for pious Muslim women of formerly noble families by the reformist author, as instead mediated and repeated violations or bargains with the explicit male-spoken dictums found throughout the text. Frances Pritchett suggests such a reading, asking in the afterword of the re-printed English translation of *Mirāt ul-ʿArūs*, "How can such unabashed, carefully plotted, meticulously described manipulation of her whole marital family's fortunes be fitted into her official ethic of unquestioning subordination to her male elders?"[7] This encapsulates the most succinct reflection on the aspect of the text that this thesis addresses — that the text itself exceeds the author's own reformist intentions.

Aḥmad, as part of his involvement in the Aligarh Movement, backed English language education and British rule in India in the later years of his life. Throughout, he was noted for his piety - perhaps most evidenced by his writing of an Urdu translation and extensive commentary of the Qurʾan - and was vocal on the behalf of the Muslim community in India under colonial rule. Despite this, some of his works, including *Mirāt ul-ʿArūs*, had been criticized and banned by figures in the revivalist Deoband movement, due in part to his involvement with the British and the universalist overtones in some works.[8] Within three

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[7]   Pritchett (2001) in the afterword of *The Bride's Mirror*

[8]   This movement emerged alongside the Aligarh movement in the mid 19th century, but opposed it on the

decades of the publication of *Mirāt ul-'arūs*, the landscape of women in Urdu literature and the nationalist movement in colonial India had drastically changed. Yet *Mirāt ul-'arūs* remained an important part of that landscape. Its detractors, some of them quite influential, like the Deobandi scholar Maulānā Ali Ashraf Thānvī, tended to view the story, despite what it contained in terms of valuable wisdom for young Muslim women, as a story that would generally weaken the faith of its female readers. As Barbara Metcalfe, the translator of Thānvī's etiquette manual, *Bihishtī Zevār*, which was written in 1905, mentions in the introduction to her translation of the book's 10th volume wherein he bans *Mirāt ul-'Arūs*, the women of *Mirāt* "go beyond the bounds of being competent and responsible to become more independent than their received domestic role comfortably allows."[9] She goes on to say, "as the lines were drawn," meaning the lists of approved and banned books in *Bihishtī Zevār*, Naẓīr Aḥmad's story "went too far in the direction of the cosmopolitan, at the risk of what was seen as the normative cultural core."

If we take his intent to be most clearly evidenced in the introduction where he retains an absolute authoritative voice then, clearly, the impact of Naẓīr Aḥmad's work exceeded his normative ideals. However, such an argument based on the evidence provided thus far is insufficient. In order to avoid a purely teleological argument, returning to the text is essential and, in the case of *Mirāt ul-'arūs*, the textual evidence is abundant. For example, when her

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grounds of its support for the British Raj. See part II of the literature review for some important aspects of the movement and its importance to the present discussion. The universalism which I mention, is discussed in the afterword, see Pritchett (2001), and in Naim's work on adab (1984). For example, Aḥmad made the claim that his advocacy for women's education in *Mirāt ul-'arūs*, should be for all respectable women, regardless of faith.

[9]   *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar.* (1990) p.

husband expresses consternation when faced with the decision to abandon his mediocre post in favour of a more lucrative, yet unguaranteed post with the British, Asgharī responds to each of his anxieties with shrewd advice and obtains the effect that she herself desires for him in the situation. At another moment, on her way to rectify the degenerating situation of her husband in his post, corrupted by bribery and run amuck with bad company, she entrusts her home to her brother-in-law, who notably refers to her as brother (as does her father-in-law in other passages). An honorary patriarch, she behaves with authority and wise decision-making and guides the younger generation of girls whom she instructs in her school through the inter-cultural matters of the age. She confronts the girls' presuppositions of British mores and critiques much of the child-rearing by mothers of their young girls in the Indian sub-continent. Taken together, these three examples demonstrate at once the the breadth and the precision of Asgharī's articulations of her vision for the family's future. She forges a leading role in the family and establishes herself as a progenitor of such behaviour in her *mohalla* with the younger women in the community. With her status she does not merely empower her family, she perceives and addresses shortcomings of the social in her teachings at the school, and importantly upholds other ideals that she wishes not to challenge.[10]

The thesis is divided into five short sections; an introductory literature review and four disquisitional chapters. The literature review introduces some of the salient themes that are addressed across the thesis, namely: the Aligarh movement and Islamic modernism, purdah and *zenāna* education, the history of Urdu literature for and by women, and *begamātī zubān* or

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[10] This point is important for the discussion in chapter 4 which questions the notion of agency that is used in the historical analysis and in literary criticism.

women's language. This brief thematic overview contextualizes the analysis presented in the later chapters and offers an introduction to some of the terminology and concepts that will appear in the discussions of the subsequent chapters.

The first chapter focusses on the literary debate surrounding the claims that *Mirāt ul-'arūs* was a novel by drawing from historical and contemporary responses to the text. Having resolved this issue - to the extent of the purpose of this thesis - I engage Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia in the novel to pursue new avenues for reading the text. The chapter examines Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, to develop both the reasoning for considering Aḥmad's book a novel and numerous cases in the text where the author's and his character's voices converge and refract, the central aspect of heteroglossia.[11]

The second chapter adopts this heteroglossic approach and chronicles the narrative of Asgharī and her female co-protagonists via such a reading the novel. It postulates how the variety of voices in the text offer polyglossic and heteroglossic readings of Naẓīr Aḥmad's novel by investigating each of the characters in the novel. The chapter connects the many actions and speech acts of characters and the author in the book to constitute a very different reading of the text.

The third chapter expands on the implications of polyvalent readings given this heteroglossia, addressing the evidence of the influence of Naẓīr Aḥmad in Urdu literature and his specific influence on female writers. Here, too, there is a comparison with more evocative, non-elite narratives through some of work of Subaltern Studies' post-colonial criticism of

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[11]   Published originally in 1934, but quoted throughout from the widely available English translation (1981).

Indian historiography. Through this theoretical framework, I will explore how power, sacredness, honour and agency are mapped out in the text and embodied by characters in the narrative. This analysis is situated in the context of larger debates on the subjects of tradition and modernity, which I understand to be cornerstones in the discourse of the Subaltern Studies group's post-colonial criticism of Indian historiography.

The final chapter confronts the current understanding of the text, categorized through a dichotomous purview of the liberatory feminist and patriarchy binary, most evident in Ruby Lal's work on Aḥmad which misses the quotidian agency of Aḥmad's characters as they encounter contemporary peers of their readership. The chapter draws connections to current debates, particularly in anthropology, on Muslim women and the perceptions of their confrontations with modernity. This exposes the elisions made in historical analyses when chronicling women and the presence or absence of agency when ostensibly re-inscribing male dictums and masculinist discourses. To conclude, I argue how such moves essentially truncate genealogies of some feminisms and offer some thoughts on alternative methods of analysis.

Literature Review

The aim of this short introductory chapter is to present scholarship on four themes that are relevant to the analysis in the following chapters. I present brief overviews of some of the most relevant texts on *zenāna* education and the Islamic modernism of the Aligarh movement as these pertain to the subject of gender and rights for women in the Indian subcontinent. I will also give an outline of literature by women or aimed at female audiences and secondary scholarship pertaining to *begamātī zubān* or women's language. Each of these four thematic elements are foundational for understand both the historical and theoretical context that this study is based upon. They are presented here to contextualize the discussion of specific figures, texts and theoretical frameworks that take place in the subsequent chapters. This literature review is by no means meant to be comprehensive, but is meant to frame this study, presented below, of *Mirāt ul-'arūs* by reviewing scholarship directly relevant to the text and to the theory that I use in my analysis. As will be seen, the work of several authors, including Barbara Metcalf, C.M. Naim and Gail Minault, appears repeatedly throughout these four sections and is a testament both to the scope of their impact on these topics and to the intersections that exist in the historiography of these themes and concepts.

Zenāna Education and Purdah

Historiographers have taken a keen interest in the trajectory of the political involvement of Muslim women in India from the time of Delhi Sultanate to the present. With that interest

comes the chronicling of leading figures of educated women and pioneers of both genders in the push for broad education of women. Gouri Srivastava offers brief accounts of the biographies of almost three dozen historical and contemporary women ranging from Razia Sultan in the 13th century to Shaista Suhrawardy, whose literary criticism we will visit later.[1] These biographies give an important perspective on the status of women in the era in which we take an interest here, including the Begams of Bhopal, Bibi Ashraf (Ashrafunissa Begam), Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani and Bi Amman (Abadi Banu Begam), yet they also reveal how little historical information we have on women's education. Bibi Ashraf is one first-hand account that exists to provide some idea of what was typical for the time. In a composition for the women's magazine *Tahzib-e-Niswān*, which we will revisit below, she describes the practice of having an *ustānī*, essentially a live-in female tutor who educated the younger women of the home.[2] This notion we see is the prevalent model for education in Naẓīr Aḥmad's novels, though the model is tweaked by Asgharī in the curriculum and approach.

Gail Minault writes that Muslim women were "virtually invisible," in the colonial records which provided little information on women.[3] Minault's interest in *zenāna* education is evident across her work. Two articles from the above volume focus extensively on the debate that

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[1] See Srivastava, Gouri. *The Legend Makers: Some Eminent Muslim Women of India*. New Delhi: Concept Pub. Co, 2003. Print.

[2] See Naim, C.M "How Bibi Ashraf learned to read and write." *Annual of Urdu Studies*, v. 6, 1987 p. 102

[3] Minault, Gail. *Gender, Language, and Learning: Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History.* Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009. Print. p. 10. (Referred to from henceforth as "Gender Language and Learning" Minault Quotes Y.B. Mathur's account in *Women's Education in India (1813-1966)*, 1973 as offering some insight into the East India Company's approach to female education and that under the Raj post-1857. Most of the schools taught English and the numbers across India are quite small (127,066 in 1884, with only 6 reaching college level and 2,054 in secondary school) Her work supports the notion that part of the struggle in expanding education was the need to educate teachers who could teach within the *zenāna*. Her work unfortunately gives no specifics on Muslim women and the only references

raged in the second half of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth on the subject. Though Naẓīr Aḥmad and Altaf Hussain Hālī - who wrote another popular book for women, *Majālis un-Nissa*, translated by Minault - advocated in the 1870s for the extension of schooling to women, Minault documents how the Aligarh movement and the educational establishment at Aligarh repeatedly voted down measures for women to be educated in schools and that it was not until the early 1900s that such establishments surfaced and were sustained.[4] Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal also undertook similar pursuits in her own state, opening the Sultania Girls' School in 1903.[5]

Margrit Pernau has noted the existence of girls schools in Hyderabad that moderately predate those found in North India. She writes

> An article, dated 1897, mentions a "Madrassa A'izza Niswan," that had been running for eight or nine years, financed by the state and caring for the daughters of the respectable classes. The same source mentions another school, called Madrisa Nisvan, which was founded, financed and supervised by Nuru in-Nisvan Begam, the eldest daughter of Salar Jang.

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to the community appear in the documents of colonial administrators quoted at length that reflect a general neglect of meeting the needs of that particular community.

[4]   See specifically Minault (2009), the chapters *Sayyid Karamat Husain and the Education of Women* which documents the history leading up to the founding of the school in his name in Lucknow in 1912 and, *Sharīf Education for Girls at Aligarh* which outlines the history and debate on the emergence of the Aligarh *zenāna* Madrasa in 1906 by Shaikh Abdullah and his wife Begam Abdullah.

[5]   See Lambert-Hurley, Siobhan. *Muslim Women, Reform and Princely Patronage: Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal.* London: Routledge, 2007. Print. p. 82-3 for greater detail on the life of this historical figure.

Her personal involvement, stemming from the education she herself had received from her father. Aside from these educational ventures, in the same year there existed a "zenāna School" that provided education up to the Middle Level in English, Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Here 32 girls were taught in four classes by three European and two Indian ladies. The school kept strict purdah and addressed itself to sharīf families, who insisted on respectability but were not necessarily affluent." [6]

In the same volume as above, Minault theorizes the appeal and the motivation for purdah in her chapter on the extended family. She argues that women viewed themselves not as individuals, but as members of families, serving as symbols rather than acting in the public realm.[7] In line with this perspective, the expansion of women's role in politics modelled itself and was possibly justified through the metaphor of the Muslim community as extended family. This is a common theme across several articles and the notion of the "nurturing mother" and the "self-sacrificing wife" were common images echoed across socio-religious divides and served as guiding archetypes in the moral and cultural imaginary.[8] The defining spatial aspect of the *zenāna* is the physical separation and seclusion of women under purdah. The collection

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[6] 'Female Voice: Women Writers in Hyderabad at the beginning of the Twentieth Century', Annual of Urdu Studies 17 (2002): pp. 36–54. See also, Pernau, Margrit "Schools for Muslim Girls —A Colonial of An Indignous Project? A Case Study of Hyderabad." *Islam in South Asia*. Oriente Moderno, Nuova serie, 23 (84) 2004. p. 263-276. Print. (from henceforth reference as *Female Voices*)

[7] Minault, Gail. *Gender, Language and Learning*. (2009) p.26

[8] See Sinha (2006) for a lengthy discussion of this motif in the case of Hindu communities in the 1920s. Dr. Kesahvmurthy, drew my attention to a similar line of argument made in *Maqālāt-e Shiblī*, by Shiblī Nu'mānī (another contemporary of Aḥmad) that the education of Muslim women was paramount for the community given that only with such education would they be ideal mothers for Muslim men.

of works in *Separate Worlds* includes mostly ethnographies, with the exception of Minault's contribution and that of Geraldine Forbes, who both write from a historical perspective on purdah at the beginning of the twentieth century. Fazlur Rahman's contribution to the volume offers a modernist perspective on the practice of purdah.[9]

His perspective differs greatly from that of Maulānā Maudūdī in his 1939 treatise on purdah where he defends the practice on traditionalist-literalist grounds.[10] A distinction between the work of Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī in *Bihishtī Zevār* and that of Maudūdī offers insight into the immense shift in the rhetoric and tone of elite Muslim thinkers — although Maudūdī is actually trained as a journalist — on the social comportment of women in the first four decades of the twentieth century. Whereas *Bihishtī Zevār* takes for granted the existence of purdah and beckons women onto the straight path of Islam through religious education in the *zenāna*, Maudūdī devotes the entirety of his treatise to the demise of the practice and the failings of the Muslim community to uphold practices espoused in the Qur'an and the *hadīth*. It is also worth noting how between generations, another shift took place which further repositioned "traditional" Islamic education as distinct from what had comprised such a training in pre-colonial India.[11]

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[9]   He writes that his stance is "in contradistinction to the stance taken on most social issues by the Muslim conservative-traditionalist leader." p. 285 He argues through several references to Qur'anic *ayas* (verses) on issues of divorce, polygamy, and purdah distinctions between religious and cultural understandings and suggests that, at times, on the basis of "necessity" (*zarura*) and "public interest" (*maslaha*) the community adapts.

[10]   Maudoodi, Syed A. A, and al-Ashʻari. *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam.* Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1972. Print.

[11]   In the generation of Aḥmad, Shibli Nu'mānī had stood for one of the most revered Islamic scholars, yet like Aḥmad, was only partially trained "traditionally," meaning in the fashion of pre-colonial training. Maudūdī, who gained the title "Maulana" and commands an immense amount of influence into the present, was trained completely

In Minault's work, specifically "Coming Out: Decisions to Leave Purdah" and her contribution to *Secluded Scholars*, she documents several cases of women of prominence who observed purdah, and several others who made the decision to leave purdah. She writes that, "individual women did not usually defy their families and throw off the veil, but rather achieved greater freedom with the help or complicity of their men, whether spouses or relatives."[12] She documents two cases where women defied their families and made the decision to come out for social or political reasons. She argues that decisions were often made in conjunction with other family members or spouses, like that of Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, whose work on Urdu literature we will discuss later. However, even making the decision in this sanctioned way did not mean that the shift from purdah was an easy one. In Suhrawardy's memoir she writes

> I did not enjoy my first experience of being out of purdah all. I felt
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> embarrassed at being looked at by hundreds of men (while) decked up all
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> in my best, and my enjoyment of the party was further spoiled by my
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> having to spend the entire evening trying to avoid being seen by my uncle,
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> who very strongly disapproved of my coming out of purdah.[13]

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outside this pre-colonial Islamic education system and was trained only as a journalist. My thanks goes to Dr. Keshavmurthy, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, for pointing this out to me in personal communication.

[12]   "Coming Out: Decisions to Leave Purdah." India International Centre Quarterly. 23 (1996): 93-105. Print. p. 94

[13]   See p. 28 in the chapter *From Purdah to Politics* in Ikramullah, Shaista S. *Behind the Veil: Ceremonies, Customs, and Colour.* Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

All of these documented examples occur much later, in the 1910s and 1920s, but was not unheard of prior to the turn of the century. Nawab Shah Jahan Begum of Bhopal was one such example who left purdah, to rule her state in 1867, departing from the practice of her mother who had ruled from behind purdah.[14]

In Hālī's similarly reformist work, *Majālis un-Nissa*, translated by Minault (in English as *Voices of Silence*) the reader is able to observe examples of what might be taught to women in the *zenāna*.

> By the time I was thirteen, I had studied the *Gulistan* and *Būstān*, *Akhlāq-e-Muhsinī*, and *Iyār-e-Dānish* in Persian, and in Arabic the necessary beginning grammar, in arithmetic the common factors and decimal factors and the two parts of Euclid's geometry. I had also studied the geography and history of India, and had practiced both *naskh* and *nasta'liq* calligraphy and could copy couplets in a good hand. At that point, my father began to teach me two lessons a day. In the morning we read *Kimiya-e Sa'adat* and in the evening *Kalila wa Dimna* in Arabic. [15]

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[14]   See *The Legend Makers* (2003) p.58

[15]   Hālī, Khvājah A. H, Gail Minault, and Khvājah A. H. Hālī. *Voices of Silence*: English Translation of Khwaja Altaf Hussain Hālī's *Majālis Un-Nissa* and *Chup Ki Dad*. Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1986. Print. Hālī was another active member of the Aligarh movement as well as poet and author.

We can see similar examples of typical curricula in Naẓīr Aḥmad's sequel to *Mirāt ul-ʿarūs*, *Banāt un-Naṡh*, which focuses on the school started by Asgharī that is one of the cornerstones of the plot in *Mirāt ul-ʿarūs*.

A final note to conclude this section: Patricia Jeffreys, in her ethnographic work in rural North India, argues that, "Education can be seen as a way of domesticating women into new forms of patriarchy, rather than offering them new horizons," and that in her field-work she observed that education was not a determinate of autonomy in women.[16] Her findings corroborate what Ruby Lal might call the reinscribing of patriarchal values through the reformist education regimen of Aḥmad and his contemporaries that "bring the 'literate' woman to the centre of the respectable patriarchal family."[17] These assertions offer conventional, paradigmatic readings of these texts, of history and of Muslim women's actions. Conversely, Minault warns us, "One should not project current feminist consciousness back too far in seeking to understand the origins of women's political participation in India."[18] Both Lal and Jeffrey make the mistake of viewing their interlocutors from the perspective of their own contemporary and progressive frameworks of agency. Absent is a reflexivity that contextualizes their own historical or ethnographic aims and an imagination for notions of agency not corroborated by their own paradigms of existence.

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[16]   Jeffery, Patricia, and Amrita Basu. *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*. New York: Routledge, 1998. Print. p.156-7

[17]   Lal, Ruby. "Gender and Sharafat: Re-Reading Naẓīr Aḥmad." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. 18.1 (2008): 15-30. Print. p. 27 (refered henceforth simply as *Gender and Sharafat*)

[18]   *Gender, Language and Learning* (2009) p.10

Reform and Revivalism: The Aligarh Movement, the Deobandis and Bihishtī Zevār

There is much to be said on the theme of reform and modernism in South Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century. My interest here is to highlight just some of the scholarship and debate on the Aligarh movement, as well as the contemporaneous Deobandi movement. The latter is very much still present in the Indian subcontinent and, though in more indeterminate and discrete ways, of course so is the former. My interest in both of these movements is to offer some introduction, but also to pay specific attention to the (range of) attitudes in their midst. As we have seen, the books of Naẓīr Aḥmad and Altaf Hussain Hālī endorsed the modernist views of the Aligarh movement and both were active teachers and orators in the establishments and circuits of the movement's educational and political spheres. Maulānā Ashraf Thānvī was another figure that features strongly in the discussion of women in the early twentieth century. His efforts at reform culminated in the etiquette manual *Bihishtī Zevār* published in 1904.[19]

Metcalf, whose scholarship addresses both the Deobandis at the turn of the century and an offshoot of that group, the Tablighī Jamāt, offers perspective both on the historical development of these groups and on their disposition and regard of women participants. In both movements, she argues that these revivalist groups sought to reform the Muslim not on the grounds of gender, but solely on the merits of one's adherence and practicing of faith. As

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[19]   There are numerous translated copies of this treatise. Barbara Metcalf has translated some books of the volume published as *Perfecting Women*, though dozens of other publications are also readily available, typically under the English name *Heavenly Ornaments*. For the purposes of this text, I have used Metcalf's edition. Metcalf notes that *Bihishtī Zevār* is a popular gift as part of the dowry or trouse of a newly-wed woman up until the present day.

she points out, this holds true both for her Tablighi interlocutors and for Thānvī. Metcalf remarks that the revolutionary egalitarianism of *Bihishtī Zevār* and much of its contents, though aimed primarily at women, were equally applicable to men. Thānvī himself in the text encouraged that it be read by young boys as well as young girls.[20] In an earlier work, Metcalf lays out three principles that form the core of the revivalist aims. First was the view that the problems the Muslim community faced were religious; second was the placing of these problems at the feet of individuals and calling upon Muslims to tailor their own behaviours to doctrines that would overcome the moral decay at the individual and social level; third, to disavow practices that were not scripturally justified.[21] The movement was generally seen as not having nationalist aims, though was generally understood to be active politically in some ways. [22]

In a very different approach, Faisal Devji argues that Islamic revivalism like that of the Deobandis came about not solely as a reaction to colonial domination, but more as dialogue between Muslims and the desire to distinguish itself as the *sharīf* "on the basis of 'true' or 'orthodox' Islam." He writes, "The shurafa, in other words, who did not exist as a community prior to the nineteenth century, created themselves in and through the colonial order as a distinct 'Islamic' or 'revivalist' polity — a self-creation in which their movement of women's

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[20]   The text includes an appendix, specifically for men entitled *Bihishti Gauhar*.

