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SOUTH ASIA**

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KHANDAN-I-IJTIHAD: GENEALOGY, HISTORY AND AUTHORITY IN A HOUSEHOLD OF ‘*ULAMA* IN MODERN SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

Revisiting the debate on how Islam’s ‘learned men’ (*‘ulama*) have sustained their religious authority through changing historical circumstances, this article offers a *longue durée* account of the so-called ‘Khandan-i-Ijtihad’: a family of renowned scholars and jurists who have held scholarly and popular precedence within South Asia’s Shi‘i clerical networks for some 250 years. Instead of analysing the *‘ulama* as a corporate group or a class of religious professionals, this article examines the *‘ulama* as members of households (*khandan*, *khanwadah*), and emphasises the important role of family lineage and inherited social influence as conduits of clerical leadership. Tracing both the genealogical succession and the vocational enterprises of this family over several generations, the article proposes a framework for understanding an individual scholar’s relationship with the collective household, arguing that a cleric’s own reputation (*hasab-va-nasab*) rests on a mingling of ancestral pedigree and personal achievement, with the stature of individual and household perpetually affirming and reinforcing each other in the making of Islamic clerical authority. Furthermore, it establishes the importance of the *‘ulama*-biography (*tazkirah*) as itself a mechanism for actively sustaining the relevance of contemporary *‘ulama*, by perpetually memorialising their ancestors.

The community’s ‘guiding light’: introducing the Khandan-i-Ijtihad

In a small lane in Lucknow's old city, in an attic office in the compound of the landmark Ghufuran-i-Ma'ab *imambarah*, sits the headquarters of a Shi'i religious organisation known as the Noor-i-Hidayat ('The Guiding Light'). The organisation frames itself as a public religious service for the city's Shi'i community, publishing religious works, and organising calendrical sermons, 'Eid functions and lamentation gatherings during Muharram. Yet, significantly, it simultaneously seeks to preserve the memory of the so-called 'Khandan-i-Ijtihad': an extensive historic family, or household (*khandan*, *khanwadah*), of Shi'i 'ulama associated with the city. The organisation is presided by this family's current figureheads, and administered by staff who call themselves the family's 'assistants' (*khadims*); it publishes cheap-print Urdu/Hindi biographies of family luminaries, and organises public functions in the family name.¹ Implicitly, the so-called 'guiding light' that this organisation provides to

¹This paper has been a long time in coming. Early versions were presented at the University of Exeter, University of Royal Holloway, and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Paris, and I am grateful to all participants. Parts of the research were conducted on funding from the British Academy and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and I am grateful for their support. My additional thanks to Simon Fuchs, Denis Hermann, Pooya Razavian, Sajjad Rizvi, Francis Robinson and Richard Williams for advice and assistance on different aspects of the article. In particular, I thank the Noor-i-Hidayat Foundation and those several members of this 'ulama-household themselves in Lucknow, including some who feature in this paper, who often spoke to me very candidly.

The organisation has formerly released a serialised publication entitled *Khāndān-i-Ijtihād*, which carried biographical essays about the family's 'ulama, and runs the ongoing magazine *Shu'ah-i-'Amal*. The latter publishes an assortment of essays on Shi'i history, the lives of the

South Asia's Shi'ism connects the vitality of the community's religious life with the leadership provided by this particular family of exemplary religious scholars.²

The 'Khandan-i-Ijtihad' is a wide, incorporative title that refers retrospectively to a celebrated 'ulama-household of Lucknow. It has produced, over many generations, a number of certified *mujtahids* (scholar-jurists empowered to practice *ijtihad*, or independent judicial reasoning) and *marja's* (exemplars empowered to provide religious guidance), as well as dozens of other 'ulama, *muftis*, *imams*, sermonisers, poets, and other religious specialists spanning many generations. The importance of this clerical household for Shi'ism across South Asia is difficult to overstate, and while the family has received treatment in a number of Arabic, Farsi and Urdu biographies as well as some Western scholarship,³ it is worth first offering a brief overview of its illustrious history.