[21]   Metcalf, Barbara D. *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900.* Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1982. Print. p. 5

[22]   See Aḥmad, Ali (1996) 'The Dar Al-Uloom of Deoband: A Religio-Political Movement for the Indian Muslims', *The Islamic Quarterly*, 40(1): 23–31.

reform necessarily participated." [23] He groups these separate movements of the *sharīf* polity together and argues that while distinct in their aspirations, both were attempting to reconfigure that polity into a new orthodoxy. The end result, he concludes, was the relocation of that polity to the private sphere by a process he calls "Islamization" and congruously the movement of the feminine sphere from the periphery of that polity, "to the centre of the new muslim home."[24]

Minault's piece on *Huqūq an-Niswān* and Mumtāz 'Alī also offers some insight into the debates of the time. She argues that Alī believed the notion that legal positions afforded to women in Islam were far greater than the practice at the time and that that practice did not achieve this ideal due to false customs.[25] This is, of course, similar to an argument made elsewhere about Thānvī in his *Bihishtī Zevār* and other religious reformers who sought to stamp out superstitions and customary practices like *begamātī zubān* - a better idea of this debate and its repercussions will be elaborated below. She continues that the Deobandis desired to strengthen the Muslim community and that Mumtāz 'Alī extended this notion to include women, where it might previously have not, articulating the need for equality when contending with the human soul and that differences in perceptions of male and female intellect were man-made and not divine. 'Alī was a pioneer in journals for women, seeking to make religious and practical texts accessible.[26] Pernau references another of Minault's works

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[23]   Devji, Faisal F. "Gender and the Politics of Space: the Movement for Women's Reform in Muslim India, 1857–1900." South Asia: *Journal of South Asian Studies*. 14.1 (1991): 141-153. Print. See specifically p. 143

[24]   Ibid. p. 153

[25]   Minault, Gail. *Gender, Language and Learning*. (2009) p. 38

[26]   Ibid. p. 40 (see the following section of this literature review for more details on *Tehzib un-Niswan*.) He also

when making the argument that, in the making of this new *sharīf* polity, both men and women were called upon to achieve this aim. She writes, "Women under these circumstances acted, in the first instance, not as representatives of a female community encompassing different religions and economic standards —the "classical" zenāna - but as the members of a social status group whose respectability was based on a reformist expression of piety and on education, and it was in this capacity that they made their voice heard through literature." [27] Partha Chatterjee's work *The Nation and Its Fragments* looms large across many of these works, specifically his two chapters on women in the nationalist movement. These two chapters will be referenced at length in Chapters Three and Four.

Finally, Usamah Ansari presents his own reading of *Bihishtī Zevār*, in which he argues the female readership is encouraged to submit to divine will and engage, through self-reflection, in self-cultivation (2010). His article summarizes much of the debate on the Deobandis, their attitude towards modernism and the use of Thānvī as a liminal figure for the debate. He references Fuad Naeem, whose version of modernism, he argues is Eurocentric and excludes "the possibility of competing or alternative modernities where 'tradition' is articulated in contemporary movements to produce types of subjectivity rooted in modern fixations on authentic personhood." [28] Ansari views Thānvī and the Deobandi *ulema* as making a strong departure from traditional dissemination of religious material and from the traditional male-

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founds Dar ul-Ishaiat-i-Punjab (see Suhrawardy (1945) p. 105-165.)

[27] See Pernau (2002) p. 53-54

[28] p. 288 For a look at this work that he critiques see Naeem, Fuad (2004) 'A Traditional Islamic Response to the Rise of Modernism'. In Joseph Lumbard (ed.), *Islam, Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition: Essays by Western Muslim Scholars* (pp. 79–120). Bloomington: World Wisdom Inc. See Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar (2001) 'On Alternative Modernities'. In D.P. Gaonkar (ed.), *Alternative Modernities* (pp. 1–23). Durham and London: Duke

centric dissemination of this material. [29] Ansari argues that, in addressing women directly through his project, Thānvī hopes that their reform will bring about a "pious self" that enacts positive change to the community through women. [30] In conclusion, Ansari sees no reason as to why we cannot conceptualize the Deobandi's embeddedness in religious tradition as part of the imagination and production of a modern Muslim community.

Women's Literature

In the last three decades of scholarship, a great deal of emphasis has been laid on seeking out women's voices in the historiography of South Asia during the colonial era. Again, Gail Minault has been a pioneer in sharing these voices with an English-speaking audience, along with C.M. Naim and others. The central subjects of many of these articles have been three women's periodicals from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Ismat* (first published in 1908), *Tehzib un-Niswan* (1898) and *Khātūn* (1904). *Ismat* was started by Rashīd ul-Khairī with the support of his friend Sheikh Abdul Qadir; *Tehzib un-Niswan* was started by

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University Press. and Göle, Nilüfer (1996) *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. for their contributions to developing these notions of competing or alternative modernities.

[29]   There are two points to note here: First that citing Devji (1991) from above and Robinson (1993), the advent of print capitalism made these works more readily available, alongside other texts like the periodicals I visit below. This vehicle permitted religious texts to circulate more widely; Ansari writes, "The structures that had supported the ulema's public authority as specialists in scriptural analysis had been altered." p. 291 Second, the reach now extended beyond the traditional confines of male elites, but was also addressed directly at women like in *Bihishti Zevār*.

[30]   Ibid. p. 290 Ansari's use of pious self is a direct reference to the work of Saba Mahmood, whose work on women on muslim woman agency will be on of the foundational pieces in my analysis in Chapter Four. This idea, which Ansari fleshes out for himself briefly, draws on a Foucauldian conception of bio-politics, which Ansari sees as quintessential to an understanding of his "shariatic modernity."

Mumtāz 'Alī and his wife Muhammadī Begum (d.); and *Khātūn* was begun by Shaikh Abdullah and his wife Wahīd Jahān.[31] They appear as the central texts in many of Minault's historiographical works that introduced English speakers to these periodicals. Azra Asghar Ali examines the women's writings published in *Tehzib un-Niswan* and *Ismat* and categorises them into four categories: (i) the production of new domestic literature; (ii) social transformation (iii) Indian Muslim women adapting to social and cultural modernisation and; (iv) criticism of traditions and suggestions for change. [32] In her piece we see the difficulty in excavating women's voices in the early years of this publication that were dominated by men writing.[33] C.M. Naim's *How Bibi Ashraf Learned to Write*, gives us one example of a woman publishing prior to 1900. Naim writes, and indeed we see this in the text, that many of the obstacles and challenges that Bibi Ashraf narrates are quite similar to those that the "female characters possessing remarkable strength and intelligence" encountered in the fictionalized

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[31]   "Urdu Women's Magazines In The Early Twentieth Century." *Manushi*. 48 (1988): 2-9. Print. Mumtāz 'Alī, an Islamic scholar also wrote the treatise, *Huquq un-Niswan* (Women's Rights), a work of Qur'anic interpretation in favor of women and of reciprocity in gender relationships.

[32]   Ali, Azra A. "Recovery of Female Voice Through Women's Journals in Urdu in British India 1898–1947." South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies. 21.2 (1998): 61-86. Print. See specifically p. 66 There is a mistake in the original text which precludes a solid understanding of what the author means, this summary is what I believe what was intended for the fourth point.

[33]   For example, she writes that in the initial years of publication, Rashid ul-Khairi, often using female pseudonyms, would write many of the contributions to *Ismat*. Minault remarks that in *Khātūn* Shaikh Abdullah also did much of the writing, and in that periodical, unlike *Ismat*, the aim seems to have been to address men on women's issues. This may account for why that journal is somewhat less studied in these articles or may also account for why its circulation ended in 1914 as women sought to express these ideas for themselves and society, and men in particular, warmed up to these ideas. Outside this speculation, what can be observed is that in these articles many of the references to these periodicals are from editions in the 1920s and 1930s, several decades after their initial publishing and more than fifty years after the writing of Naẓīr Aḥmad and his contemporaries.

accounts of Hālī and Aḥmad.[34] Yet, while many of the pieces surveyed in this review contain references to one or more of these magazines or figures, outside the few articles mentioned here, little exists to document the actual contents of the many editions that were published.

Margrit Pernau turns to Hyderabad to document the advent of Urdu magazines for women that actually predate similar developments in the North despite what she calls a more conservative atmosphere (Pernau, 2002). She traces the founding of the first journal for women in Urdu based there, the *Mu'allim-e-Niswan* which she dates to 1886 or 1887 and which was founded by Muhibb Husain. His aims, she writes, also sought to shift the discourse towards the rights offered to women by the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. He believed, she continues, that purdah should be done away with on the grounds of it being un-Islamic, and that education would enable women to live with virtue and piety. He too attacks the practice of *begamātī zubān* and other customs, believing that the seclusion of women in the *zenāna* is what had promulgated these ill behaviours in women's separate world. She also describes two early female literary figures in Hyderabad, Sughra Begam and Taiyiba Begam, and compares their works. She classifies the former Begam's work as "fictionalized preaching," but sees the later's work, particularly *Anvari Begam* as conveying the author's message through complex development of the character's stories.[35]

Aamer Hussein in *Forcing Silence to Speak* chronicles the life of Muhammadi Begum and her penning of several novels. He specifically takes interest in the influence she draws from Naẓīr

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34   Naim, (1987) p. 111

35   Pernau in "Female Voices." p. 52 She also explicitly compares *Anvari Begam* to Naẓīr Aḥmad's work.

Aḥmad in her own fiction. Hussein counters Suhrawardy's chronology of the publishing of several of her works, namely the placing of *Sharīf Bētī* as her first work and the overemphasis of Naẓīr Aḥmad's plot devices as influential.[36] Instead, he argues that *Sharīf Bētī* was likely one of her last works in a series of about a dozen. While drawing from the reforms put forth by Aḥmad, the narrative altered and adapted the story in a "highly sophisticated reclaiming, by a woman and for women, of women's territory."[37] Hussein enumerates several key figures of the next generations of female writes who drew inspiration from Muhammadi Begam demonstrating the impact of her contributions to *Tehzib un-Niswan* and Urdu literature for generations of Muslim woman authors who followed her.

Asiya Alam discusses two other relevant novels, highlighting the issue of polygyny in *Gudar ka Lal: Khawateen aur Ladkiyon ke liye aik Naseehat khez Novel* (The Ruby in Rags: A Novel with Advice for Women and Girls) by Akbarī Begum (d. 1929) published in 1907 and *Iqbal Dulhan* (The Bride Iqbal) by Bashīruddīn Aḥmad (d. 1927) published in 1908. She compares these two works which endorse polygamy in certain cases to that of Nazr Sajjād Hyder whose *Ah-e-Mazluman* argues strictly against the practice. Alam writes that the indignancy of Hyder's narrative stands in stark opposition to the idea of Muslim women under the dual pressures of colonialism and patriarchal nationalism as repressed and unresisting. She outlines how all three pieces reflect the shift in the notion of respectability from inherited to acquired, which is a theme to which I will return in the discussion of *Mirāt ul-'arūs*. The struggle between this

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[36]   See Suhrawardy, (1945), Chapter 9 in *Critical Survey of the Urdu Novel*, p. 122-165

[37]   See Hussein, Aamer. "Forcing Silence to Speak: Muhammadi Begum, Mira'tu 'l-'arus, and the Urdu Novel." *Annual of Urdu Studies* Center for South Asia, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 11. 1996. p. 85

acquisition of respectability, namely through education - and thus also employment -faced with the preservation of family structure, serves to demonstrate the true precariousness of womanhood in this period. But alongside these tensions Alam points out that the success of the second marriage in *Gudar ka Lal* points to the existence of multiple "trajectories of 'modern' marriage in India."[38] Her conclusions echo those found elsewhere in Metcalf, Ansari and others which challenge the fixedness of a singular conception of modernity and similarly, I argue, should force scholars to theorize other trajectories of agency.

Begamātī zubān

Finally, we turn to *begamātī zubān*, the register of colloquial Urdu spoken by women, characterized by lexical differences, varied colloquialisms and distinctions in the usage of speech or idioms. Minault writes of women's Urdu, compared to other women's languages, that, given the highly segregated way of life wherein men and women were more isolated spatially, naturally, quite distinct differences would emerge in the language.[39] Of course, like others who write on *begamātī zubān*, Minault references Naẓīr Aḥmad's work as well as that of

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[38]   Alam quotes Tanika Sarkar in comparing the belief that modernity in South Asia should be equated to "the mimicry of Victorian norms and the emulation of companionate marriage." Sarkar writes, "the normative and moral horizons between the two cultural systems were so very different and distant that plain mimicry was plainly out of the question." Tanika Sarkar, 'Strishiksha or Education for Women', in Mary E. John ed., *Women's Studies in India: A Reader* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 321. In her article Alam also relies on the memoir of Saliha Hussein, who in the 1930s married as a second wife of Abid Hussein. Her memoir supports this idea presented here that multiple modern arrangements were possible.

[39]   See Minault, Gail. begamātī zubān in *Gender, Language and Learning*. 2009. p. 119 She references several works on linguistic distinctions in the colloquial American English, see William O'Barr and B.K. Atkins, "Women's Language or Powerless Language?", in S. McConnel-Ginet et al. (eds) *Women and Language in literature and Society* and Francine Frank and Robin Lakoof in *Women's Language and Style* 1975

Altāf Husain Hālī and Agha Haider Hasan Dehlāvī who, while being men, captured the language in the dialogues between women to be found in their pages.[40] Minault also mentions numerous lexicons and linguistic studies, mostly in Urdu, that focus on the register and catalogue it. She also offers in her articles numerous examples of the richness of the register.

Yet, while in the pages of even male authors this register came to life, Minault argues that it was not viewed favourably by all, including Hālī and Aḥmad. Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī is one such case who decries explicitly that the woman's language goes against religion in the reference to or deployment of rituals, superstition or custom. [41] He deplores the departure for the practice of the *sunna* (teachings of the Prophet) where any Muslim should, for example, use the customary greeting *as-Salamu alaikum* instead of any other of a dozen or so greetings that Thānvī comically lists as "count(ing) off the names of the whole family."[42]

Another example of the prevalence of this register is in the poetic tradition of *rekhtī* poetry. This distinct counterpart of *rekhtā*, allowed the male to take on a female persona and was often used to address women directly.[43] Again, it was a male who introduced *rekhtī* into this milieu. The son of a Persian nobleman, Sa'adāt Yār Khān "Rangin" settled in Lucknow, seeking

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40   See also Devji (1991) and Suhrawardy (1945)

41   This is evident across Bihishtī Zevār, but Minault highlights several examples by Hālī and by Thānvī in her
      article *Other Voices, Other Rooms*

42   The greetings "May your brother live long!", "May your husband live long!", and "May your children live long!"
      are given as examples. p. 110-11 in Thānvī, Ashraf A, and Barbara D. Metcalf. Perfecting Women: Maulānā Ashraf
      'ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar : a Partial Translation with Commentary. Berkeley: University of California Press,
      1990. Print. (from henceforth referred to as *Perfecting Women*)

43   Petievich, Carla. "Gender Politics and the Urdu Ghazal: Exploratory Observations on Rekhta Versus Rekhti."
      The Indian Economic and Social History Review. 38.3 (2001): 223. Print.

patronage and, drawing from the debauched adventures of his youth, developed a style that reflected the "pithiness of their (courtesans) expression and their wit" by incorporating this "ladies' language" into his poetry. This accounts for the birth of the female narrator and the *begamātī zubān* that came to characterize *rekhtī*'s "generic distinctiveness."[44] Ruth Vanita writes on the idiomatic differences of the two contrapuntal poetics that, similar to *begamātī zubān* in day-to-day life, *rekhtī* possessed an affinity for a "less Persianized Urdu" that "leans more heavily towards dialects."[45] Somewhat contrary to the assertions made by Minault and echoed in the archives by her interlocutors, Vanita remarks that "For both Muslim and Hindu elite men who spoke the language of high culture in public, 'women's speech' was the language of private life and of significant emotional and imaginative domains" and adds that men would have encountered this register from their lower class servants and their female family members.

However, the fading of the isolation and the self-sufficiency of women behind purdah corresponded to the lessening of distinctions between *begamātī zubān* and the "standard" register of Urdu employed by men. Whether this was because the isolation lessened or the education among women increased may still be debated, though the idea that ironically, education - advocated by reformist authors who employed the register in their works or offered platforms for women to write in the pages of their periodicals - had the effect of teaching women this standard form might lend its support to Vanita's theory. Devji notes:

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[44]   See Petievich (2000) p.232

[45]   Vanita, Ruth. *Gender, Sex, and the City: Urdu Rekhtī Poetry in India, 1780-1870*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Internet resource. p. 78

While the shariat shut its ears to the specialized slang (begamātī zubān) spoken by the woman-as-pagan...orthodoxy made every effort to 'standardize' and destroy it. And if we are to believe the model objections to Islamization put forward by female characters in the works of the sharīf educators only to be refuted, there did exist resistance to this sort of reform. In Altaf Husayn Hālī's didactic tract *Majālis un-Nissa*, for example, various female characters put forward objections to reform ... They failed, of course, and yet I firmly believe that this failure constituted a victory of sorts both for Islam and for the women for they were now potentially in a position where they could conduct a dialogue with the very orthodoxy that produced them, as full Muslims.[46]

Devji's is also a remarkable conclusion to consider and is similar to that of Metcalf and others' appraisal of the levelling effect of the reformist discourse. From a linguistic perspective, however, the end result was a slow disassociation of women's language as something distinct and separate from the Urdu standard and resulted specifically, as Minault writes, in the influx of Persian loan words and the standardization of the language for women as well as men.[47] Yet, the question that Devji and Metcalf leave unanswered, is how, in standardizing these women-specific registers, women retain their voice, as something distinct and able to advocate for themselves.

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[46]   Ibid. p. 152

[47]   Minault, *Gender Language and Learning* p. 134

In my two final chapters, I highlight how anthropologists and Subaltern Studies historiographers have taken a keen interest in the women-specific registers of diverse communities. Many of these, writing in broadly in the vein of feminism, witness and describe resistance, subversion and agency among the proverbs, songs and stories shared among women in harshly patriarchal societies. One example of this in the North Indian context is the work of Gloria Raheja and Ann Gold.[48] They document the speech acts and the revelation of contradictions in the dominant discourse in the subculture of women.[49] Partha Chatterjee, in his work, argues for idioms that captivate and mobilize women beyond their fragmentations, reminding us that these debates, at the time, were to a large degree representative of *sharīf* culture and were not necessarily extended to lower classes.[50] Sharing a particular affinity for the language of non-*sharīf* classes, drawing from local vernaculars rather than Persian, *begamātī zubān* remained rather distinct and continued to enable women to contend with normative discourses through their own voices. I will explore how historiographers and

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[48]   Perhaps the most notable and one that is relevant to the discussion in Chapter Four is Janice Boddy's work on the Zār cult of Sudan, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zār Cult in Northern Sudan* (1989)

[49]   See Raheja, in *Women as Subjects*, p. 74 where she discusses songs and expressions commonly spoken about food leavings for oneself and lamenting how modest and shy women will go hungry. See also for more detailed account of the ethnographic work Raheja, Gloria G, and Ann G. Gold. *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

[50]   Here again I am alluding to *The Nation and Its Fragments* when I invoke the notion of fragmentations. What Chatterjee means by this is the division of colonial society on one level into the spiritual and material domains and furthermore of this spiritual domain as characterized by a myriad of marginal groups, including women. This spiritual domain came to be dominated by, as documented in the book through the case of Bengal, by the middle-class Bengali elite and their aspirations to appropriate marginal groups, including women, in what emerged as the nationalist discourse.

anthropologist have pursued "finding" women's voices through women interlocutors and how numerous studies, in this regard, assist in reflecting upon *Mirāt ul-'arūs*.

As we can see across these four themes, much of the substantial archival material on women or by women emerges only in the waning years of the 19th century and, even then, the archives are scant. We have some details from memoirs, letters, and biographies that allow us to glimpse back further, but there still remains a general paucity of material from the decade in which Naẓīr Aḥmad wrote *Mirāt ul-'arūs*. It is for this reason that this novel, among his others and those of his contemporaries like Ḥālī, continue to be useful for chronicling and theorizing these moments of the Colonial period.

Chapter 1

Mirāt ul-'Arūs, *heteroglossic novel*

My aim in this initial chapter is to detail the literary debate on the Naẓīr Aḥmad's 1869 work *Mirāt ul-'arūs*. What I intend to argue is that the text in its reception, both in its literary milieu and its socio-political context, cannot be simply taken a univocal treatise by Aḥmad. The first part of the chapter focuses on the debate of its reception as a new form of literature in the Urdu literary milieu. This section examines the various perspectives that have been defended by various literary critics and adds to these works by assessing the question from a new angle. In introducing Bakhtin's work, *The Dialogic Imagination*, I am able, not only to rethink these attributions to Aḥmad's work, but also open new horizons on which I might confront the socio-cultural and politico-historical contexts of Aḥmad's writing and the text's reception through the liminal post-1857 period.

The book's female characters, through their dialogue and character development, assume a voice of their own. In turn, the influence of these characters, their personalities and their voices brought to light for a generation of Muslim women, as Naẓīr Aḥmad emphasized the universality of the *akhlāq* (ethics) and *izzat* (honour) promoted in his story, a path for meaningful life that in many ways transcended old gendered boundaries. Having adopted this approach, focus on Bakthin's theory of *heteroglossia*, developed in the fourth essay of *The Dialogic Imagination*. Using this analysis, I develop a reading which permits the characters and

their impact to be viewed as often exceeding the intent of Aḥmad's authorship. In my analysis, I refrain from casting aside the author and making judgement against his intent, for I am not convinced by the evidence presented in other works that his aim in his piece was to limit and confine the parameters for female life in his community. Separating the author and his characters would stand at odds with the relational approach I adopt throughout the study. In negotiating the shifting literary and political paradigms in the social changes and permeating societal crisis, I argue that Naẓīr Aḥmad sought to incorporate and utilize the contemporary idioms whose definition were necessarily in flux to negotiate and fix meaning for his community. His work, without doubt, contributed to this discursive relationship between the text and its audience. This argument situates the characters of Naẓīr Aḥmad's text as vital contributors in defining meaning for its audience, and as I will argue here, as actors in the discourse surrounding the issues, with their own voices contributing to the repositioning of new idioms.

The First Urdu Novel?

It is at the request on a colonial Lieutenant Governor's call for modern works in the vernacular that Naẓīr Aḥmad submits *Mirāt ul-'arūs* for publication. Francis Pritchett has noted that while Naẓīr Aḥmad's story does rely heavily on some classical modes of storytelling found in the *dāstān* or *qiṣṣa*, he is also among the pioneers in the writing of the Urdu novel. Aḥmad's education began in more traditional educational settings under the maulavīs and muftīs of Bijnor, and he then traveled to Delhi to study at the Delhi college, though there too he focussed his studies primarily on Arabic language, literature and the Islamic sciences. It was not until many years later when working for the Department of Public Instruction that he acquired a knowledge of English. Thus Aḥmad, is a powerful case of the liminality of the

Urdu literary world at this time, as he only reluctantly turns away from Persian modes of storytelling towards modern appropriations of the narrative forms of the colonizing European powers and does so through at times ambivalent discourse in his work.[1]

That Naẓīr Aḥmad was one of the forerunners of what was deemed a new "genre" in the Indian subcontinent, speaks to the historical moment of the book's publication, on the frontier of two eras in the literary history of the region and the development of this literary language. Naẓīr Aḥmad's story, *Mirāt ul-ʿarūs*, is certainly a literary piece that straddled two major eras in the development of South Asian literary traditions. Historians of Urdu literature have unequivocally placed it on the frontier of the emergence of the novel in Urdu's literary history. However, debate remains as to the nature of this particular text. Criticisms include that his characters are flat, his style overly didactic, and his plot too mundane.[2] Others view him as the pioneer of the genre, or a proto-novelist as Pritchett suggests. Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah wrote extensively on Aḥmad, praising his work to great length and its relation to other women novelists and authors; we see in her chapter on Naẓīr Aḥmad evidence of the dialogic nature of the story's realism through Aḥmad's characters and the influence they sparked in other writers in subsequent generations.[3] With this in mind, a central aim of this

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[1]   Here I am reflecting on Homi K. Bhaba's idea of the third space and his reflections on liminality found in *The Location of Culture* (1994), particularly his chapters "By Bread Alone," p. 282-302 and "Of Mimicry of Man" p. 121-131.

[2]   For a more in-depth discussion of the existing criticisms of Naẓīr Aḥmad, see p. 219 of *The Bride's Mirror*, where in the afterword Frances Pritchett outlines the perspectives of Ralph Russell, Suhrawardy, Muhammad Sadiq and Iftikhar Aḥmad Siddiqi.

[3]   Ikramullah, Shaista S. A *Critical Survey of the Development of the Urdu Novel and Short Story.* London: Longmans, Green, 1945. Print. p. 49-50 (from henceforth referred to as *Critical Survey of the Urdu Novel*)

chapter is to employ a Bakhtinian analysis to determine to what extent his idea of dialogism comprises and characterizes Aḥmad's text.

As has also been noted, the title "mirror for brides," evokes the *dāstān*, an earlier genre which comprised mostly of epic narratives which were common in both Persian and Urdu and date back to the 13th century.[4] Notably, several scholars have compared the text specifically to *A Mirror for Princes: The Qabus Nama* by Kai Ka'us ibn Iskandar, which like many other such *dāstān*, were written for young princes at the behest of their fathers who wished to convey worldly advice for their young sons on the need for virtuous and moral rule. Ruby Lal, who has discussed *Mirāt ul-'arūs* at length - and to whom we shall return later - also draws connections to *Akhlāq-e-Nasirī*, an ethical treatise from the 13th century which gained a great deal of currency in the 17th century courts of the Mughals. Lal argues both would have likely been texts read by Naẕīr Aḥmad given their high regard in the intellectual circles in which he was educated.[5] These texts will be examined at greater length below; from a literary perspective they offer rich comparisons with Naẕīr Aḥmad's stories. What is important to note here is that Aḥmad's *mirāt* was instead written as a mirror for daughters to guide their daily lives in an ethical and respectable manner.

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[4]   Pritchett in the Afterword of Naẕīr, Aḥmad, G E. Ward, and Frances W. Pritchett. *The Bride's Mirror: Mirāt ul-'arūs : a Tale of Life in Delhi a Hundred Years Ago*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001. Print. (referred henceforth as *The Bride's Mirror*)

[5]   For an in-depth review of some of the Islamic sources that would have likely been influential in the generation of Aḥmad see Lal, Ruby. *Coming of Age in Nineteenth-Century India: The Girl-Child and the Art of Playfulness*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Internet resource. In particular see 137-140 in Chapter Four of that work. In this thesis see Chapter Three which discusses and critiques the singular influence that Lal maintains in her work.

What I will attempt to show in the following section is that Naẓīr Aḥmad's work, when analyzed from the theoretical framework elaborated in Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, possesses many of the foundational elements of the novel as outlined by Bakhtin.[6] This is not a new observation, it has been noted that Aḥmad, "Makes a complete break with the language used in the *ðāstān* and in historical romances, and with the worldview they projected. In contrast to the monologic and authoritarian mode of the former, Naẓīr Aḥmad's mode acquired a certain dialogism in the Bakhtinian sense of the word."[7]

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin lays out a series of arguments that elucidate the major criteria that comprise a novel. In the introduction to the 1981 edition, the editor summarizes that, "The novel can include, ingest, devour other genres and still retain its status as a novel, but other genres cannot include novelistic elements without impairing their own identity as epics, odes or any other fixed genre."[8] So just what are these criteria and in what way do they relate to the historical moment of Aḥmad's literary career? For Bakhtin, the Epic centres on something in the past being recounted, but there exists a hierarchy between this glorified past and the narrator-speaker (or reader) who cannot experience that reality.[9] Simply put, the reader is "separated by epic distance" from the story and its characters. Thus Bakhtin reasons

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[6]   M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). From henceforth referred to as *The Dialogic Imagination*.

[7]   Asaduddin, Mohammed. "First Urdu Novel: Contesting Claims and Disclaimers." *Annual of Urdu StudiesI*. Center for South Asia, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2001. See p. 88 where he cites Bakhtin and suggests this comparison.

[8]   *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. xxxii

[9]   Ibid. p.13 - Bakthin writes "the authorial position immanent in the epic and constitutive for it is the environment of a man speaking about a past that is to him inaccessible."

that to place the story in the author's own era is to annihilate the hierarchy of values that existed between the idealized past and the accessible present and signals a marked transition from Epic to novel.[10] This is one of the noted successes of Naẕīr Aḥmad's work; as Asaduddin notes, this feat is precisely what Aḥmad achieves in *Mirāt ul-ʿarūs*. Suhrawardy notes that, "So real and lifelike he succeeded in making them that Akbarī and Asgharī are not regarded by the Urdu reading public as "characters" in a book, but as personal acquaintances, whom they have met and know."[11]

Asgharī, the story's protagonist, has been accused of being too hero like, flawless and infallible, but this isn't supported by the text. The story of Asgharī is organized around a series of challenges that she overcomes over the course of the novel and as Bakhtin points out that this premise, "The idea of testing the hero, of testing his discourse, may very well be the most fundamental organizing idea in the novel."[12] The difference between the trials of the hero of the epic and that of the novel comprise the same difference between the "epic distance" mentioned above and the familiarity afforded by experiential proximity. We would know, Bakhtin argues, when standing on the side of belief in the mythology that governs this "epic distance" from our own position, that the protagonist has overcome their trials; thus "an atmosphere of doubt surrounding the hero's heroism is unthinkable."[13] The finality of the

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[10]   Ibid. p. 14 - Bakhtin's argument in full is as follows: "To portray an event on the same time-and-value plane as oneself and one's contemproaries is to undertake a radical revolution, and to step out of the world of epic in the world of the novel." and "not merely temporal categories but valorized temporal categories."

[11]   *Critical Survey of the Urdu Novel* p. 48

[12]   *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 388

[13]   Ibid. p. 388

story in the epic serves to cut it off from change. Bakhtin argues that the role of tradition and of the national past serve to preserve that distance. When such tradition is replaced with personal experience these undermine the integrity of this idealized past and through contact with the changing present determine free thought and agency for the subject. The experience that is recounted in the novel develops into an image for the reader with which they acquire a relationship via their own immediate present. This relationship allows for the construction of new literary images, and allows for individuals in the novel to acquire the "ideological and linguistic initiative necessary to change the nature of his own image."[14] Here, Bakhtin indicates that through the experiences of the individual - whether rejecting some idea presented in the text or by reifying the author's expression - that such acts convey meaning and only precisely through the text being in contact with the present which the readers inhabit and participate in, is meaning conveyed.[15]

Therefore, not only does *Mirāt ul-'arūs* seem to clearly fit in the parameters that Bakhtin draws in his work, but the narrative itself reflects the type of story of cultivation and growth that is seen in the *bildungsroman.*[16] It seems equally plausible that among the influences of Naẓīr Aḥmad was Ibn Tufail's *Hay ibn Yaqḍhān*, an 12th century Arabic prose work which is considered to be one of the earliest *bildungsroman* works and was translated into first Latin, then numerous other European languages in the 17th century. It has been noted that Naẓīr

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[14]   Ibid. p. 38

[15]   Ibid. See p. 11 and p. 30-31

[16]   This point is made convincingly in Pernau, Margrit. *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013. Print. p. 258

Aḥmad's *Taubat un-Nusūḥ* was perhaps based on Daniel Defoe's *The Family Instructor*, and perhaps not coincidentally, Defoe based his more famous *Robinson's Crusoe* on *Hayy ibn Yaqḍhan*.[17] What is important to note, and what has failed to be noted by other commentators on the story, is the element of *becoming* experienced by Asgharī's character. The entire story is developed along the trajectory of her rising to become an important and respected figure in the community. Aḥmad writes, "The things which she achieved under these conditions for all that she was a woman will no doubt remain in the world as memorials of her to the last day."[18] It is not only Asgharī who might be viewed from this perspective for both Husnāra and Mahmūda emerge as strong independently willed women by the end of the book. We see near the end of the book that the new father-in-law of Mahmūda sets out to test Mahmūda for her worth and she passes his tests wonderfully. Content, he sets out for *hajj* and leaves his estate to his son and daughter-in-law. Thus it is Mahmūda and of course, Asgharī - who remains close to her and is sought out for her opinion on many things - who in the end manage the most affluent family of their *mohalla*. Aḥmad praises Asgharī for having come from nothing to attain a great deal of influence and power over the course of her life. If taken in conjunction with *Banāt un-na'sh*, the apparent sequel to *Mirāt ul-'arūs*, then we get the full scope of Husnāra's transformation too.

The majority of scholarship of these texts seems to focus solely on the duality of Akbarī and Asgharī. Only in Suhrawardy's work do we see a developed analysis of the supporting characters. She writes, "(Muhammad Kamil's mother), not Asgharī, is the best person in the

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17   Oesterheld (2001) p. 29

18   *The Bride's Mirror*, p. 187

book. Asgharī is clever and shrewd rather than good, or, in other words, her goodness is of the practical type." [19] Elsewhere she remarks that, "(Azmat's) talk with Hazari Mal is the best example of servants gossip read anywhere." [20] In Suhrawardy, we see that Aḥmad's book cannot be simply limited to the didacticism attributed to it, but that the text is rich with many (almost exclusively women) characters that each bring to the story various perspectives, ethical dispositions and language. This is to serve as simply an introduction to the diversity of actors that comprise the setting of *Mirāt ul-'arūs*. In this sense, we can look more in depth at each to gain a better sense of the meta-discourse that emerges from the text. But first, I turn again to Bakhtin to qualify and to examine the heteroglossia present in the text.

The Many Voices of Mirāt ul-'arūs

Bakhtin defines heteroglossia in various ways, since to him it operates at many levels and in different manners. In the case of *Mirāt ul-'arūs*, heteroglossia manifests in three of the ways articulated by Bakhtin. First, among the characters there are numerous languages spoken, what Bakhtin calls "stylistically individualized speech of characters."[21] There is of course the presence of English at the edges of the scenes of the story. There exists too a competition between the courtly language that held sway prior to the revolt of 1857 and the new language of the colonial administrations. By that I mean, there would have clearly been shifts in the privileged language and lexicon and Aḥmad's text reflects this as the placement - both

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[19]   *A Critical Survey of the Urdu Novel*, p.45

[20]   Ibid. p. 48

[21]   *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 262

occupationally and thematically - of fathers and sons shift from being located primarily in the Chief's court towards the English's realms of influence. Suhrawardy mentions also the language of Mama Azmat, the servant who works in the home of Muhammad Kamil's mother. [22] At the time of its publication, and since, there has been much praise too for the accuracy of the spoken language of the dialogues, which epitomize *begamātī zubān*, the characteristic speech of women in the Urdu-speaking Indian subcontinent. Thus already, internally there is a polyglot nature to the text. Bakhtin writes, that such stratification of language within the text is the "indispensable prerequisite" for the development of the novel in a given historical context. [23]

The introduction of this stylistic element in the novel is important to note for two reasons. The historical aspect relates to what has been outlined above and the specificity of the encounter of languages in this *particular moment* of literary and political history in India. "The novel took shape precisely at the point when epic distance was disintegrating... At its core lay personal experience and free creative imagination." [24] This statement, with hindsight, reflects not only the changes to the generic landscape of Urdu literature, but also those changes to socio-economic landscape of the political imagination that defined the era of the writing of this text. It has been pointed out that the text summarizes, quite accurately, the story of those Indian Muslims of the "*kacaharī* milieu" who were the first generation to work in the British

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[22]   *Critical Survey of the Urdu Novel*, p. 48

[23]   *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 263

[24]   Ibid. p. 39

government's administrations.[25] This milieu was defined by a certain level of social and economic precarity and transformation that defined the setting, fittingly, of both Aḥmad's milieu and that of his text. It was this identifiability of the narrative of these women's personal experiences was something new for Urdu literature, and Aḥmad's deployment of such a creative narrative was transformational.

In the subsequent parts of this thesis, questions of gender are raised about the story and part of that analysis relies on the idea that there is a gendered stratification of the language, a stratification accentuated by the socio-cultural milieu of the story as we saw above in the review of literature on *begamātī zubān*. It is in this way, for this novel, that one can understand Bakhtin's remarks on the stratification of language not just into linguistic dialects - an essentialized *women's* dialect - "but also into languages that are socio-ideological."[26] To anticipate criticism on this front, it can be maintained that despite the existence of overtly patriarchal passages and masculist tone, female characters in the novel, by virtue of their existence and their resonance with a female readership, possess voices that cannot be subsumed by the author's voice. Therefore, even if we assume Asgharī's voice to be a precise expression of Aḥmad's ethos, as many critics have suggested, the existence of Asgharī in a complex and heteroglot narrative precludes the existence of a discourse-less narrative. Bakthin writes:

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[25]   See Lelyveld, David. Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1978. Print. p. 56-58

[26]   *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 272

In the novel a character may also be depicted who thinks and acts (and of course, talks) in compliance with the author's wishes, a character who acts irreproachably, precisely as he is supposed to act. But such novelistic irreproachability is far from being the kind of naive conflictlessness that characterizes the epic.[27]

Of course, I criticize even this idea of irreproachability for Asgharī, for across the plot there are numerous instances where there is room to interpret her actions in a number of ways, that contradict certain ideals of the period. As Chapter Four will examine, the idea of agency in this text, though perhaps not of the emancipatory variety, remains discursively fruitful. In this way, Aḥmad's novel, even with particular tone and didacticism, remains in dialogue with the social milieu in which he created it.

The second aspect of Bakhtinian heteroglossia in *Mirāt ul-'arūs* is that there exist numerous types of texts within the story, which constitutes the "stylization of semi-literary narration" and to a lesser extent "extra-artistic authorial speech."[28] Naẓīr Aḥmad incorporates letters from Asgharī's father, Dūrāndesh Khan, and weaves the story by employing narration, long sequences of rich dialogues, inserted tales, occasional poetic verse and Qur'anic or other religious textual references.[29] Bakhtin remarks that this too is part of the fabric of a heteroglot text. The novel subsumes other genres, among them oral narration, and employs them for its

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[27]   Ibid. p. 334-35

[28]   Ibid. p. 262 Pritchett notes that this in some ways is a characteristic of the *dāstān*, however, I argue that the diversity exceeds that genre's conventions and adds more to the richness of what she equally admits are the British influenced aspects of the text. See the afterword *The Bride's Mirror*, p. 219-220

[29]   See p.37-38 and 46-47 in *The Bride's Mirror* for examples of small short stories recounted by characters, p. 13 for

own generic purposes; Bakhtin goes even further to argue that the novel takes over older genres and attemps to establish a hegemony in literature causing these genres to decline.[30] In many ways, Aḥmad's own intent, reflected in the introductory chapter, demonstrate an antagonism to the older *∂āstān* and *qissa'* as well as a desire to replace them with more sober and realistic literature that reflected a "simplicity of diction" and "purity of sentiment," while avoiding the "far-fetched or unnatural."[31] Bakhtin argues that this process is achieved again through contact with the present which possesses an unfinished realism that he qualifies as "semantic openendedness."[32] In this way even extra-literary genres like the letters of Dūrāndesh Khan to his daughter emerge as in dialogue with the literary text as a whole. Historically, one way this was achieved is through comedic, farcical and satirical elements in the narrative. In *Mirāt ul-'arūs* too, this comedy is present and even critics of Aḥmad, the novelist, agree that it is through humour that Aḥmad does bring his "stereotyped" characters to life.[33] What these comedic elements serve to do is challenge the language of ideology in the text and they do so by introducing variance into and more importantly by dialogising the

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Qur'anic verse, and p. 55, 161, 175, and 197 for examples of couplets of verse evoked in the text including those by Saadi, Hafiz, Hālī, the last King of Delhi (not named, but Bahadur Shah II) and several other unnamed Persian poets.

[30]   *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 3

[31]   *The Bride's Mirror* p. 3 noted as well in the afterword p. 220-221.

[32]   *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 7

[33]   Pritchett in Aḥmad p. 220; quoting Sadiq, Mohammed. A *History of Urdu Literature*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964. Print. p. 410-14

unitary language of the narrator-author in poetic genres.[34]

Finally, heteroglossia nevertheless expresses the authorial intent, but does so in a "refracted way," bringing this intent into dialogue with the other refracted voices in the novel and thereby creating multiple meanings.[35] It is these refractions that I wish highlight and parse out since current analysis of the text reads the text as somewhat monolithic and views the author's voice - not unnaturally, since the story is undoubtedly didactic - as the sole grounds of analysis. In most English scholarship on Naẓīr Aḥmad and on *Mirāt ul-ʻarūs* specifically, critics allude with some skepticism to this didacticism, but none investigate hermeneutically the underlying aspects of the text which provoke such distrust of the unitariness of the author's intent.[36] Both Asaduddin and Suhrawardy seem to exhibit some tentative explanations, but even so, their textual analysis is cursory and they instead focus on the author and the place of the text on the mantle of Urdu literature. Asaduddin alludes to a Bakthinian reading of Aḥmad, and it is from his questioning that I begin my investigation. Bakhtin challenges the reader or the critic to see,

> Even in those places where the author's voice seems at first glance to be
> unitary and consistent, direct and unmediatedly intentional, beneath that
> smooth single-languaged surface we can nevertheless uncover prose's

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[34]   *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 308

[35]   Ibid. p. 324 here I am talking about what Bakhtin calls the "direct literary-artistic narration" of the author.