Imams, and literary contributions chiefly written by the family's 'ulama or their associates, including ruminations on Karbala, *marsiya* (lamentation poetry) and advices on good comportment.

² Acclamatory tracts that emphasise the need to protect the 'legacy' of this family include Mustafa Husain Asif Ja'isi, *Hindūstān mein Shī'at kī tārīkh aur vaṣī'at-nāmah-i-Haṣrat Ghufraan-i-Mā'ab* (Lucknow: Noor-i-Hidayat, 2008). The organisation's website, which advertises community events as well as publishing biographies of family figureheads, is quite comparable in its perspective: <http://www.al-ijtihad.com/> [accessed 13 March 2018].

³ By far the most substantive academic studies of this family in English remain Juan Cole, *Roots of north Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: religion and state in Awadh, 1722-1859* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), and S.A.A. Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna' Ashari Shi'ism in India*, vol II (Canberra: Ma'arif Publishing House, 1986), pp.128-52. Various Arabic, Farsi and Urdu family histories exist, many of which are

The Khandan-i-Ijtihad's influence and reputation grew in tandem, and alliance, with the Nawabi kingdom of Awadh (1722-1856), as the latter evolved from its early status of a provincial monarchy loosely subject to Mughal suzerainty into one of the world's principal seats of Shi'i-modelled governance. The household's members all share common descent from its founding figurehead Dildar 'Ali Nasirabadi ('Ghufran-i-Ma'ab', 1753-1820), an aspiring scholar from a small-scale landowning *sayyid* family of Nishapuri origins⁴ settled in the Awadhi *qasbah* (Muslim gentry-town) of Nasirabad.⁵ Having trained in the established *Dars-i-Nizamiya* curriculum under both Sunni and Shi'i teachers, he was then funded by Awadh's *vizier* (chief minister) to embark on a pilgrimage of learning to Najaf in preparation for a career in government service. Having gained certification as a *mujtahid*, he returned to Lucknow in the early-1780s, and with state patronage, effected major changes in Awadhi Shi'ism over the next four decades. He consolidated Lucknow as a centre of Shi'i scholarship

cited below; one of the most significant in Sayyid Ahmad Hindi, *Wārthat al-Anbīyā'* (Qom: Mu'assasat-i-Kitabshinasi, 2007 [first published 1918]).

⁴ For background on the *sayyids* and 'patrician' *'ulama* of this town in eastern Iran, see Richard Bulliet, *The patricians of Nishapur: a study in medieval Islamic social history* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

⁵ Nasirabad is a small *qasbah* adjacent to Ja'is in Rai Bareili district, founded by *sayyid* immigrants from Iran around the thirteenth century. Like many UP *qasbahs*, it has its own illustrious history of Islamic scholars, Sufis and poets, and has been the subject of nostalgic memorialisations by contemporary Urdu writers and poets, who ruminate on the town's vanished glories. See e.g. Mustafa Husain Asif Ja'isi, *Gulkadah-i-Manāqib* (Lucknow: Nizami Press, 2005).

and learning (*hawza*), established the city's Shi'i *namaz-i-jum'ah* (congregational prayers), and fostered the sciences of Shi'i jurisprudence and anti-Sunni/ anti-Sufi polemic.⁶

Dildar 'Ali's close involvement with Awadh's Shi'i ruling elite was expanded further after his death by his five sons, in particular his eldest, Sayyid Muhammad ('Sultan al-'Ulama'/ 'Rizwan-i-Ma'ab', 1784-1867) and his youngest, Sayyid Husain ('Sayyid al-'Ulama', 1797-1856). With the conditions for Shi'i state formation greatly bolstered by the pious Amjad 'Ali Shah's ascent to the throne (r.1837-47), it was these two *mujtahids* in particular who helped consolidate Awadh's Shi'i legal-political administration in the 1830s-50s. Sayyid Muhammad and other relatives were recruited into the Awadh judiciary, jointly heading its Supreme Appeals Court, and appointing the former's son Muhammad Baqir (d.1859) as chief justice (*sadr-al-sudur*) of the *diwani 'adalat* (civil and criminal court).⁷ They founded *madrasas* (most importantly the Madrasa-i-Shahi, established in 1847) to train more Shi'i scholars and judges for government service, and they acted as supervisors of religious endowments, as collectors of *zakat* (religious tax) and distributors of *khums* (charitable