[36]   See Oesterheld (2001); Pritchett (2001); Assaduddin (2001); and Suhrawardy (1945)

three-dimensionality, its profound speech diversity, which enters the project of style and is its determining factor.[37]

Bakhtin's point highlights that even in the narration of the author, or the direct speech of a highly stylized character like Asgharī exists dissonance and subversion of the perceived comprehensiveness of the author's voice. Bakhtin is very interested in the emergence of the novel and he writes extensively on threshold cases. Aḥmad's work, too, is undeniably written in liminal space, as has been pointed out above. Nevertheless, Bakhtin ascribes a particular hegemony to the novel and a particular flexibility that allows for the inclusion of more works.[38] In the introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*, the editor makes the worthwhile point that Bakhtin is interested in something else altogether from many literary critics. His view of the novel is one that seeks out works that were innovatively anti-canonical through their engagement of three devices mentioned above. Of course, for Bakhtin, these devices succeed in dismantling the authorial intent by introducing dialogical elements to the text.

This discourse relates back to the socio-historical reality of the text and struggles against the unitary language of the author.

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[37]   *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 315

[38]   In the introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*, the editor Michael Holquist writes, "Bakhtin's advantage over everyone else working on novel theory is that he is able to include more texts from the past in his scheme than anyone else and this because paradoxically, he more than others perceives the novel as new. Not new when it is said to have 'arisen,' but new whenever that kind of text made its appearance...a text that merely found its most comprehensive form in Cervantes and those who come after." in *The Dialogic Imagination* see p. xxvii

The prose art presumes a deliberate feeling for the historical and social concreteness of living discourse, as well as its relativity, a feeling for its participation in historical becoming and in social struggle, it deals with discourse that is still warm from that struggle and hostility. [39]

Other critics have noted the existence of this dialogical nature. Asaduddin makes direct reference to a Bakhtinian dialogical nature of the text as does Farrukhi, who writes quite directly on the subject as well, arguing that, "The authorial voice gets submerged in the dialogue and it subverts the didactic intention of the writer and firmly restores the novelistic discourse."[40] These points have been highlighted, but never addressed in-depth in the text. The aim here has been to present in detail the many ways that the text embodies Bakhtinian heteroglossia with the hope that in the following section, the specific characters, dialogues and languages of the text might be analyzed with this heteroglossic quality of the text in mind. It is essential to challenge the idea that the only achievement of Aḥmad's novel was to consolidate a reformist political enterprise of Aḥmad and his contemporaries. To make such an assertion is not only to diminish both the text's literary value and its potential to possess a multiplicity of meanings, but also risks eliding the capacity for those multiple readings or meanings to both represent and shape through its socio-ethical discourse the comportment of its readership.

A pause to address two outstanding gaps in this analysis is in order. Aḥmad offers his own insight on the nature of his story. He calls it a *latīf qiṣṣa*, or what Pritchett writes might be a

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[39] *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 331

[40] See Asif Farrukhi *Hariati Hai ye A'ina Urdu Navil ki Dastan* (Urdu; not consulted directly) however, quoted in Asaduddin (2001) p. 89

"refined, graceful, subtle agreeable story, and not a novel.[41] Yet, as we have also seen, he definitely sought to create something new and this newness has yielded a work worthy of our scrutiny.[42] In leaving behind the standard conventions of the *qiṣṣa'* or the *ḋāstān*, he welcomed the development of characters with whom his daughters could, at once, identify, and benefit from such an identification. This marks a significant break with these other forms. By employing and drawing attention to the existing language diversity and using this language to create a plot immediately recognizable for the women of his time, Aḥmad "plants the seeds of social heteroglossia embedded in words."[43] It is not the aim of this analysis to overly laud Aḥmad's text which, using this Bakhtinian analysis, can only be considered a novel. There remains much work to be done on early-modern texts in Urdu and other Islamicate languages of the Indian sub-continent, and the move to consider Aḥmad's work a novel need not support the modernist view of that genre's superiority. Bakhtin reinforces, however, the contact with an external culture, particularly the literary culture that serves to destabilize the mythologically infused tradition and establish new hegemonic literary paradigms.[44]

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[41]   See Pritchett (2001) in the afterword of *The Bride's Mirror* p. 221

[42]   See below in Chapter Four for a characterization of what I am alluding here might best be qualified as a "bourgeois habitus."

[43]   *The Dialogic Imagination* p. 298

[44]   He writes, "This verbal-ideological decentering will occur only when a national culture loses its sealed-off and self-sufficient character, when it becomes conscious of itself as only one among other cultures and languages. It is this knowledge that will sap the roots of a mythological feeling for language, based as it is on an absolute fusion of ideological meaning with language." *The Dialogic Imagination* p. 370 This point is scarily accurate, but it is important to distinguish between what Bakhtin cites in predominantly Eurocentric contexts and the colonial experience of Indian writers.

Chapter 2

Naẓīr Aḥmad's *Mirāt ul-'Arūs*

In this section, we turn to the text itself to analyze the narrative and the existence of heteroglossia in the text. The previous section outlined a defence for why, when looking at the inner structure of the text and the style of the author, the text exhibits many key stylistic elements of the novel, as determined by Bakhtin. This conclusion, in the analysis of the text, will only be further supported, but the purpose of this textual analysis is to identify and distinguish key elements of the discourse on gender and to historicize the role of woman as evidenced by the text. While this may, at first, seem like an odd enterprise in the absence of female authorship, I would like to pursue this avenue of inquiry for two reasons. First, Bakhtin's development of heteroglossia allows for some negotiation around the notion of female voice as articulated in the text, often against or in conflict with the male author's dictums. Second, the remarkable realism of the text, as noted by numerous male and female authors and critics, permits the reader to analyze these female voices as a close approximation of this reality. The general popularity of the novel, its re-publication into the present-day and the richness of commentary across generations of readers make it an apt document to piece together a makeshift archive for such a study that considers these issues of gender and the role of woman both as the central focus of reform and *as central actors* in those debates.

The Introduction

In the introduction of *Mirāt ul-'arūs*, Aḥmad is in his most authoritative mode. He makes his case for the division of roles in the home - men bear the burdens outside while women are occupied by the home and its management. Women, in managing these affairs well, will ascertain to their own credit both comfort and respectability for the family. For Aḥmad, "The world is like a cart which cannot move without two wheels — man on one side, and woman on the other," but for him it is equally true that "He (meaning God) has given to women… intelligence, thought memory, just the same as to men."[1] Aḥmad also mentions Nur Jahan Begum, Queen Victoria, Zebunissa Begam and Nawab Sikander Begum, and their ruling of not simply homes, but of empires. Aḥmad emphasizes the importance of a basic level of education in the vernacular, but also reasons that too much might not be necessary. In the examples he gives as to why education is important, he argues for the importance of keeping honour and privacy, and not having to rely on men or outsiders to resolve conflict or assist in other delicate affairs. While, in the English translation, the text reads, "I do not deny that too much learning is unnecessary for women," the narrative, even with this overbearing introduction, when taken as a whole, supports the idea that though perhaps "unnecessary," such achievement would nevertheless be met with high regard unlike some of his contemporaries who feared too much education.[2] Aḥmad places importance on household

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[1]   *The Bride's Mirror* p. 7-8

[2]   Ibid. p. 9 I am referring to Thānvī in particular who feared that too much knowledge of writing might lead to women gaining too much access to the outside world.

finances and marital stability and outlines the four most important skills for a woman: reading, writing, needlework and cooking.[3]

In the final pages of his introduction, Aḥmad mentions several examples from poetry and the Qur'an that purportedly speak negatively of women's treachery and deceit.[4] It would be easy to see this as Aḥmad attributing a lower position to women and religious sanction for these attitudes. Instead, it could be read as Aḥmad placing the blame for women's lower position at least partially on woman's own fault with the hopes that such accusations might admonish them into action for they comprise a significant audience for this novel. He implores women to educate themselves and addresses the matter of purdah head-on. In addressing purdah, he takes aim at public opinion as well as custom, but noticeably not religion. He does not go so far as call for the banning of purdah, but does question its grounds.[5] The omission of religion is noticeable, as C.M. Naim has noted, while *Mirāt ul-'arūs* is foccused on the home and the management of that sphere, it is Aḥmad's other novel, *Taubat un-Naṣūh* that is more focussed on Islam and religion. (Naim, 1984)

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[3]   Ibid. p. 10 The inclusion of writing in this list is noteworthy since many of his contemporaries who may have supported basic education for women in their homes frowned upon learning to write as it gave women unfiltered access to the outside world.

[4]   He mentions the line "*verily, as to your deceit, it is appalling*" and two lines of poetry including the truly appalling: *If all of her actions were kind and discreet, Her name would be 'Beat not' - it would not 'be Beat'*, which alludes to the Persian word for woman which also is the imperative for the verb to beat. One way of understanding these allusions could be as satirizing references on the subject of women's status in society. Elsewhere, Aḥmad clearly offers an opposing view and the line of argument for reformers like him is often one that argues for stamping out of customary practices that discriminate against women in favour of evidence in the Qur'an or *aḥādīth* that broadly afford women more rights.

[5]   Ibid. p. 15 He writes, "For you there is little hope of escape from your seclusion. Public opinion and the customs of the country have made a retired life behind the purdah obligatory and incumbent upon women, and in these days the observance of this institution is more rigid than ever."

Aḥmad compares the experiential education of men in the "out-of-door life" to that of the secluded woman and reinforces that, given this reality, the need is even greater for women to be properly educated.[6] Isolating the introduction from the rest of the book distinguishes the section's style and discerns the most undistilled and unrefracted authorial voice present in the novel. Though this authorial voice has been critiqued as setting out to establish a new modern patriarchy, the introduction highlights Aḥmad's pragmatism in writing this novel in a climate that was not always sympathetic to his views.[7] Instead, as Aamer Hussein concedes, it would be more accurate to understand Aḥmad's views as striving to bring the discussion of equal educational rights and subsequently domestic rights to the forefront of public debate; even in his introduction Aḥmad makes clear the transformative nature of education for women and this leaves *him*, oddly enough and uncomfortably so, as the progenitor of much of the discourse on women.[8]

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[6]   Ibid. same page. Here, too, he takes a kind view of women. "Except in reading and writing, there is positively no method by which you can develop your intellects. Indeed, if you were to compare them with men, the need of education for women is even greater."

[7]   The critique I have in mind here is Ruby Lal's work - though others have echoed Lal's sentiments. Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khan, the leader of the Aligarh movement was not initially in favour of extending the educational reforms of the movement to women. See Lelyveld (1978). For an appraisal of this position see Hussein (2003) who writes, "Naẓīr Aḥmad, whose importance as a stylistic innovator and embryonic realist is conceded, is nevertheless consistently discussed as a conservative colonial lackey by the critics of the left." p. 72

[8]   Ibid. p. 72 Hussein continues, "And yet it was Naẓīr Aḥmad who first raised, albeit with diffidence, the question of women and change in the context of a living social situation. This, in itself, is enough to reevaluate his importance; for predictably, the absence of women's voices amongst those of the founding fathers of our fiction is a deafening echo."

Akbarī

There is no doubt that in Akbarī, Asgharī's older sister, Aḥmad meant to expose his version of the antithesis to the good virtuous and pious young woman of his post-1857 *sharīf* community. Yet, oftentimes through humour, Akbarī's voice intervenes logically in the discourse. At one point she confronts her husband, "Ask this old mother of yours whether she got her son married, or purchased a slave-girl for him." [9] But Aḥmad's crafting of her character might at times call for repudiation and merit criticism, especially for contemporary sensibilities. When discussing the mixing of classes, the *sharīf* born Akbarī and her non-*sharīf* friends, Aḥmad takes a clear position in favour of preserving that status among his young characters, a status which, under threat and in flux, he clearly felt was important to safeguard. Yet, elsewhere, she speaks truth to power and through humour her opposition makes sense even to Aḥmad's diffident liberalism. What stands out about Akbarī is that, despite her shortcomings, her voice exists and offers a cautionary tale, for mothers and young women readers of the book.[10] At times, the reader feels sorry for her; as she tries to get a good deal from a beguiling old woman, she's ruthlessly taken advantage of and loses the entirety of her collection of fine jewelry. At other moments, that feeling is simply one of disdain at her

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[9]   *The Bride's Mirror*, p. 22 It seems appropriate to recall what Bakhtin has to say about comedy in the novel. On page p. 317 in *The Dialogic Imagination* there are a series of examples of ironic characterization, where Bakhtin argues that some speech or narration will not simply convey "a simple authorial statement" but instead will reflect the norms of his time, ironically, or in this case, satirically.

[10]   Aḥmad notes in the story that her poor education was the result of excessive coddling by her grandmother. Elsewhere he appeals for mothers not too smother their children and stunt their intellectual growth.

laziness, but overall Akbarī's story is cautionary, advocating for education in a unforgiving colonized world.

Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah (d. 2000), a noted politician, author and critic, adopts this sympathetic point of view.[11] She adds that for women of her generation - the late 1930s and 1940s - Akbarī might not be such a terrible type of woman, she's the warmer personality in *Mirāt ul-'arūs* and much of her fault seems to stem from her boredom with her customary and pedestrian lifestyle. Her desires to leave the joint family are earnest, but as Aḥmad crafts her story we see that she is utterly unequipped to run her own home. Asgharī, who would have no trouble running her own home, makes the decision to live with and assist with the operations of her in-laws home. Despite this, what remains important in the text is that her voice is faithfully depicted and, for readers, was identifiable as a sister, mother, cousin or other familiar relation. It's never mentioned explicitly, but often implied in scholarship, that Akbarī might have been the true feminist of this narrative. Her refusal to be co-opted into the reformist schemes imparts an essential counter-narrative for the discourse in the novel and, while, for her, even marginal success is elusive, she does occasionally, rationally subvert the social paradigms through her disregard for its norms.

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[11]   Suhrawardy writes, "Naẕīr Aḥmad did not set out to justify Akbarī but to hold her up as a warning and to point out what the consequences of impulsiveness and thoughtlessness were. Naẕīr Aḥmad was not a romantic writer but a realistic one, and in real life caution and good sense always pay." *Critical Survey of the Urdu Novel*, p. 50

Asgharī

We can now turn to Asgharī, the protagonist of Aḥmad's tale, keeping in mind throughout how Bakhtin sees, "social heteroglossia enter(ing) the novel primarily in the direct speeches of his characters, in dialogues."[12] In this way, Asgharī, through her own language, though autonomous and calling upon its own ethics and beliefs, refracts the aims of Naẕīr Aḥmad in the text. The extent of Asgharī's semantic and literary impact was - and continues to be - immeasurable.[13] The seventh chapter of the book turns to Asgharī's story. Aḥmad writes that she, "acquired excellence, every kind of natural intelligence," adding, "good sense, self-restraint, modesty, consideration for others — all these qualities God had bestowed upon her."[14] From the beginning we see these virtues in Asgharī's demeanour. She refuses a larger trouse to be taken with her into her new home and she tactfully ensures this so as to not offend her sister. Asgharī is often referred to as an honorary patriarch, being alternatively referred to as "sonnie," "brother" and "your honour" by men of her own generation as well as that of her fathers.[15] While this clearly indicates a social setting where male is neutral, it also

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[12]   *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 316

[13]   Bakhtin writes, "The area occupied by an important character's voice must in any event be broader than his direct and "actual" words." *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 320 I quote Bakhtin here because Asgharī, Akbarī and Husnāra have gained a degree of cultural currency as symbols. In *Critical Survey of the Urcu Novel*, p. 48 Suhrawardy notes, "How often are the various situations and phrases from 'Mirat ul 'Arus' and 'Banāt un Na'sh quoted! How many mothers have smiled indulgently at their daughters' boastfulness and told them not to be a Husnāra, and how often their petulant boasts and naughtiness have been likened to Akbarīs!"

[14]   *The Bride's Mirror*, p. 54

[15]   This has also been noticed by Frances Pritchett, who mentions it in the English versions' afterword. Four examples in full are: "In accordance with your honour's order." p. 94 "The Maulavi said: 'Listen, my brother!" p. 95 "'You tell me, sonnie, who will do the housekeeping now?" P. 108 "'Well, brother Tamizdar bahu, so you are going away.'" p. 156

indicates the extremely high regard the men in the family held for Asgharī. Later, she addresses this neutralism head-on. "Asgharī said to (her husband): 'It is an extraordinary thing that you cannot do anything which is contrary to your habits, and yet you wish us to act contrary to ours.'"[16] She confronts the idea that the women wait, anticipate and accept the actions of men, but that in this case the husband is clearly out of line and against her own ethics. While one cannot dispute that the central aim of Aḥmad's work is to reconfigure the landscape of ethics and values for the *sharīf*, it would be remiss to think that in this enterprise women are exempt from shaping or appropriating the discourse for themselves.[17]

The argument could be made that it is Dūrāndesh Khān, Asgharī's father, and not Asgharī, who crafts the social views throughout the narrative espousing a dogmatic conservatism. The reader never encounters him, but twice he imposes his ethos onto Asgharī and the reader through letters he sends to his daughter. In his first letter, written after Asgharī's marriage for which he was absent, he writes paternalistically and draws heavy-handedly from various religious and parable-esque anecdotes that indicate the inferior and subservient role of women in marriage.

> The creation of woman was merely to insure the happiness of man, and it
> is woman's function to keep man happy. It is greatly to be regretted that so
> few women in the world fulfil this task. God has given to man a somewhat

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16   Ibid. p. 115

17   In Chapter Four, I shift my critique from the purely literary to an anthropological mode and in doing, so attempt to excavate how this appropriation and moulding takes place, to what degree these actions are agentive, and what in this case can agency really mean.

higher status than to woman — not only by His command, for He has also given to men's bodies greater physical strength, and to their mental faculties a greater perspicuity...In addition to love, she is bound to show him respect...it is a great folly in a woman to suppose that her husband is on the same level with herself..the talk is generally about what kind of treatment 'so and so' expects from her husband. [18] (original emphasis)

The inclusion of Dūrāndesh Khān's words serve to set the tone of his generation's discourse on gender. As the most conservative voice in the text, his words contradict even the outlook put forth by Aḥmad in the introduction. Yet Asgharī, the ever-dutiful daughter, keeps the letter in her book of daily lessons and Aḥmad tells us that she refers to it often, consulting and "meditating upon its contents regularly everyday."[19] What does one make of the presence of such inegalitarian language in the text and the adherence of the story's leading female to the whims of this language? My own reading of these passages is that the choice of certain phrasings: "merely," "greatly regretted," "great folly" exhibit an ironic intonation in his words. The author's choices of anecdotes regarding women who assert their authority are farcical: Tiger-like men, women who put paan under their feet and feed it to their husbands and so forth. There is great humour in having Dūrāndesh Khān write, "A very simple receipt for taming them is being agreeable and submissive, and every *silly* woman who aims at bringing her husband under subjection by the *violent assertion of her own authority* makes a great mistake"

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[18]   *The Bride's Mirror*, p. 62

[19]   Ibid. p. 66

[20] There is room for interpretation, but it would follow that in the context of the novel as a whole, a self-admitted reformist tract, that these moments of extreme misogyny are present in the text for the purpose of being countered. Aḥmad does so through satirizing this conservative figure's speech. Aḥmad wrote *Mirāt ul-ʿarūs* in a climate not entirely favourable to his aims and thus, humour was likely the most suitable medium for engaging with views like those of Dūrāndesh Khān. For Aḥmad, in the shifting landscape of middle-class nobility, the modernizing project encompassed tensions between a need to engage these issues in the public arena while safeguarding the private sphere from colonial meddling. Dūrāndesh Khān is symbolic of these negotiations; away, supporting his family with a post in the colonial administration, he sought to continue to regulate what took place in his home, with mixed success, as Aḥmad underscores.[21]

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[20]   Ibid. p. 63 (my own emphasis)

[21]   Asiya Alam best captures this tension in her analysis of the discourse on polygyny in the early 1900s: "After the establishment of British government, Indian Muslims, especially those who had served the Mughal rulers, had to come to terms with the realities, rules and institutions of the changed political climate. As they evolved into a professional class claiming the ashraf position, one of the guarantees of 'respectability' and 'Islam' was the home and the domestic space." Later in the same article she writes, "The struggle between the 'new' lifestyle, on the one hand, where education and employment were new markers of 'respectability', and the more conventional family structure on the other, where marriage, especially of young women, occurred at an early age and education at higher levels, after adulthood was seen as a violation of filial honour and duty. She refers to the novel *Guḍar ke Lal* (see section III of the literature review) which, "reflects this conflict within the same generation and between cousins. Surayya and Hasan Raza are the prototypes of the 'respectable' protagonist common to ashraf novels." This is a reference to the archetype defined by Asgharī. "They are astute in understanding human relationships, adjust to demanding situations and, most importantly, desire a good education to acquire greater social mobility." Alam, Asiya. "Polygyny, Family and Sharafat: Discourses Amongst North Indian Muslims, Circa 1870-1918." *Modern Asian Studies.* 45.3 (2011): 631-668. Print. p.650-666

Asgharī and Muhammad Kāmil

Several chapters are devoted entirely to Asgharī's relations with her husband. We see him growing tired of not being employed and *he* consults his wife for advice. She repeatedly shoots down the ideas he proposes, each time employing logic to kindly point out the shortcomings of his plan. Finally, after hearing him out, she offers him an idea to join the British administration and in the end convinces him of the merits. Later when his mentor sets off for a new post it is Asgharī who encourages him to go. When offered the post he is honoured, but not convinced. Of course, his mother does not want him to go and Asgharī cleverly lets on that she does not want him to go, but advises that he does for the sake of the family. Ahmad writes, "In short, Asgharī put the yoke on Muhammad Kamil by force, and made him inclined to go."[22] Then, upon his setting off, Asgharī writes her father-in-law to have the Chief make a recommendation on Muhammad Kamil's behalf. This results in him being appointed to a higher post and the money he is allotted goes up greatly. However, soon corrupted by his newfound wealth, he gradually stops writing regularly and Asgharī decides to travel to him in order to set him straight. She travels alone to Siyalkot and upon reaching there quickly goes about ridding her husband of his bad company, putting an end to the bribery, gambling, courtesans etc. to which he has fallen prey. At every sign of her husband's petulance, rascality and waywardness, she tactfully and cleverly sets him straight, at times at risk to her own respectability and reputation.[23]

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[22]   *The Bride's Mirror*, p. 151 Later Ahmad attributes the success of the young man to Asgharī - "induced only by Asgharī's persuasion." (p. 153)

[23]   See below for the detailed conversations she has with an Aunt, Tamāsha Khānam, about the permissibility of

The development of Muhammad Kāmil's character adds to the diversity in the discourse at work in Aḥmad's novel. There is more to him than comparative weakness and deference to his wife. At numerous points in his character development, Aḥmad makes points related broadly to the state of education and society. As he dedicates himself to his studies - at Asgharī's suggestion - there is a brief discussion of the declining value of Arabic and Persian study versus the merits of studying accounting.[24] When he begins looking for work, he suggests going to work with his father or in another court of a "native chief," but Asgharī knocks down this idea on the grounds that these rulers were old and their influence waning. Instead, she suggests going and seeking employment with the British. Not only does Asgharī "put the yoke" on her husband, but she does so according to the modernist vision espoused by her, and Aḥmad, throughout the novel.

Asgharī and the Other Female Characters of Mirāt ul-'arūs

Asgharī's first challenge in her new home is to confront the thievery of the home's maidservant known as Mama Azmat. Aḥmad writes, "In short, Mama Azmat ruled the house as if she had been a man," as she possessed an unquestioned control of things in the house. [25] Asgharī's own Mama, Kifāyat Nissa - meaning economy among womankind - helps unmask some of what is going on, though Mama Azmat's treachery runs deep and she devises several plans to cause rifts between Asgharī, her husband and mother-in-law. Finally, Asgharī appeals

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taking the actions she employs to set him straight.

[24]   *The Bride's Mirror* p. 115-116

[25]   Ibid. p. 68

to her father-in-law, who upon returning home at the request of his son — sent at Asgharī's request — is very much reassured by Asgharī's grasp of the situation, going so far as to address her as his equal when settling the accounts. Mama Azmat's deceit and thievery is uncovered and she is kicked out of the house. The father-in-law is so furious he seeks to send her to the police station, but Asgharī intervenes and has her simply dismissed, in a rare show of compassionate solidarity outside the bounds of her own *sharīf* associations.

In the episode of Asgharī travelling to Siyalkot to rectify the misdeeds of her husband, the reader is privy to another important dialogue, between Tamasha Khanam, an aunt, and Asgharī. Asgharī, though Aḥmad states she has already made up her mind, calls upon Tamāsha Khānam to consult. They discuss the permissibility of a woman to travel or not and several of their remarks are worth noting.

> Tamāsha Khānam: "'Sister, has one of us gone mad? The idea of your leaving the city to go wandering about to Siyalkot!...What will the relations say? No one out of our family has ever gone away from home to this day.'"

> Asgharī: "'And if you talk about the family custom -- well, in former days there was no dawk, nor railways, nor were the roads frequented with passengers; it was a very difficult matter for women to travel -- that is why they did not move about. But now, what difficulty is there?'"

> Tamāsha Khānam: "'It is not proper for you to go without being asked.'"[26]

Asgharī again appeals to the assurances of modernity which in this case allow for the ease of female transport. She brushes aside the impermissibility of it and cites the need of her husband's earnings to secure the well-being of the family. Not only is she unabashedly unafraid of defying custom, but she turns the argument around on the *khānam*, or lady, and casts her actions as fulfilling obligations and taking responsibility for the family. As Aḥmad mentions, she has already made her decision before consulting the aunt, it is as if she is simply going through the customary motions, employing the logic she knows can counter the concerns of her elders.

In fact, when Tamāsha Khānam says that Asgharī should just focus on her school and use her own earnings to support the family, she replies, "Why, look you, are women's earnings any earnings at all? If families are to be reared upon women's earnings, why should there be men?"[27] This response is potentially a difficult one to consider in relation to the other assertions that I am making about Asgharī. Presented with the opportunity to be independent, at least economically, thereby not only managing the home, but also providing for it, Asgharī rules out such an option. She reinforces the social arrangements that render her earnings worthless. However, one cannot ignore that she *makes* this decision, she could have decided to the contrary and within the narrative, we see that it is acceptable for women at the time to earn for the family in this fashion as attested to by the examples of other *ustanīs* to which Aḥmad compares Asgharī. Equally noteworthy is that, despite the strict division of labour - with one form of labour rewarded through salary, the other noticeably without - the moment of this dialogue occurs at the very moment when Asgharī is on her way to subordinate her

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[27]   Ibid. p. 155

husband to her will and against his own! Though potentially contradictory, Asgharī makes the decision to rescue her husband and not, as Tamāsha Khānam would have it, cut him out and survive independently. This internal contradiction adds to the depth of Asgharī's character and makes her negotiation and bargaining with other actors all the more believable in the context of the period.

The most central narrative arc of *Mirāt ul-'arūs* is Ashgari's formation of the school and the education of many young girls from the city, most notable among them Mahmūda, her younger sister-in-law, and Husnāra, the daughter of the most affluent and respected family in the *mohalla*. Husnāra's mother is made aware of Asgharī's esteem and respectability when looking for a governess, Asgharī accepts the position while foregoing the salary. This is a key point in the narrative, as it permits Asgharī to leverage this family later when she seeks the betrothal of Husnāra's brother to Mahmūda. Mahmūda and Husnāra become the monitors of the school and develop in their own right as young leaders that set the example for others to follow. There is a lengthy description of the state of other schools in the city at the time and the conduct of other governesses as well as an obvious critique of the manual drudgery required in other schools. In opposition to these conditions, Asgharī teaches the *Qur'an*, other relevant religious and ethical texts, writing, sewing, embroidery and lacework which in turn was sold in the market with the profit going towards an endowment that was built up for the school.[28]

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[28] Naẓīr Aḥmad outlines his ideal curriculum in the sequel to *Mirāt ul-'arūs*, *Banāt un-nāsh*.

In one scene, Asgharī and her two protegés encounter the mother, Safīhan, of one of the other girls at the school who accuses them of teaching her daughter nothing of worth. Asgharī counters with several important points that pertain to the girls learning to deal with the "business of the world" and the "art of expressing themselves."[29] She emphasizes practicality, but also agency. The ability to cook, to sew, to do accounting are all emphasized, but so too are learning to express oneself and to challenge norms, storytelling and creativity, and the value of each of these talents in the home for securing one's place and the well-being of the family.

The extensive dialogue between the older guard of women and Asgharī, as well as the narration of a story by Fazilāt - Safīhan's daughter - to the other girls in the presence of her mother delves into the heart of the subject of women in a changing society. There is an extensive discussion of the downfall of the Indian nobility, of the role of Queen Elisabeth in England and in India, of the parenting of Muslim women in Delhi, and of purdah. Fazilāt's fictitious story that she recounts to the other girls is about a king who has only a daughter and is instructing her how to rule. The framing of the story read by a young girl in Asgharī's school, serves to reinforce the dialogue between Asgharī and Safīhan whose reaction to the ruler of England and India being a woman is a mixture of appalledness and awe. "'I say, mistress, is a *woman a king*...What can *she* do if she is a woman? I cannot bring myself to believe that a woman by nature can do king's work." [30] Asgharī responds by invoking the

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[29]   Ibid. p. 136 "I try to make them useful for the business of the world, which will fall upon their heads before many days are over." "They acquire a clear elocution by rehearsing stories, and become more and more practised in the art of expressing themselves correctly." (p. 138)

[30]   Ibid. p. 140 (original emphasis)

Begams of Bhopal and defending a woman's ability to govern and defend her subjects equally well. As Fazilāt reads the story, Asgharī questions her extensively and in their exchange of questions and responses, the events of the deposing of Bahadur Shah come to light as explained by Fazilāt. This rhetorical device frames the narration of the downfall of the shah in the responses of a young girl and serves to heighten the verisimilitude of the experience of the life for Muslim society and specifically Muslim women as recounted in Aḥmad's novel. All this is framed in the form of a lesson between Asgharī and her students and throughout Safīhan challenges Asgharī ethos.

> Safīhan: "'What talk is there of English women? They are altogether a different kind of women. How are we to take after them? The gad about outside the house... Goodness knows what kind of mothers they are."
>
> Asgharī: "In the mutiny time our family took refuge in a (jat) village where there was no custom of the purdah; all the young married girls went about outside the house. But... I observed such a modesty and propriety of demeanour among those women -- going about as they did, as I would that God might grant us women of the purdah."[31]

Asgharī was genuinely impressed by these women. She clearly places the values of modesty, etiquette, and religious values above the cultural dictates of purdah and arrives at the conclusion based on personal experience that such an arrangement as those of the *jats* (a

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[31]   Ibid. p. 143

particular Hindu caste) might be preferable. She does not eschew the view that these qualities are important for women, but does demonstrate that there are multiple ways of achieving those standards. To this anecdote she adds more remarks, appealing abroad this time:

> True, the love which these (British) women have is tempered with reason. It is not a mad fondness like that of mothers here, who prevent their children from reading, and deny them the chance of acquiring any accomplishments. You may call that love, but in reality they are sowing thorns for their children to reap. They allow their children to grow up ill-disciplined, and bring discredit upon the very name of love.[32]

In this response to Safīhan, Asgharī denounces the practices to which Aḥmad ascribes to Akbarī's impoverished *adab*.[33] Throughout these chapters where Safīhan plays a central role, Asgharī is her most confrontational. With less reserve than in the rest of the text, she reproves Safīhan, at times belittling her for her ignorance. She makes an example of the woman and the intelligence of her students stands in stark contrast, not only with regard to facts and intellect, but also as evidence of two competing paradigms' capacity to conceive of women in agentive positions. This capacity is a remarkable aspect of Aḥmad's character development in the younger generation. There exists in his female characters a willingness to question the status

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[32]   p. 143

[33]   For a lengthy discussion of *adab* in this time period see Metcalf, Barbara. *Moral Conduct and Authority*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. Print. specifically as it pertains to this study in this volume see Naim, C.M. "Prize-Winning Adab: A Study of Five Urdu Books Written in Response to the Allahabad Government Gazette Notification." p. 290-314 and Metcalf's own contribution "Islamic Reform and Islamic Women: Maulānā Thānawis *Jewelry of Paradise*" p. 184-195

quo and, in mediated ways, to negotiate, bargain with, subordinate, circumvent and subvert these norms.

Husnāra and Mahmūda

While Aḥmad emphasizes the success of Asgharī and her role in securing the marriage, the reader gets the sense that the narratives of Husnāra and Mahmūda are similarly central. Husnāra's tremendous transformation, from her roguish adolescence to a refined intellectual young woman, with fine penmanship and a strong command of Persian signifies the potential for change, not through divine provenance, but through education and self-reform. Thus, importantly, it is Husnāra's character that makes the narrative transformative. Mahmūda, is praised for her God-given attributes.[34] This reference to God-given stands as a contrasting narrative element in opposition to Husnāra who accomplished these things through self-reform. My reading of the text is that two competing ideologies coexist alongside each other throughout the development of the plot. One perspective views life's potential as *strictly* God-given.[35] The other competing view sees these qualities as acquired and mastered, as evidenced by Husnāra's transformation and by Asgharī's own development from averagely capable to

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[34]   Mahmūda's list of qualities according to Aḥmad are, "'Modesty, consideration for others, good manners, amiability, self-possession under all circumstances, every kind of accomplishment -- reading, writing, needlework, cooking.'" In trying to secure the marriage of Mahmūda to the brother of Husnāra, Asgharī implores, "'That she is my sister-in-law and my pupil had nothing to do with it. No, the girl herself was created full of all good qualities by God.'" *The Bride's Mirror*, p. 164

[35]   Ruby Lal's (2008) understanding of the text uniquely includes this perspective. She describes the existing understanding of the day as such when she writes of Asgharī in the above scene talking to Safīhan. "(Asgharī) points out the difference between (ordinary women and those who rule kingdoms or empires) by saying that when God grants high ranks (*rutba baḍa karna*), he also grants such people the capacity (*haunsala*) and wisdom (*'aql*) accordingly." p. 30

extraordinarily impressive. Taken together, they offer a compelling and modern orientation in the context of the period for it is indicative of the struggle of the period and the negotiation of religious and political orientations. The literature, manuals and tracts by men like Mumtāz 'Alī and Maulānā Thānvī, while inscribing the rights of women by varying degrees to the confines of domesticity, were innovative in their espousal of the belief in self-reform and in women's equality in the eyes of Islamic theology and jurispredence; on what God creates, what women can achieve and their rights under God's law. Though Aḥmad only glosses this shift in the introduction, these two characters demonstrate the manifestation of his view. Moreover, that the more liberal progenitor of these subsequent figures adhered to a less egalitarian view of women as full Muslims is unconvincing and counterintuitive.

The story arrives at its conclusion as Asgharī arranges for the marriage of her sister-in-law Mahmūda to the brother of Husnāra - Mahmūda's co-monitor at the school. Her aunt, who is not keen on the plan to accept Mahmūda into the family as she sees it fit for her own daughter to be the wife, visits Asgharī to debate this proposal. Asgharī, through the esteem she has earned with Husnāra's family, makes her case to Husnāra that, combined with Husnāra's father family wealth and the good upbringing of Mahmūda, there exists a real recipe for success in the family. Through this logic, Husnāra manages to win her parents over. What emerges from these chapters is the new importance of education and the safeguarding of respectability as the assurance of status into the future in this new *sharīf* community. This combination wins over birthright and the inherited wealth that was associated with it.

When faced with the impending costs of the wedding, Mahmūda's parents are worried, but again Asgharī, with great cleverness and entrepreneurism manages to raise a substantial wealth and members of both sides of the marriage party are astonished. In the new bride,

Mahmūda, the family is more than pleased; we witness the father, a Hakim — an educated doctor or judge — test Mahmūda and she passes his tests wonderfully.[36] Content, he sets out for hajj and leaves his estate to his son and daughter-in-law. In turn, Asgharī, who remains close to Mahmūda, is much sought out for her opinion on many things and Aḥmad praises *her* for having come from nothing to attain a great deal of influence and power over the course of her life.

Conclusion

Finally, Aḥmad personifies his characters in their names or nicknames: Mizajdar bahu (Akbarī, the great) is the one who, ironically, "has a proper sense of her dignity" or more realistically "one who has a temper;" Tamizdar bahu (Asgharī, the small) is the one "having discretion;" Dūrāndesh Khan is the far-sighted; and Kifayat Nissa is the one who possesses "economy among womankind." These characterization serve to reinforce, sometimes humorously, the development of the personalities Aḥmad incorporates into the novel. Across the story we see several references to practices that Aḥmad cautions against. The final chapter contains a second letter written by Dūrāndesh Khan to his daughter. The first part discusses the importance of relations and the link between parents and their children. He outlines a cosmology of death and the human desire to preserve it. He laments the practice of having children to "carry on the name" as much as he does the living of life for one's estates and property to be left within the family. He laments the disregard children have for their elders

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36   *The Bride's Mirror*, p. 186 "The Hakim saheb found his son's bride to be thouroughly educated, and of great natural ability, and full of tact."

both in general day to day relations and specifically in the treatment of the elderly. Elsewhere, there is a small passage on female infanticide among Arabs and Rajputs; a comment on the ridiculousness of the expenses in the preparations of a wedding;[37] and an interesting passage where Asgharī scolds the the aunt for having suggested "that there was any girl for sale."[38] Each of these moments touches on key issues of debate on women and reinforces Aḥmad's modernist perspective. Moreover, the stark contrast between Dūrāndesh Khan's first and second letters may have been in itself an attempt to reflect the changing attitude - or a need to do so. His rabid misogyny in the first letter is augmented by an near absence of the mention of women in the second correspondence. Instead, his discourse is one on some of the compulsions of religion and the gap between society and these ideals. Aḥmad implies as much, concluding, "We may call it a story for children, but in sooth it is a sermon for their elders."[39]

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[37]   Ibid. p. 177

[38]   Ibid. p. 168

[39]   Ibid. p. 187

Chapter 3

Voices at the edge of sharīf historiography

Having read the text and examined the narrative's numerous female characters, I turn to a discussion of the state of the historiography of the post-1857 period, in order to analyze how *Mirāt ul-'arūs* has previously been understood and elaborate a post-colonial critique of this understanding. While women are of course at the core of the discourse that surrounds *Mirāt ul-'arūs*, before paying particular attention to women as symbolically relevant in mapping the debate, it is important to outline the discursive parameters and genealogy of the debate. To start, however, it is worth briefly mentioning again some of Aḥmad's biographical details. He writes that the original intent for his story was to encourage education among the female members of his house, but this is likely to be a literary tool and it is more likely that he wrote in response to the colonial Lieutenant Governor's call for modern works in the vernacular.[1] Aḥmad initially studied in more traditional educational settings under the maulavīs and muftīs of his hometown in Bijnor and only after, traveled to Delhi to study at the Delhi college. It was not until many years later when working for the Department of Public Instruction that he acquired a knowledge of English.

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[1] See Naim (1984) in Metcalf's *Moral Conduct and Authority*, p. 190-214

Keeping in mind these biographical details outlined here and above, I will turn to the historical placement of his text. As evidenced by Fuad Naeem's claims, the Deoband have been viewed as backwards-oriented traditionalists who stood in opposition to the modern ventures of Sir Sayyed Aḥmad Khān and the members of his Aligarh movement.[2] Usamah Ansari's work, like others, has debunked this notion that posits a binary to conceptualize these two contemporary movements (2010). He argues, in his article on Maulānā 'Ali Ashraf Thānvī, a popular and prolific member of the Deobandi *ulema*, that this binary is an ineffective means of situating these scholars. My own reading of Naẓīr Aḥmad precludes positing him against Thānvi in this binary; I concur with Ansari's argument that Aḥmad and his contemporaries at Aligarh cannot be viewed as modernist in opposition to the traditionalist Deoband. While the Aligarh movement held antagonistic views of the *ulama*, I make the corollary argument to Ansari's that, in so far as the Deobandi's revivalism drew on many modern colonial systems and forged its own brand of modernism, "shariatic," as Ansari suggests, the Aligarh leaders also relied heavily on religion, tradition, custom and Perso-Indic Islamic epistemology in their reformist ventures.

The extreme opposite view of Naeem's has also been put forth. This perspective, separated the reform efforts of the *sharīf* polity spatially, dividing their efforts into those of the outer and the inner domains, and as such views the production of the inner domain as espousing a feudal and patriarchal understanding of the community and the orientation of life in the private

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[2]   Naeem, Fuad. 'A Traditional Islamic Response to the Rise of Modernism'. In Joseph Lumbard (ed.), Islam, Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition: Essays by Western Muslim

Scholars (pp. 79–120). Bloomington: World Wisdom Inc. 2004. Print.

domestic sphere. Ruby Lal, who best epitomizes this, in relation to Naẓīr Aḥmad's work, writes of Asgharī, "this is not the 'new woman' of a world caught between tradition and modernity, but one that lives the ethic of an inherited sharīf culture by maintaining the ideals of domesticity. It is a reorientation, a recasting of *sharīf* practices, spaces and networks."[3] She draws her understanding from analysing the circulation of Perso-Arabic texts, including, among others, *Akhlāq-i-Nasiri*, the 13th century work by Nasīruddīn al-Tūsī which gained importance in Mughal ruler Akbār's court in the 16th century. She adds that Sādi's *Gulistan* and Kai Ka'ūs'*Qābūs-Nāma* also comprised some of the core readings on ethics of young *sharīf* men and women of Aḥmad's milieu.[4] Across the spectrum of analysis of the text in secondary sources are arguments situating Naẓīr Aḥmad's works on both sides of the binary, some arguing its contributions to modernist works of reform, others asserting its role in re-solidifying a particular cultural identity, deemed traditional by this scholarship as under threat from liberalising colonial forces.