⁶ Literature on Dildar 'Ali includes Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*; Rizvi, *A socio-intellectual history* pp.128-39; Sajjad Rizvi, 'Faith deployed for a new Shi'i polity in India: the theology of Sayyid Dildar 'Ali Nasirabadi', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (24, 3, 2014), pp.363-80. There are also a range of Arabic, Farsi and Urdu accounts, e.g. 'Ali Naqi Naqvi, *Janāb-i-Ghufran-i-Mā'ab* (Imamiya Mission: Lucknow, 1958); Agha Mehdi Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt-i-Hazrat-i- Ghufran-i-Mā'ab* (Karachi: Jami'yat-i-Khuddam-i-A'za, 1982).

⁷ Muhammad 'Ali Kashmiri, *Nujūm al-Samā'* (Tehran: Mir Kabir, 2003-4 [first printed 1884-5]), Vol I, pp.179-80.

funds).⁸ Thanks to courtly beneficence, they formalised Lucknow's ties to the *'atabat-i-'aliyat*, the holy cities of Iraq, and expanded the links of education and pilgrimage between India, Najaf and Karbala. These roles advanced Dildar 'Ali's earlier efforts into the new generation, establishing this scholar-household as an efficient hierocratic elite of religious scholars that held heavy influence over the governance of Awadh.

All these endeavours contributed to the creation of what Juan Cole has called a 'formal religious establishment' in Awadh, whereby the Khandan-i-Ijtihad *'ulama* worked closely with the ruling Nawabs and courtiers to establish a distinctive model of Shi'i governance.⁹ The household's key representatives, over these two critical generations, collaborated in a project of Shi'i statecraft. Drawing from their elite learning and expertise in jurisprudence, they served the administration as educators and advised the state's courts, and in turn, they bestowed Shi'i legitimacy upon Awadh's regime, delivering Friday prayers in the king's name, issuing *fatwas* in support of government interests, and conducting the coronations of

⁸ Works on one or both of these brothers include Cole, *Roots of north Indian Shi'ism*; Rizvi, *A socio-intellectual history*, pp.139-46; Agha Mehdi Lakhnawi, *Tārīkh-i-Sultān al-'Ulamā: Sayyid Muhammad Rizvān-i-Mā'ab kē hālāt-i-zindagī* (Karachi: Jami'yyat-i-Khuddam-i-A'za, 1977); and Sayyid Muhammad Abbas bin 'Ali Shuhstari, *Aurāq al-dhahab* (republ. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Balagh, 2007 [1854]), which detailed their roles in the Islamic life of the city during this period. For the additional role of Sayyid Muhammad and his cousin Muhammad Hadi in engaging in major written and spoken polemics with Christian missionaries, see Avril Powell, *Muslims and missionaries in pre-Mutiny India* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1993), pp.121-131, 171-77; Karl Gottlieb Pfander, *Hall-ul-Ishkal: a reply to Kashf-ul-Astar* [by Muhammad Hadi] (Agra: Publisher Unnamed, 1847).

⁹ Cole, *Roots of north Indian Shi'ism*, *passim*.

incoming monarchs. This symbiotic relationship lasted until Awadh was disbanded at the hands of the British East India Company in 1856.