Idioms for Indian Historiography

This raises a two questions, both somewhat rhetorical, which posited alongside one another, help to destabilize the binary by critiquing both those who posit Aḥmad as the liberal in the presence of more conservative Deobandi *ulama* and those who lump the both together in their common patriarchal aims. First, if a particular vein of scholarship does consider the

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[3]   Lal, Ruby. "Gender and Sharafat: Re-Reading Naẓīr Aḥmad." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. 18.1 (2008): 15-30. Print. p. 27-28

[4]   *Coming of Age* (2013) p. 141-142

Deoband movement as the traditionalist-revivalist contingent of Indian colonial history, then what how does one view the assertions made of Naẓīr Aḥmad and other prominent figures in the Aligarh movement as espousing their own, clearly different interpretation of traditional, particularly Islamicate values and ethics? Second, if Naẓīr Aḥmad is understood to have been a leader of a class of modernist politico-literary figures, then how can one understand the explicit religious overtones in his work? In situating these two questions together, they reveal the internal conflicts of distinguishing accurate idioms for characterizing reformist aims that Vasudha Dalmia suggests in her work. Her work builds on the idioms of Ranajit Guha's work who offered three broad idioms - colonial, comprising all things British; indigenous, comprising the "traditional;" and Indian, modern yet distinctively so - the latter of which is understood to be a synthesis of its two former counterparts.[5] What these idioms reveal, in dealing with the Hindu and nationalist (but not uniquely Hindu-nationalist) discourse of the late 19th century for Dalmia, is the need for viable categories that distinguish the socio-historical phenomena of the period as neither purely a derivative of British modernism nor as explicit reaffirmations of traditional modalities. Similarly, in the development of the *sharīf* polity, Muslims sought to appropriate modernist and Indo-Islamic religious discourses to produce their own identities. Despite these developments, the question remains as to what alternative lines of inquiry in investigating *Mirāt ul-'Arūs* - and as we will see alongside it, *Bihishtī Zevār* - can be achieved either within, or perhaps entirely outside of this third idiom?

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[5]   See Guha, Ranajit. *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997. Print. and Dalmia, Vasudha. *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

Both clearly fit the mold of the proposed composite, yet they differ significantly suggesting there remains room to continue to develop new and increasingly nuanced idioms.

As Partha Chatterjee and others have articulated regarding the nationalist project in India, one of the defining aspects of the colonial experience for nation-builders (comprised of course predominantly by the elite) was the demarcation of public and private life as separate. While the separation of the private and the public sphere is not necessarily a characterization specific to the social structures in colonial Bengal, he argues that this division was further characterized by the idea that the public sphere was "masculine" and private sphere was "feminine," and thus, subject to different relations to colonial thought.[6] Whereas in the public sphere, colonial idioms possessed a greater currency, in the private sphere, nationalists were more successful in deploying modern Indian idioms in discursive exchanges. Thus, the conflation seen above in categorizing both the Deoband and scholars at Aligarh, I argue, seems more easily reimagined and corrected when placed into this framework of private and public. In the public sphere, the leaders of the Aligarh movement operated with a more colonially influenced mindset — they established schools, curricula, and various other institutions and institutional apparatuses neatly modelled after the British, though of course still with emphasis on Islamic science and Islamo-Persianate knowledge forms. In the private sphere, these same leaders sought to reconfigure — as it pertains to the object of our study — ideals for women's honour, moral life and ethics, but also sought to extend these ideals for all

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6   See Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories.* Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993. Print. From henceforth referred to as *The Nation and Its Fragments*. Therefore, what he aims to establish is how this masculine sphere interacted more directly with colonial thought and actively sought to protect the private, feminized sphere from being sullied by contact with the outer sphere. Chapter 4 fraws heavily from the two chapters of this volume focussed on women. p. 116-157

sharīf muslims. In the contradictory associations of Naẕīr Aḥmad's work with both the "modern" and "traditional" contingents of these historical movements we've discussed, what is then elided in both cases is that such projects were not wholly on either side of the binary, and were very much in dialogue with one another, developing, not in isolation, but mutually through contestation and compromise resulting in *various* hybrids.

Public and Private Spheres

For the purposes of this research, also invested in the study of gender in the context of these texts, I maintain that Aḥmad's text possesses various elements which might be read as emancipatory, while other aspects are appropriately conceived as oppressive.[7] However, it is important to note, that particularly in the case of these texts, this liberatory-repressive dichotomy closely mimics this modernist-traditional binary that is being debunked. The next chapter will investigate those claims in greater detail and demonstrate the complexity of many aspects of the narrative which do not neatly operate strictly in either of these two manners of the dichotomy. First having outlined Chatterjee's discussion of the spheres of debate in nationalist discourse, I now turn to the female voices that emerge from Naẕīr Aḥmad's text to posit their role framed in these terms. I draw from Francesca Orsini's work, who in following both Guha and Dalmia, poses the idea of normative and critical voices in the public sphere of nationalist discourse.[8] Given Orsini's characterization of the normative voice, I suggest that

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[7]   The same has been argued about *Bihishtī Zevār* by Thānvī, and as I argue in the following paragraphs, studying these two texts together offers a great deal of nuance *within* the idioms put forth by Dalmia and Guha.

[8]   See Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–40: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.

Naẓīr Aḥmad, in his authorial role, comprises a normative voice in the debate of education reform and in the extension of such a reformist project to women. I further suggest that, keeping in mind that the book was originally written under the guise of "private use," — Aḥmad claims that it was written first as an entertaining story for his daughters and only later submitted to the competition for vernacular compositions — the text performs prescriptive and ideal values, carrying them from the private sphere into the public debate. In doing so the female characters, relegated to the private sphere, force the reformers in the public sphere where these ideas circulated, into reacting to their "critical voices" which are present throughout the text. If we deem Aḥmad's authorial voice to be the normative ethical discourse exchanged in the public sphere, we cannot omit that in the private sphere similar contestations that took place, though clearly here too men attempted to assert normative discourse in this realm. Recalling that this private sphere was, in fact, not uncontested space, opens up the possibility for understanding the challenges that the private domain posed to the public debate. We see examples of this across Mrinalini Sinha's *Specters of Mother India* whose study personifies how Janice Boddy argues are "feminine responses to hegemonic practices."[9] In Sinha's case of nationalist projects, the roles adopted by women as mothers, served to "assert value collectively," but also constitute the "instruments of their oppression." Thus, women confronted with this paradigm — as mothers of the nation — "insist on their dynamic complementarity to men," as "a means of resisting and setting limits to domination." Saba Mahmood advocates, that these negotiations in the discourse of power account for neither as a

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[9]   Here, and in the following sentences, I am reading Janice Boddy's *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zār Cult in Northern Sudan.* (1989) alongside Sinha's *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restrucutring of an Empire.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Print.

reinscription of traditional — as patriarchally-inflected — roles nor as liberatory political endeavours. She writes that subordination and resistance viewed in this binary ignores the "projects, discourses and desires that are not captured" in this framework, as I am outlining in my analysis of *Mirāt ul-'Arūs*. [10]

Looking at history linearly, the reformist projects embarked on by Aḥmad and others resulted in an increased awareness of women in the public sphere and eventually opened up of space for women in that sphere, demonstrated by the pioneering work of female authors emerging in the generations after Aḥmad.[11] However, in the public sphere where this reformist text circulated, the female voices - sometimes at odds with the author as the two previous chapters asserted - that persist throughout Aḥmad's story serve a role that, I argue, fits Orsini's definition of critical voice. As has been noted, the presence of female authors and political leadership in the first generation after the 1857 revolt is scant. The few authors who do write at this time use male pseudonyms and even so, do not significantly emerge until the mid-1870s. Outside a few select women leaders of aristocratic lineages or British families — namely Shah Jahan Begum of Bhopal and missionary wives— there are few women who contribute to the public discourse of reform or of revivalism. This is the undoubted difficulty in doing this type of research for one finds it difficult to rely on the male authors' writing on these gender issues to ground any position, for in doing so one leaves oneself open to an easy critique and risks the pitfalls of a teleological analysis. I argue nevertheless, that Asgharī's

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[10]   Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005. Print. From here on referred to as *Politics of Piety* p. 9

[11]   Suhrawardy (1945) makes this point convincingly in her reference to her own experience and that of her fellow women writers p. 123-165.

voice, no doubt a fictitious one, was a more powerful one as a result of the character's imaginative capacity. She was one such woman whose ideas did circulate in this context, as her character forced debates to emerge at the fringes of the reformist discourse. Thus, I maintain that the few women who did manage to secure roles in the debate outside of the private sphere, served as a type of critical voice in the normative discourse and include among them Asgharī, and other women from Aḥmad's novels. What can also be suggested is that women, from within the private sphere, both understood and lived the experiences found in the pages of Asgharī and Akbarī's narratives. In this sphere, these voices in isolation likely did not appear as particularly critical, for this was the lived experience of many *sharīf* women. However, as was the case for Naẕīr Aḥmad who's work served as a vehicle to propel the lived experience, albeit exceptional ones, of women into the public arena, the circulation of Asgharī's embodiment of *adab* and personification of piety emerged as something to be debated. As attested to specifically by Sheikh Abdul Qādir and Maulāna Thānvī's own writings during Aḥmad's lifetime and in the reflections of Shaista Ikramullah Suhrawardy written in the mid-twentieth century, is that throughout the thirty years after the initial publication of *Mirāt ul-'Arūs* the story continued to circulate in these debates as its popularity and readership continued to grow.[12]

We see references to this influence in Altāf Husein Hālī's *Majālis un-Nissa* and *Chup ki Dād* (translated by the American historian Gail Minault into a compilation called "Voices of

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[12]   I'm drawing this conclusion from numerous sources, including Suhrawardy (1945), Sheikh Abdul Qadir (1897 and 1945), Maulānā Thānvī (1990, Metcalf's translation), the evidence in Alam (2011) and across Minault's work which demonstrate the extent of Aḥmad's influence in literary, religious and political circles during his life and after his death.

Silence") as well as in the Urdu literary journals for and by women that begin to crop up in the 1870s and are well documented in other works by Minault, and by Barbara Metcalf.[13] Finally, we see *Mirāt ul-'arūs* discussed and banned in Thānvī's Bihishtī Zevār. I argue that Naẓīr Aḥmad and his characters served as interlocutors between the public and private spheres, and that much of the debate on educational reform and "proper" family comportment were mapped onto these characters who in turn became objects of debate. Moreover, they continue to be the site of debate for such topics in academic literature, and in contemporary Pakistan, India and Urdu-speaking diaporic communities in the form of TV serials and novellas based on the story.[14]

Gender and Power in Indian Historiography

Arguing that *Mirāt ul-'Arūs* was an attempt by reformers like Naẓīr Aḥmad at the "preservation of inherited respectability" of the *sharīf* family, community and culture and that these efforts emerged as a reaction to a general anxiety for the *sharīf* class fails to investigate how power was mapped onto Aḥmad's characters and the lives that they came to symbolize.[15] The narrative is more complex than this reductionist approach suggests. The story is crafted

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[13]   See the third section of the literature review for a more detailed overview of this secondary scholarship on women's literature.

[14]   There have been at least three productions of *Mirāt ul-'arūs* in Pakistan for television: *Mirāt ul-'arūs* (1984), *Mirat Ul Uroos* (2013), *Akbari Asgharī* (2014), and as a theatrical play by Umeira Ahmed, *Mirāt ul-'arūs* (2012). It has recently been re-released in India under the name *Aaina Dulhan Ka*.

[15]   Lal, "Gender and Sharafat: Re-Reading Naẓīr Aḥmad." p. 27 As Lal fails to consider across this work and the others cited in my research, there is no such thing as time-independent social classes. This *sharīf* class emerged at this post-1857 juncture in the developing of Indian Muslim bourgeoisie. Reading Aḥmad as "preserving inherited respectability" offers a decontextualized understanding of some timeless imaginary social class solidarity.

around female characters, constantly in dialogue with each other and the narrative's male characters which amounts at the very least to an eloquent depiction of the period's gender relationships that ought to be analyzed more than in the crude concept of power put forth by Lal. As suggested by Frances Pritchett, an Urdu literature scholar, this depiction is worthy of an analysis of power in the narrative.[16] One of the noted strengths and innovations of this work in the history of Urdu literature is its use of *begamātī zubān*, or women's language. This register of Urdu has been widely discussed for its intrinsic femininity and its contemporary employment in the subversion of masculinity and gender roles deemed traditional. Several anthropological studies have noted in the songs, poems, and exclusively female dialogues of South Asian women the degree to which subversive talk is expressed in these settings.[17]

Not only in Lal, but across the historiographical work on reformist texts, the focus remains extensively on Aḥmad himself and the moments in the book where he uses his own voice, in a non-fictive mode. Of course, in the introduction and in the descriptive adjectives he uses to describe his female characters, summarized perhaps most egregiously by his words, "I do not deny that too much learning (*'ilm*) is unnecessary for a woman," there is undoubtedly evidence of the limits to his reformist aims, clearly demarcated by his beliefs concerning gender roles.[18] Taken as a whole however, the text can equally complicate any idea that the story has uniquely patriarchal aim. If *Mirāt ul-'Arūs* amounts to an attempt at reinscribing

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[16]   See Pritchett (2001), the afterword of the *The Bride's Mirror*, p. 201-219

[17]   See the fourth section of the literature review above for a more in-depth overview of some of the relevant scholarship on *begamātī zubān* and Chapter Four for how the theoretical underpinnings of this work are integrated into my current analysis.

[18]   *The Bride's Mirror*, p. 9

disappearing "traditional" values of the "declining" Muslim gentry, then one might say that it summarily failed. Clearly this is not a story of female liberation, but the text performs a refusal of the analytic categories attributed to it and articulates a different framework for an analysis of gender in the literature of such a colonial context, that has significant implications in contemporary discourse on feminism, culture and religion.

Lal is right to think that the *sharīf* sought to reformulate their social milieu post-1857 (2008). Part of this venture, necessarily sought to reassign the sacredness of the emperor lost with all finality in the wake of colonial desacralization of his sovereign authority in 1857. [19] This moment in the historiography of Urdu-speaking communities is particularly useful in contextualizing the moment in the colonial period during which Naẓīr Aḥmad makes his literary mark. Written in 1867-68, we know that his writings come about a bit more than a decade after the complete de-throning of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II. This event, undoubtedly marks a pivotal moment in the history of the Indian subcontinent for many reasons, but perhaps chief among them, in relation to this thesis, is that with the passing of the last Mughal emperor, that sovereign power was displaced in favour of the emerging *sharīf* class.[20] While this process arguably began a century earlier, a shift from a paradigm of still nominally contested and shared colonial-sovereign composites were forcibly abandoned with the exile of Bahadur Shah II, in favour of full colonial administration in which the

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[19]   Clearly, this process of desacralization begins in the early decades of the 18th century with the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah. However, the final blow to even a nominal attribution of authority to the emperor comes in 1857 with the quelling of the rebellion - the mutiny of sepoys of the East India Company at Meerut.

[20]   See Alam, Muzaffar. *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-48*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print.

Muslim bourgeois took over and sought to assume sovereignty over the subcontinent's Muslim communities.[21] I take this moment as one major starting point necessitating the chronicling of the shifting landscape towards the formulation of new methods for the deployment and distribution of power within the context at hand. At the same time, I also want to posit a noteworthy ending point for this chronicling enterprise - the publication of Maulānā Ashraf Thānvī's etiquette manual for women, *Bihishtī Zevār*.

I choose this as a convenient historical threshold that has been evident across this chapter for three reasons. First, within the pages of *Bihishtī Zevār*, Thānvī bans this study's prime object of study, Naẓīr Aḥmad's *Mirāt ul-ʿArūs* on the grounds that its female characters were far too cosmopolitan and did more to dissuade the women of Thānvī's audience from the right path of Islam than they did to encourage meaningful pious lives (though Thānvī did remark that other novels written by Aḥmad, including *Taubat un-Nuṣūh* comprised significant contributions to a corpus of permissimible - in fact encouraged - reading material for young Muslim women). Second, though the Deoband movement, and Maulānā Ashraf Thānvī as a leading figure within that movement, did not evoke a particular religio-nationalist discourse in its rhetoric, the movement's rise did mark a shift in the intellectual and political spirit away from collaboration and collusion with the colonial British, found within the ranks of the Aligarh movement, to a surge in authority on the part of the Deoband *ulama* who are historically viewed - as well as espoused within their own ranks - as promoting a "traditionalist" brand of religious idioms in their social projects.[22] Finally, an analysis of this

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movement, Maulānā Thānvī, and *Bihishtī Zevār*, have been undertaken in recent scholarship by Usamah Ansari who adopts a useful Foucauldian analysis of power in the context of Thānvī's work similar to that which I wish to put forward here.[23] As we saw above, his work refutes the dualistic categorization of the Deoband movement and this treatise on women's etiquette that emerged from the movement through a critique to which this thesis owes a great deal.

Thus both as corroborative and as comparative evidence, Ansari's *The Pious Self is a Jewel in Itself: Agency and Tradition in the Production of 'Shariatic Modernity'* is a work worth addressing in the context of this study. The corroborative aspect of his work centers its analysis on post-colonial theory and a Foucauldian conception of biopolitics, both of which I will utilize in the coming section to arrive at some similar conclusions to Ansari. It has been denied that Asgharī is "caught between tradition and modernity," instead maintaining that she was solely stuck in a reformulated masculinist and traditional mode of power. (Lal, 2008) Lal elides not only that the narrative assumes meaning beyond the author's intent, but also that such an existence, forged at the brink of two hegemonic discourses, is possible. As we have demonstrated above, Mikhail Bakhtin's heteroglossia qualifies that far from having an authoritative voice, the role of the novel is to directly call into question any voice that seeks such to establish authority. The aim of the novel is to open itself to interpretation. But more than this, the type of history writing put forth in Lal's work, precludes "the voices from the edge" and "fragmentary

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British must be noted marking a shift from collaboration (as was more significant in the ranks of the Aligarh movement) towards opposition to colonial rule.

[23]   See Ansari, (2001) p. 285

statements," rendering it impossible to represent Asgharī's production and reproduction of Aḥmad's normative discourse forged on this brink from appearing in her analysis.[24] If, "Even in the instances where there are questions about the appropriate conduct and models of behaviour, her responses are knowledgeable but predictable — hardly based on reflection and self-questioning,"[25] what can one make of the numerous occasions where Asgharī comes up against customs which appear in the text as sincerely more normative than her own desired actions?

The easy trap of reducing these complexities to a generic traditional and modern binary elides the complex and multilayered nature of social relations in colonial India in favour of simplistic categories and in doing so ignores the matrix of power in which the author and his characters - insofar as they are reflections of real life - exist. Such an oversimplification demonstrates just to what degree the absence of an analysis of power still exists today in certain works of scholarship. Partha Chatterjee, who devotes two chapters in his *The Nation and its Fragments* to the role of women in the process of the formation of nationalism in the 19th century, attempted to establish new idioms that would qualify "a modernity consistent with the nationalist project."[26] He writes,

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[24]   See Pandey, Gayandra. "Voices from the Edge The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi. Verso, 2000. Print. p. 281-299.

[25]   See "Gender and Sharafat," (2008) p. 29

[26]   *The Nation and Its Fragments*, p. 121

"It would be a grave error to see in this, as liberals are apt to in their despair at the many marks of social conservatism in nationalist practice, a total rejection of the West."[27]

Much of the Subaltern Studies group's project, interrogates these categories of modern, classical and traditional and assists in analysing the woman colonial subject through idioms that problematize studies of colonial South Asia such as Lal's. The novel is much more interesting for the purposes of offering a view into colonial life than as a bankrupt representation of the perceived conservatism of the 19th century.

I have referenced several works in an attempt to intervene by using this novel to reaffirm prior work on the socio-historical context of the narrative and then to articulate new orientations of lives of these fictive women that open new possibilities for thinking about gender during this period. As characters within a colonial novel, yet also as personified feminine ideals that circulate discursively in private and public spheres, Asgharī and the other women of Aḥmad's story help reify the composite idioms presented in Guha, Dalmia and Orsini. I suggest, given that these characters are in fact fictional, that they garnered more prominent exposure in this early phase of emerging female contributors to the public debate. Across these historical and literary studies, we see a continued dearth of archival material in which the role of feminine actors are catalogued and as a result the scant evidence for any analysis of gender in these contexts leaves a researcher empty-handed. Only by the waning years of the 19th century and into the early 20th century do we see substantial material to

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[27]   Ibid. same page

investigate such questions. I believe that *Mirāt ul-'Arūs* is one such document in which we can successfully interrogate these problems, without relying on speculative evidence. I have sought to push back further into the 19th century to further develop an understanding of gender as a subaltern category which as pertaining to Muslim life in colonial India, remains largely uncharted prior to the 20th century. The aim of this thesis is to examine how the text's meaning is inflected not only by the author, but also specifically the voices of his characters and voices that reproduced the narrative in the first generations of its readership, particularly women readers and authors.

As I have demonstrated above, emerging from this discussion on the role of Nazīr Aḥmad's female characters is a broader debate on the text and its characters. This debate is grounded in an analysis of power within the text, within the sociological contexts within which it circulated and in the observable ways in which the text has been interpreted, appropriated and transformed. This next part of this thesis is interested in addressing both how the use of this text as such a grounds for such an inquiry might link to anthropological scholarship thats strikes me as being of the same vein. Then, once substantially defending the temporal and disciplinary leaps associated with it, I elaborate a new approach to view literary works of this woman-centric variety within a more reflexive anthropological and socio-historical context. Anthropological work on agency in the current vein of studies on Islam and gender find some basis in studies from the 1980s on the use of *begamātī zubān* in rethinking female spaces in segregated settings. These studies have often revealed the agentive capacity of feminine speech acts to unsettle or disrupt contexts understood to be where such segregation emanated from patriarchally-oriented models of social constructions. These foundational studies have depicted new embodied facets of gendered being and, in doing so, have helped challenge an

assumed universalism that views the sole avenues of agency tied up with emancipatory and liberatory aims.

Chapter 4

Reading Mirāt ul-'Arūs *Anthropologically*

This final chapter links contemporary anthropological theory on agency and Muslim women to the historical and literary study elaborated above of *Mirāt ul-'Arūs* (*The Bride's Mirror*), written by the colonial Indian reformist author Naẓīr Aḥmad (d. 1912). This chapter considers the ongoing debates at the intersection liberal feminist thought and the study of Islam and Islamic societies, rejecting the feminist – patriarchal dichotomy that imbues much of this discursive framework in the analysis of Islam, women and perceived or real confrontations with modernity. This re-reading, proposed and outlined in the previous chapters, takes place at the nexus of historiography, anthropology and literary analysis. Its aim is to confront presuppositions in some of the existing scholarship on the subject of this novel. In the previous chapter, I addressed some of these presuppositions by elaborating arguments grounded in my understanding of the Subaltern Studies group's work and continued scholarship grounded in their analytical framework. This chapter, invested in these claims on modernism, takes interest in how the determination of new Indian modernities was also responsible and implicit in changing the relations of power. As the sphere of women came to occupy new space in this matrix of power, where honour, virtuousness, religion and culture came to represent new meanings and were embodied in new ways, how can we understand manifestations of female agency in these contexts?

Naẓīr Aḥmad's crafting of the narrative through the dialogue of Asgharī and her female entourage in the language of women, *begamātī zubān*, opens new possibilities for thinking about agency and the role of women in the first decades after the 1857 Mutiny.[1] While Asgharī embodies - idyllic *sharīf* Muslim behaviour - her actions often violate the explicit male-spoken dictums in the text. In doing so, a central claim in my analysis argues that the depiction of *Mirāt ul-'Arūs*' female character's development and embodiment of *adab* and piety are, at times, in contrast to the patriarchal norms that governed women's behaviour in her social milieu. The female characters who overcome many challenges in the text complicate the representation of the submissive and silent woman of the period. Consistent with the post-colonial analysis used to examine these relationships in their historical context, this chapter challenges historical scholarship on *zenāna* education that cites *Mirāt ul-'Arūs* as a prime example of a classical Indian attitudes about women – separate and unequal.[2]

The aim of this chapter is to offer a framework for plotting the necessary links between the central text of my analysis, *Mirāt ul-'Arūs*, and the relevant anthropological and historiographical paradigms that are implicated in a study of gender in colonial Urdu literature. Part of the task then is to justify the use of anthropological theory on gender and agency in a 19th century text and its historical context. Bernard Cohn, in his essays on the

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[1]   This is the register of Urdu employed by ashrāf women in colonial India and still present as an anthropological phenomenon in rural areas of North India and Urdu-speaking Pakistan. See the fourth section of the literature review above for a brief overview of some of the relevant work on this concept in historical and anthropological scholarship.

[2]   See Dalmia, (1999) *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions* for an outline of how she categorizes the "classical" Indian idiom. My use of this term and the other idioms outlined by her and Ranajit Guha are outlined in Chapter Three.

encounter of anthropology and history wrote how the practitioners of both are forced to encounter the other. He writes, "One field constructs and studies 'otherness' in space, the other in time."[3] Having sought, from historiographers, idioms that contest the fixedness of a colonial modernist - traditionalist dichotomy to construct a new a vision of competing versions of modernity — each as valid as the next — Cohn might suggest that we turn to anthropology to theorize agency and locate in *Mirāt ul-'arūs* how the text manifests agency. In Chapter Three, I outlined Chatterjee's distrust of the hegemony of a liberal understanding of the history of nationalism - often resulting in what he calls the paradox of "good" and "bad" nationalism. Confronted with a not dissimilar dilemma of the normativity of freedom in the prescriptiveness of feminist theory, Saba Mahmood challenges the paradigm of understanding woman's actions as submissive or subversive.

I turn to the anthropology of Islam to think about the paradoxes which implicate women directly in the historiography of India under colonial administration. While the the work of the Subaltern Studies group, like Chatterjee who I rely upon heavily in the previous chapter, clearly addresses the woman as the subaltern, Chatterjee's two chapters in *The Nation and Its Fragments* raise more questions than they answer. Chatterjee's division of colonial space into the material and the spiritual is useful in thinking through the appropriation of a discourse on the rights of women in the anti-colonial nationalist narrative. Indeed, his mapping of the masculine/feminine onto this dichotomy of the material/spiritual or outer/inner grafts well onto the cases he plays out. He argues a linear reading of the stories of the lives of five Bengali

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[3]   Cohn, Bernard S. *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987. Print. (p. 44?)

women only to interrupt this linearity with Binodini's "story of betrayal." He admits equally that the same texts could have been read in "the opposite direction, against the grain, as texts that show the marks of resistance to a hegemonizing discourse."[4] He writes that the nationalist would read this as a story "from bondage to emancipation," but that the feminist likely would view this as a bad trade-off "from one kind of bondage to another." He argues that Binodini's presence in the archive interrupts these simple conclusions, but instead her story illustrates only the degree to which this hegemonizing project failed to extend its benefits widely and instead based its successes and liberations, on the exclusion of others. Moreover, Chatterjee understands the project of anti-colonial nationalism as one that, though faced with certain resistance, largely subsumed the desires and interests of women and subjected them to *newly forged* modern Indian patriarchies. His understanding of the trajectory of woman and his anticipation of the feminist critique of his crafted narrative are emblematic of the paradigm that anticipates either subjugation or resistance. This chapter sets out to think about the project of Muslim "nationalism," and is particularly interested in community-centric religious reform. While historical scholarship on the Aligarh has tended to adopt this level of thinking, I wish to turn to anthropological work that takes interest in contemporary cases from the same perspective to raise questions on gender to which Chatterjee's work is unable to respond.[5] The two examples that spring to mind are the Piety movement in Egypt and the now global

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[4]   See Chatterjee, (1993) in the chapter *Women and the Nation* in *The Nation and Its Fragments* quoted from p. 151

[5]   A revealing aspect of this question on the formulation of the idea of nationalism can be seen in the selection of "qaum" as Urdu's stand-in for the idea of nation. The flexible use of the word across, for example, the speeches of Sir Aḥmad Khan, reveals how the term conveyed many meanings and, as scholarship has demonstrated, was linked more to the idea of community and religion than to the idea of a nation. See Jalal, Ayesha. *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850.* New York: Routledge, 2000. Print. p. 39, 45-46, and 93.

Tabligh-i-Jama'at movement emerging from India and Pakistan.[6] These ethnographic studies which have analyzed both the use legal structures and language that are subverted and appropriated by women examine agency and power in gendered Muslim spaces as well substantiate challenges to liberal understandings of pious female Muslims. Saba Mahmood summarizes the relevant question to my discussion in this thesis when she asks, "how do we analyze operations of power that construct different kinds of bodies, knowledges and subjectivities whose trajectories do not follow the entelechy of liberatory politics?"[7]

Formulating Agency

Saba Mahmood traces the development of feminist inquiries in the domain of the anthropology of Islam. To this effect, she documents the move of such anthropologists towards an understanding of resistance in every day acts. She quotes Janice Boddy, whose scholarship epitomizes this vein of thinking, that women, "use perhaps unconsciously, perhaps strategically, what we in the West might prefer to consider instruments of their oppression as means to assert their value both collectively...and individually...This in itself is a means of resisting and setting limits to domination."[8] Boddy's research questions the official ethic in Islam as something controlled by men by viewing the appropriations by women of subaltern

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[6]   See *Politics of Piety* and Metcalf, Barbara. *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004. Print. specifically her Chapters 1 and 11 p. 29-55 and 265-284. and "Living Hadith in the Tablighi Jama'at." *Journal of Asian Studies.* Association for Asian Studies 52 (1993): 584-608. Print. Of course the Tablighi Jama'at is ideologically indebeted to the Deobandi *ulama* of the generations preceding its formation.

[7]   *The Politics of Piety*, p. 14

[8]   Ibid. p.7 quoting Boddy (1989) p. 345

realities within the normative discourse to assert agency in non-emancipatory ways. Mahmood traces the work of Lila Abu Lughod by drawing from contrasting excerpts of her writings which demonstrate a shifting interest from studying resistance and those who resist towards establishing better understandings of the working of power, what Abu-Lughod calls looking for a "diagnostic of power" (Abu Lughod, 1990). Mahmood questions a particular understanding of liberation which, she argues, has been established as a universalism in much of liberal and feminist thought. In order to chart this shift, Mahmood compares the notions of positive freedom, understood to be the ability to form one's own reality, epitomized by the projects of historiography of women and their actions like that of Joan Scott, and negative freedom, which takes as its basis situations free of restrictions that enable one to act as she wants.[9] This idea of negative freedom is interesting in its correspondence to the world of the *zenāna*, where a woman's own reality, communicated in *begamātī zubān*, might very well be exceptionally free of the influence of men and is pregnant with the ability to form a uniquely feminine reality. Mahmood summarizes how these spaces have been thought of as, "conferring a potentially liberatory meaning to practices of sex-segregation that had traditionally been understood as making women marginal to the public arena of conventional politics" (Ahmed 1982,; Boddy 1989; Wikan 1991).[10]

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[9] Scott (1988) is interested in the stories of women, who wrote themselves into the archives. She calls this the "her-story" and in the context of what I have presented in this study, is reflected in Minault's early works: see *Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter* (1978)

[10] *The Politics of Piety*, p. 13 These three studies that she cites investigate respectively the Harem, the Zar cult of Sudan, and the practice of sex segregation and the wearing of the burqa in Oman.

While even this understanding of woman's place in the *kachahrī* milieu of Aḥmad's novels, might unsettle the readings of his work that have been put forth, I have chosen Mahmood's ethnographic praxis because her investigation pushes beyond the limitations - as I summarize below - of this thinking.[11] Some post-structuralist feminist scholarship calls into question the normativity of freedom in feminist thought, arguing that in analytical sense, feminism must be untethered from a proscriptive aim for "freedom." However, in this paradigm of post-structuralist thought, Mahmood argues that, here too, agency occupies one side of the binary understood as either the acquiescence to or a repudiation of the hegemonic discourse of subjectivation. Such an understanding she maintains, while shifting the debate, does not account for other manifestations or embodiments of agency that might contradict or disassociate from progressive politics. This understanding then fails to situate such a theory of agency in particular histories and epistemologies. Mahmood believes that this model still "elides dimensions of human action whose ethical and political status does not map onto the logic of repression and resistance."[12] Mahmood shifts the conceptualization of agentival capacity from one that strictly includes resistance to the normative discourse to consider a capacity to inhabit those existing norms.[13] She formulates this theoretical paradigm via Butler's adaptation of what Foucault calls the paradox of subjectivation. Foucault maintains that the formulation of the subject encompasses both the subject's subjugation and their

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[11]   *Kachahrī* here conveys the middle class milieu of the *sharīf* polity, see Lelyveld (1978)

[12]   Mahmood writes that, similar to the relationship of freedom and liberalism in certain societies as both a philosophical lens of analysis and as a political ideal to strive for, freedom is a normative aspect of feminism, which Mahmood argues is similarly possessive of a dual nature, being both analytical and prescriptive. (p. 10) For her summation of this conceptualization and the subsequent elisions made by conflating these dual natures, see p. 14

[13]   *The Politics of Piety*, p. 15

agency; thus the corollary of this is that any possibility of agency exists within the structures of power not outside these structures.[14] In turn, the conditions that produce the subject also produce the capacity for resistance to that structure of power.[15] Mahmood draws on Butler to continue in this analytical vein, by turning to normative actions, stating that any reenactment which reproduces a norm also possesses the potential to fail, leaving the moment of any formulation of a norm in the precarious position of instead being undone.[16] Butler's model of performativity, while understanding "norms as things that are inhabited, aspired to, reached for and consummated," is conceived nevertheless in the dualistic terms of consolidation and resignification, doing and undoing.[17] Mahmood turns to the idea of docility, the idea that presumes one's ability to learn, be taught and transform one's behaviour by submitting oneself to a normative framework. Again turning to Foucault, the self, in such an atmosphere, is able to control "a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being" to submit to this normative structure.[18]

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[14]   See Foucault, Michel. "Truth and Power." In *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. ed. and trans. C. Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. 109-133. Print.

[15]   Ibid p. 17. In this passage she cites Butler, (1993) p. 15 and (1997b); Foucault, (1980) and (1983)

[16]   *The Politics of Piety* p. 19-20 in which Mahmood quotes Butler, 1997a (p. 14).

[17]   *The Politics of Piety*, p. 22 again quoting Butler, 1993 (p. 15)

[18]   See Foucault, Michel "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress." In *Ethics : Subjectivity and Truth*: Vol. I of *Essential Works of Foucault*. ed. P. Rabinow and trans. R. Hurley et al. New York: New Press, 1997. 253-280. Print. (p.255) The argument here is not to say that docility is emancipatory, but to say that docility may not be solely confined to the opposite - as the socialization into partiarchy. Mahmood, would likely agree that such docility does constitute the acting out of ideology, but that feminist scholarship, often grounded in a particular perspective of emancipatory politics, must not project the prescriptive aspects of an liberal analytic onto the female subject that acts out this ideology. The shaping of docility and adherence to doctrinal tenets does not preclude women from acting in agentive ways. That is to say that women - in both the Piety movement and Asgharī's *sharīf kachahri* milieu - shaped as are by competing hegemonic discourses, from the perspective of western, liberal feminism, scholars

I find the two possible objections that Mahmood confronts in the section *Ethics and Politics* at the end of the first chapter of *Politics of Piety* to be particularly instructive when thinking about *Mirāt ul-ʿarūs*. The first objection she attends to is the misunderstanding of an individual's ethical formation as prior to that person's contact with any hegemonic discourse in which one becomes the subject.[19] Instead, the conditions of power are such that the subject is already confronted with that particular discourse, learning to embody and to craft it. When reading the criticism of Asgharī's unambiguous endorsement of her father's moral discourse, this misunderstanding of her agency is glaringly present. The assumption is that magically equipped with contemporary western feminism, through her own agency she - and more importantly the women which Asgharī signifies - ought to be able to confront the aspects of deplorable patriarchy in which she exists. Not to do so is, in effect, the capitulation of women to the male reformists' dictates. Such a limited and historically unmoored analysis fails to offer substantial evidence of how disciplinary techniques emerged in this period that regulated not

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cannot elide their efforts and actions as subsumed in a project of socializing patriarchy and against an idea of universal resistance. By thinking about Indian historiography in conjunction with Mahmood's theoretical framework, it permits the reader to refute an imperative to think about female actors in one of these two modes of subjugation.

19   See *The Politics of Piety*, p. 32-34. In her book Mahmood is striving to confront the idea that a subject isn't already ethically formed in certain ways and *then* confronts a "hegemonic discourse".

Thus, no subject's ethical orientation is formed outside a system of power, but is, in fact, produced within that discourse of power. The objection that being inside one system of power precludes the resistance to another system of power, is a false situation, since the existence of one ethical sphere is not in a vacumm. Taking the example of a secular citizen ethically formed by embodying and crafting a middle class "hegemonic" discourse does not preclude such an individual from finding oppressive "the hegemonic discourse" of the Piety Movement and thus resist it. That this everyday resistance is universal is precisely what Mahmood disagrees with. There is no such thing as being "inside" and "outside" of multiple systems of power. In an urban environment like that of the Piety Movement and even the more secluded one of Asgharī's *kachahrī* milieu, systems overlap and interact, they are not isolated spheres (even if participants in different spheres might ideologically attempt to cordon off their respective systems.

only women, but all persons, by introducing new logics of subjecthood and techniques of disciplinary power.

The second objection she takes up refers to debates in liberal political theory which distinguish the private and public as distinctive spheres with ethical formations relegated to the former and politics to the the latter. Mahmood rejects this, arguing that the authoritative discourse of any modern polity employs the logic of its disciplinary techniques in the regulation of any subject existing in that system. Such operations of power produce subjects in relation to their own, *historically determined* discourses. This historical contingency is central to the development of the subject and, as such, shifts the emphasis from the self's desires to the regulative apparatus that produces the subject. Drawing from William Connoly, she writes that forging of the political cannot be separated from the modes of reasoning that predate it in a disconnected private sphere.[20] Nor can it be disconnected from the "visceral modes of appraisal" that constitute a subject's formation within the private domain. Mahmood concludes her rebuttal by arguing that this ethical self-cultivation must be linked to a better understanding of political formation and to how "embodied registers of life" have long been at the forefront of feminist theory's vision for political change.[21] What strikes me as deeply relevant about her objection is its relevance to Chatterjee's formulation of the private and the public. Mahmood's defense builds on his formulation by unburdening the critique of the ambiguity in that division which marks the outside world as political, but fails to elaborate the

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[20]   Ibid. p. 32 quoting Connolly, William E. *Why I Am Not a Secularist.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. Print.

[21]   Ibid. p. 33

extent to which the inner world is similarly produced. Clearly, in reading Chatterjee we imagine the inner sphere to be of discursive value, since the anti-colonial nationalist discourse is situated within it and comprises that inner world. Yet, Chatterjee does not elaborate how the nationalist discourse outside is concomitant to the interior ethical discourse that it is both produced by and reproduces. In both of these contentions, Mahmood appeals not to the individual will of her interlocutors, but in what ways they become "a product of the historically contingent discursive tradition in which they are located."[22]

I cannot deny that this project remains a somewhat experimental work at the nexus of literary criticism, historiography and anthropology, bringing theory from each to open up discursive space in which a diagnostics of the power of this colonial moment of the novel may be undertaken. However, I hope that this cross-cutting approach might lay out new ways to link across disciplines a counter-narrative to various contributions that relegate Asgharī to serving as the mouthpiece of Naẓīr Aḥmad. Across these disciplines, I call into question the body of literature on *Mirāt ul-ʾarūs* that is invested in a feminist critique of its content, its author and the movements in which both participated.

"Shariatic Modernity"

Critics of Naẓīr Aḥmad, in their historical analysis of *Mirāt ul-ʿArūs*, deride the ideological current of the separate and unequal treatment of women that underlies the text. As I demonstrated above, the novel, abounding in hetereglossia, exceeds the underlying authorial

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voice and offers a transformative historico-literary text that offers an archive of the authoritative moral discourse of Aḥmad's socio-political period. My interest, having justified and outlined a turn to anthropological theory, is to investigate this archive to better theorize the historical contingency of the structure and technologies of power. These are manifest in the interlay of this anti-colonial nationalist discourse and a Islamic discursive tradition which both produced the novelist, the novel, and the subjects contained within.

Usamah Ansari, taking a similar approach, re-reads *Bihishtī Zevār* by Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī, a manual on etiquette for women, in the context of power and biopolitics to question the dismissal of Thānvī and the Deoband movement which produced him as traditionalist conservatives who stood at the beginning of the 20th century in stark opposition to modernism. Ansari develops a working theory of "shariatic modernity," an attempt to challenge this understanding. In focussing on a guide to etiquette for women, he analyzes the type of self-cultivation espoused by Thānvī in *Bihishtī Zevār*. I have mentioned that, in so far as the Deoband's revivalism drew on many modern colonial systems and forged its own brand of modernism, "shariatic," as Ansari suggests, the Aligarh leaders also relied on an Islamically grounded discursive tradition to formulate modern disciplinary techniques that reflected political interests of the *sharīf* class which they sought to qualify, constitute and safeguard.

As Ansari noted, the analysis of Thānvī's didactic text offers legitimate avenues along which a Foucauldian conception of a genealogy of power might be traced within this high colonial context. Unlike Thānvī's *Bihishtī Zevār*, however, Naẓīr Aḥmad's fiction both complicates that analysis and expands its scope. Of course the novel complicates that analysis because it can only claim to accurately portray reality. Yet, as we have seen in nearly every reading of the text, including the strongest criticism, Aḥmad's work is highly regarded for its

verisimilitude. In Usamah Ansari's work on Thānvī's etiquette guide, the analysis of the disciplinary power in the development of a "shariatic" biopolitics extends only to the intent of the author and gives the reader a close look at the authoritative discourse that both produced Thānvī and the reproduction of such a discourse in the sanctioned writings of Thānvī. Aḥmad's depiction of reality is far more vast in its scope for the simple fact that the cacophony of voices in the novel better reveal the matrix of disciplinary power. The authoritative discourse, its embodiment, its reproduction, and at times, its refusal all appear on the pages of the novel. The complexity involved in the character development - and also the reception of these characters - found in *Mirāt ul-ʿArūs* offers other perspectives to explore disciplinary power in the period and in turn agency of the women that Asgharī and her co-interlocutors signify.

"Resuscitating Respectability"

So what might be made of the representations and workings of power relations at play in the text, as evidenced in the refractions of authorial voice in the novel and the tension present between that singular voice and the refracting dialogue of the novel's characters? Aḥmad writes that the original intent for his story was to encourage education among the female members of his house, and to write a meaningful entertaining story for his daughters.[23] In doing so, he set out to write an instructive story for his own family members which he likely intended to have published for wider consumption.

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[23]   While this has been critiqued as being a literary framing device, it remains important nevertheless as a statement of his ethico-political intent. See Naim (1984) and Pritchett (2001) who make this claim.

Ruby Lal ends her inquiry here, and adopts this line of thinking in her article "Gender and Sharafat," in which she discusses at length how *Mirāt ul-'arūs* and *Taubat un-nusūh*, another of Aḥmad's major contributions, constitute "reformist" texts. These texts accomplish, what she calls, a resuscitation of respectability. She writes of Asgharī, the female protagonist of *Mirāt ul-'arūs*, that her character is not a "new woman" exposed, contemplating and re-configuring herself alongside modernity, but the symbol of the maintenance of the traditional and patriarchal values of her *sharīf* society.[24] Lal analysis of the disciplinary techniques aimed at controlling women is that rather than being reformist, they comprised a reformulation of traditional respectability. In her view, Naẕīr Aḥmad's project is not one of modern reform. Her analysis is handicapped by the belief that his *kachahrī* milieu is one of "feudal, patriarchal respectability."

In her book-length study on girls and playfulness, Lal argues that in nineteenth century India, contestation came to be situated on the girl or woman as objects and as a result, "attendant questions of women's life stages, agency, and self-creativity largely disappeared."[25] She goes on to describe women's dependency on men across all stages of women's life, precluding her from exercising "independent agency."[26] Lal's argument about the playfulness of the girl's in *Mirāt ul-'arūs* is demonstrated in her criticism of Asgharī's pupils who "entertain

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[24]   The full quote, present in the text above "Clearly, this is not the 'new woman' of a world caught between tradition and modernity, but one that lives the ethic of an inherited *sharīf* culture by maintaining the ideals of domesticity. It is a reorientation, a recasting of *sharīf* practices, spaces and networks." in Lal (2008), p. 27-28.

[25]   *Coming of Age in Nineteenth-Century India: The Girl-Child and the Art of Playfulness*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Print. See p. 32. (from henceforth refered to as *Coming of Age*)

[26]   Ibid. p. 36

themselves, and tell stories, and ask each other riddles" which serve only to reinforce their subordination to men and to inculcate utilitarian ethic. While this reality of the project of educational reform has been observed by other literary critics of Aḥmad's work, Lal's view remains close-minded to the systems and milieu that produced these reformist efforts. In his essay, "The First Urdu Novel," M. Assaduddin notes, that *Mirāt ul-'arūs* "preaches the merits of what may be seen as a kind of Protestant ethic—socially useful, productive work, frugality, a strong moral sense and an overall attitude which celebrates work and responsibility in life and frowns upon indulgence in pleasure or flippancy of any kind."[27] My reading of this new ethical disposition is quite different from Lal's reading. Lal addresses the confrontation with modernity, predictably; in a strictly binary sense, for her, Aḥmad's *kachahrī* milieu preserves its feudal patriarchy and rejects in the private sphere the modernist imperatives that compel the community and seeks to manage it. Some hybrid, whether Dalmia's Indian idiom, or Ansari's "shariatic modernity" seems to resonate more with the historical context in which Aḥmad lives and writes - and in which his female characters come to life.

The objection might be raised that, in thinking through Lal's argument while reading Chatterjee's distinction of the inner and the outer domains of the nation, that controlling the cultural and spiritual world of the interior, *sharīf* men, like Aḥmad, maintained and repurposed a feudo-patriarchal discourse that stripped women and their agency in all matters. [28] In distinguishing between the colonial and the reformist discourses, Lal imagines the

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[27]   Asaduddin, M. "First Urdu Novel: Contesting Claims and Disclaimers." *Annual of Urdu Studies*. Center for South Asia, University of Wisconsin–Madison: (2001) *76-97*. Internet resource. (p.88)

[28]   Lal writes that "the women's question did not disappear from the nationalist agenda in India at the end of the nineteenth century, but rather came to be folded into it – and thus "resolved" – as the "spiritual," "inner" content of the nation, a domain of cultural and spiritual sovereignty presided over and preserved by women. The question that

reformist discourse as somehow separate and is able to omit the modern techniques that began to manifest in the logic of their own authoritative discourse. She draws on C.M. Naim's reading of *Mirāt ul-ʿarūs*, to defend her position. She writes,

> Further, Naim says that "the distinction between the Inner *batin* and the Outer *zahir* has been for centuries the most powerful and pervasive way to prioritize and valuate both ideas and actions in all Islamicate societies at every level. It, therefore, becomes significant that Naẓīr Aḥmad explicitly underscored the rejection of the Outer." Naim points out that the important task for Naẓīr Aḥmad and other reformers was to "press individual community members to better themselves, and simultaneously convince them to do good to the community. [29]

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other scholars have asked since, and that I revisit in this book, is what kind of figure is this woman who (in the words of Chatterjee) becomes the spiritual symbol of the nation? What are the specific processes of cultural or spiritual sublimation or (as I suggest) erasure that go into its making? Or to put it somewhat more polemically, might one argue, in an extension of Chatterjee's point, that it was not the disappearance of the women's question, but the disappearance or erasure of women as historical subjects that was the issue – and the centerpiece – of the nationalist resolution of the women's question?" (p. 13)

While she concedes that it was a "Colonial patriarchalism" that "erases the figure of the girl-child by only ever acknowledging her as a woman in the future tense, that is, as wife, mother and nurturer, even as it erases women by infantilizing them and binding their claim to personhood to others – fathers, husbands, sons – most of all to the children they are obliged to produce and care for under the terms of what Adrienne Rich calls 'compulsory heterosexuality'" (p. 15) she does not concede that this idea is a hybrid, but instead views them as somehow distinctive discourses. She continues, "By placing colonial and reformist discourses adjacent to each other, I want to indicate a variety of articulations on girl-child and woman figures – pictures of feminine life that circulate, that are invoked in different contexts and alongside new ones, and that change in meaning according to the context in which they appear – that manage, nonetheless, to produce the girl-child/woman as a static, ahistorical figure. In the civilizing discourses that dominated the colonial world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the figure of the girl-child appears fleetingly, as shadow, only to disappear quickly into the compound figure of the child/adult." (p.45)

[29]   See *Coming of Age*, p. 137 where she quotes Naim in the afterword of *The Repentance of Nussooh (Taubat-al-Nasuh): the*

Lal mischaracterizes Naim's remarks because of her interest in this distinction in the deployment of techniques which motivate this self-cultivation. For Lal, these influences are derivational forms of numerous treatises on *akhlāq* and *adab* from a long line of Perso-Arabic traditions. While the ethical material contained within these works continued to remain relevant, the modes in which these ethics were produced and reproduced took a very different, modern, form. In discussing the *zahir*, the Outer, Naim refers to the Nawabi socio-political apparatus which Aḥmad's generation of reformers sought to reconfigure if not eliminate entirely. Lal's analysis is unable to perceive the machinations of the *sharīf* community as espousing and developing their own "bourgeois habitus" which reflected the need to create a politically viable middle class.[30] To think that the disciplinary techniques being employed in the development of new logics of ethico-political order in the *sharīf* community remained embedded in pre-modern operations of power is to ignore the historically contingent factors that shaped the production and reproductions of new norms through emerging techniques of disciplinary power in the modern Indian muslim polity. The discursive domain of reform - the religio-cultural interior - nevertheless drew from a modern vocabulary and formed its own disciplinary apparatus, repurposing these for the deployment of new techniques for the maintenance and support of their bourgeois-*kachahrī* polity.

Tale of a Muslim Family a Hundred Years Ago, trans. M. Kempson. Delhi: Permanent Black. 2004. Print.

[30]   Quoting Pernau, Margrit "Middle Class and Secularization" in Sanjay Joshi, *The Middle Class in Colonial India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. 225-226. Print. I am using this idea of habitus to recall both the type of society Bourdieu envisions in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and to offer that Aḥmad and his contemporaries' aims very much constitute the demarcation of a new currency of *symbolic capital* that would be used in this habitus.

Another perspective on these transformations in education is articulated by Asiya Alam, who citing Afsaneh Najmabadi, writes, "The gendered curriculum led to the 'transformation of woman from house to manager of the house' and the production of the woman of modernity provided both regulatory and emancipatory impulses." [31] Referring to the subject of her work, the novel *Guḍar ka Lal* by Akbarī Begum, Alam maintains that this female author emerging a generation after Aḥmad, "endorses this vision of women as house managers and more importantly, as mothers."[32] Lal ignores this possibility for agency in motherhood within this system of subjectivization. While she discerns the counter-hegemonic voice of Akbarī, she is unable to conceive of Asgharī's actions similarly as pregnant with such a possibility.[33] Moreover, Asgharī's own agency moves beyond that described by Alam, for the appearance of

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[31]   Asiya Alam (2011) p. 654 citing Najmabadi, Afsaneh, "Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran," in Lila Abu-Lughod (ed.), Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[32]   Comparing Lal's use of Najmabadi is insightful, for she too makes reference to Najmabadi's work. Whereas Alam writes, "While the critique of the new patriarchy generated by male reformist rationality in which the educated woman performs her gendered roles with efficiency is crucial, it is also important to be mindful of some vistas this opened up for women... One of the characteristics of the 'new family', expressed in *Guḍar ka Lal,* is an increasing emphasis on motherhood and the role of women as child-rearers. Tasks that were hitherto otherwise dispersed to servants, fathers, neighbours, relatives and others, are now gathered up under the rubric of 'maternal responsibility'. Concomitantly, reproduction, one of many activities associated with women (and not exclusively with them), becomes the defining aspect of their characters and their lives." (p. 655)

   Lal cites Najmabadi in the following way: "Afsaneh Najmabadi shows how in Iran, in the writings of Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani (1853/54–1896), a contemporary of Naẕīr Aḥmad and Hālī, "the shifts in meaning from pre-modern to modern normative concepts reconfigured woman from 'house' (manzil) to 'manager of the house' (mudabbir-i manzil)." A significant shift also occurred in the shrinking of a wider community of women, as the educated woman came to be confined rather more than before to the conjugal home - even as the domain of men's homosocial interactions was maintained or even expanded." (p. 142) In doing so she not only obfuscates the potential for "emancipatory impulses," but she also includes an aspect of Najmadi's analysis that she lacks in her own, that this shift represented one from pre-modern to modern concepts!

[33]   "Asgharī, the "hero" of *Mirāt*, merely followed the directions of the elders and the wisdom of tradition. The trained girl-child, now the married woman, caught up entirely in the "mindless" tasks of managing the household, raising children and preserving the honor of family and community. In a word, she is rendered static and non-

her own children in the novel appears only near the end, and instead, throughout she is more preoccupied by the needs of her family and the community. These aspects of her character cut through the domestic implications of Alam's manager-mother bind; Asgharī is effectively distinguished not only within her own home, but within her community at large.

In a final response to these assertions by Lal, on the subject of the content of Asgharī's lessons, one might add that in not dissimilar ways, the installation of any state-developed curriculum or curriculum of other established pedagogical movements - Montessori and Waldorf, for example - in late-liberal societies, much like the new techniques in Aḥmad's milieu, serves to execute far-reaching disciplinary techniques comprised of and by an existing authoritative discourse that trains the girl/child in particular and often hyper-utilitarian ways. The content and fabric of these discourses vary, determined by the historical and political context of the social milieu, but both offer organizing principles that structure the production of subjects in a modern polity. As such, claims on the feudal and patriarchal nature of practices in Asgharī milieu, require consideration and reflexive evaluation of contemporary practice.

Lal ends her chapter on women in the house, writing that the production of the ideal sharīf woman

> Was always liable to overflow the boundaries of the construction, girl-
> child or woman or both. And because Hegel's slave is forever restless, the

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agential." (p. 166) Elsewhere, "The major colonial and reformist texts of the 1860s and after presented a set of rather fixed and static female figures." (p. 32)

subaltern (even the prescribed subaltern of reformist discourses) could not

be completely tamed or constrained by the patriarchal and otherwise

privileged over- lords who attempted to construct and freeze them in

sundry ways.[34]

But Lal only opens this possibility to those whom she sees as the rebels in these narrative, namely Akbarī and Mama Azmat. It is she that denies Asgharī her agency, not Aḥmad, and as I will attempt to demonstrate, it is these stakes in the historiography of Indian Muslims that pose the greatest threats to Muslim women today and the feminism which operates in this domain.

The Docile Agents of Mirāt ul-Arūs

Lal's stance is emblematic of what Mahmood categorizes as a body of feminist literature that views patriarchal systems' aims as the objectification of women and their bodies. This scholarship sees these masculinist ideologies negating the voices, experiences, corporality and subjectivity of women, replacing these with patriarchal norms. Mahmood also takes aim at another stance, perhaps espoused best by Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" which views woman's discourse as impossible to capture given its existence outside the authoritative discourse. By forming the borders of the hegemonic debate the woman's alterity renders her unable to be articulated within that discourse.[35] For Mahmood, "The body's relationship to

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[34]   p. 166

[35]   Ibid. p. 159 Referring to the important Subaltern Studies essay by Gayatri Spivak (1999) that was hugely important in both historiography and gender studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

discourse is variable and that it seldom simply follows either of the paths laid out by these two perspectives within feminist theory."[36] One perspective sees patriarchy aimed at subjugating women and the other views the female experience as unrecuperable. Mahmood lays down these two perspectives as major streams in feminist thought between which she situates her own analysis. Mahmood's interest departs from these two perspective as it takes interest in the "*work that bodily practices perform*." Ansari, was on to this notion of evaluating the bodily practices that Thānvī lays out in *Bihishtī Zevār*. His keen examination of the way in which the readers of the manual should hold themselves, walk, talk, eat and so on reveals a great deal about the embodiment of an ethical code of modesty.

My reading of *Mirāt ul-'arūs* views the female characters who through their dialogue and development come to life and assume a voice of their own. Their cultivation of knowledge (*'ilm*), and not only of "mundane" skills, *hunar aur saliqa* (talent and proficiency) in her *khānadarī*, housework, and proper etiquette, *adab*, help develop their religious and ethical beliefs through knowledge of ethics, *akhlāq*, and the Qur'an. Also, in turn, they take positions on worldly affairs. Recalling the discussion - also in Chapter Two - that Asgharī has with the mother of one of her students is particularly telling.

> Safīhan: "'What talk is there of English women? They are altogether a
> different kind of women. How are we to take after them? They gad about
> outside the house... Goodness knows what kind of mothers they are.'"

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36   Ibid. same page.

Asgharī: "In the mutiny time our family took refuge in a (jat) village where there was no custom of the purdah; all the young married girls went about outside the house. But... I observed such a modesty and propriety of demeanour among those women -- going about as they did, as I would that God might grant us women of the purdah...True, the love which these (British) women have is tempered with reason. It is not a mad fondness like that of mothers here, who prevent their children from reading, and deny them the chance of acquiring any accomplishments. You may call that love, but in reality they are sowing thorns for their children to reap. They allow their children to grow up ill-disciplined, and bring discredit upon the very name of love." [37]

Clearly Asgharī's position is not the one that is so isolated or ignorant that she is excluded from the discourse shaping the community's identity through the novel and symbolizing the developments mirrored in Aḥmad's fictitious tale. Nor does the reader find her parroting a masculinist discourse that negates her own experiences. To the contrary, she is at the heart of the debate and espousing at times counter-hegemonic views - and at other moments noticeably conformist ones - defended with evidence from her own experiences, in a woman-fashioned register and effecting subtle shifts in the paradigmatic thinking. Rather than defending practices that, for Asgharī, are outdated and in fact, fail to meet her needs in fashioning her own piety and ethics, she counters these stances, which we might categorize as those that were culturally-determined. Instead, in this example, as well as others - such as when she

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[37]   *The Bride's Mirror* p. 143

travels to meet her husband - Asgharī privileges an ethical discourse aimed at ridding her community of exclusionary practices being upheld under the guise of religion and tradition.[38] She sets a new course where women, at the helm in the domestic and community sphere, are able to fashion and reproduce this discourse. As a teacher, she is responsible for the transmission of these newly formulated ideals. While her father attempts to regulate the debate, the quickly modernizing Outer world leaves him far away and precludes him from being an active manager he desires to be. Instead, far away, one hardly feels his presence when Asgharī is in command at her school. Finally, Asgharī, in making the decision to become a teacher, *fails* to reproduce the existing model of the *ustānī*. Instead, opting against turning this position into work, *naukrī* - i.e. work that is materially compensated - she fashions a new model for the transmission of knowledge and embodies in her ethical discourse a nascent form of modern, *sharīf* symbolic capital.[39]

Conflict in the narrative's voices and dialogues about and between women demonstrates the degree to which the reformist author's intent is not the sole grounds of authority in the narrative. Power in the context of this story is clearly not something that can be possessed and wielded, something sovereign and implementable. In this basic way, the *kachahrī* milieu is distinctively modern. This *shariatic modernity*, to use Ansari's term again, is manifested in the intricacy of Aḥmad's narrative, reflecting the complexity of the social context in which Aḥmad

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[38]   Aamer Hussein (1996) writes to this effect about Aḥmad's reform project itself. He writes, "thus, perhaps in spite of his supposed conservatism, Naẕīr Aḥmad may just as well be recognized as a seminal figure in the formulation of a nascent ideology of modernity and national liberation. With wit and irony, he struggles in his writings against the outdated and restrictive practices that had accumulated in the name of religion and tradition as a result of subjugation and colonialism and were holding back his people from progress." (p. 73)

[39]   Again here I intentionally am using Bourdieu's (1977) notion of *symbolic capital* found on p. 171-183.

writes to a degree that Thānvī's *Bihishtī Zevār*, as a strictly non-literary text, cannot reproduce. Yet taken together, the representation of this milieu and the detailed manual for self-cultivation within the context, we witness both the discourse of power, and its techniques fully-articulated a generation later. We can conclude that the model of power employed in the analysis cannot be simply viewed as something that can be possessed over another, objectifying it discriminately. Rather its deployment is intricately woven through relations and negotiations that constantly produce and negotiate new forms of being and pervade private and public life, even in Aḥmad's era - the earliest stage of post-mutiny modern Indian reform. Clearly, Ansari was right to pursue an examination of discipline in his work on *Bihīshti Zevar*, for these early Muslim reformers sought to configure new systems for the structuring of a new society faced by crisis in the face of colonial domination and developed new counter-hegemonic techniques to produce their own authoritive interior discourse.

But one would be remiss to see Asgharī's - and also Husnārā's and Mahmūda's- linear narrative as mirroring either narrative outlined in Chatterjee's chapter on women in *The Nation and its Fragments*. He writes that nationalists would read the history outlined there as a story from bondage to emancipation, whereas the feminist critic would read this as a "movement from one kind of bondage to another."[40] As he asserts, the nationalist emancipation betrays any universal freedom because in granting it to some it imposes new controls over others. Mahmood confronts this second reading in her work, suggesting the need to move away from what she calls normative and naturalized presuppositions on gender

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[40]   *The Nation and Its Fragments*, p. 151

in western academics and unencumbering the notion of agency from progressive politics.[41] Linking the two, I posit that in a study of women in South Asian colonial historiography, vigilance in avoiding this pitfall remains important, since our understanding of the present and construction of contemporary political projects depends invariably on a grasp of history and socio-political debates.

Emerging from this discussion on the role of Naẓīr Aḥmad's female characters is a broader discussion of the text and its characters as the basis for an analysis of power both within the text and within the sociological context(s) within which it circulated and the ways in which they were interpreted, appropriated and transformed. This final chapter was interested in addressing both how the use of this text might link to anthropological scholarship that strikes me as being of the same vein and then, having substantially defending the temporal and disciplinary leaps associated with it, elaborate a new approach to view literary works of the woman-centric variety like *Mirāt ul-'arūs* within an anthropological and socio-historical context. Much of the work on agency in the current anthropological studies of Islam and gender emerges out of earlier work directly implicated in spaces like that of *Mirāt ul-'arūs*. The use of *begamātī zubān* was an important part of rethinking female spaces in segregated settings that often revealed the agentive capacity of feminine speech acts to unsettle or disrupt contexts understood to be where such segregation emanated from patriarchal-oriented models of social constructions. This thesis, drawing from both these foundational studies and more

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[41]   Here I do not mean to use progressive negatively; instead, I argue that it is important to untangle these two ideas and think about agency without the burden of the proscriptive intonations of progressive politics. I am extending the theoretical framework developed by Mahmood to the field of historiography. In Indian historiography, on the topic of women, the bias of feminist thought - essential in the analysis by Lal - clouds what I feel could be a more nuanced analysis, like the one posited here.

contemporary work that refines earlier scholarship, has sought to further depict the way embodiment of gendered subjects might be mapped onto the colonial milieu of *Mirāt ul-'arūs*. The aim has been to position the characters of this novel in a way that might allow for others to investigate the matrices of power in these settings, or others similar to it and to challenge ideas that the sole avenues of agency lie in emancipatory aims.

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