Unlike these two first golden generations, this household's third and subsequent generations have received almost no academic consideration.¹⁰ Perhaps the assumption is that the family's reliance on the Awadhi state meant that its members were consigned to irrelevance once this state was dismantled.¹¹ Yet, the household's many descendants have remained prominent within India's Shi'i clerical milieu and community in every generation since. Throughout the colonial period, family figureheads continued to (and still do) hold the role of *imam* and *khatib* for the congregational prayer and sermon in the Asafi Masjid, the city's main Shi'i mosque. They also continued to command great influence over the city's public spaces: biographies record the crowds that gathered for the public sermons and the funerary processions of household figureheads being large enough to bring the city to a standstill, and

¹⁰ The sole exception is Rizvi, *A socio-intellectual history*, pp.146-152, which discusses the third generation onwards, including many of the same characters as this article, although it prioritises detail over analysis.

¹¹ Certainly the shutting down of Lucknow's *madrassa* and judiciary in 1856 immediately deprived the *mujtahids* of their salaried employment, while the king's dethronement simultaneously threatened the household with the loss of their royal stipend and the repossession of their landholdings by the British administration. Despite early foreboding, the household may have fared better than they had feared. At least some of Dildar 'Ali's descendants did hold onto their estates: H.R. Nevill, *Rai Bareilly: a gazetteer* (Allahabad: Government of North Western Provinces and Oudh, 1905), pp.200-1. Moreover, biographies claim that some family scholars in later generations did continue to draw an allowance (*tankhwah*) from the coffers of the former king, although some, e.g. the fourth-generation

suggest that these figures were regarded ‘like kings’ by the city’s residents.¹² Moreover, the household’s profile has persisted in independent India, right up until the present. Contemporary ‘*ulama* descended from this family, including figures like Kalb-i-Sadiq (‘Mufakkir-i-Islam’, b.1939) and Kalb-i-Jawad (‘Aftab-i-Shari‘at’, b.1966) remain among the most important and influential (not to mention colourful) figures of Shi‘i South Asia, and garner considerable media coverage in and beyond the region.¹³

Collectively, the Khandan-i-Ijtihad have comprised perhaps the most influential household of South Asian Shi‘i ‘*ulama* over the last quarter-millennia, equivalent only to a Sunni scholarly household like that of Farangi Mahal (from the same seat of Lucknow) in the duration and

family scholar Abul Hasan (‘Milaz al-‘Ulama’, 1851-1891), refused to claim it. Kashmiri, *Nujūm al-Samā’*, Vol I, p.124.

¹² E.g. ‘Ali Naqi Naqvi, *Tabsarah-i-hayāt-i-Jinnat-i-Mā‘ab* (Lucknow: Imamiya Mission Society, n.d. [c.1955-1960]), pp.10-11; Agha Mahdi Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt-i-Firdōs-i-Makān* (Karachi: Jami‘yat-i-Khuddam-i-A‘za, 1966), pp. 8-9.

¹³ Space does not permit a proper discussion of these contemporary clerics, though they regularly receive attention in the press and online, including through organisations such as Noor-i-Hidayat. Kalb-i-Sadiq, like his brother Kalb-i-‘Abid, has been an important public spokesman on a range of social and religious affairs, and is often lauded as an Islamic modernist, even a ‘second Sir Sayyid’. Kalb-i-Jawad has been known for engaging in a series

depth of its influence.¹⁴ We could even argue that the family's presence and influence has become more rather than less ubiquitous over subsequent generations. After the single genealogical line (*sanad*, *silsilah*) between Dildar 'Ali and his sons, it is over later years that the family has broadened into its latter-day form of a household (*khanwadah*): an extensive interlineal web with several interlinked branches. In terms of the sheer numbers of 'ulama and other clerics operating under the household name, the Khandan-i-Ijtihad has grown from generation to generation.

Seeking to understand the so-called religious capital, both scholarly and social, that these scholars have managed to retain across a historic *longue durée*,¹⁵ this article foregrounds this one 'ulama-household (a concept upon which I elaborate below) to answer two interlinked

of controversial campaigns including Danish cartoon and anti-USA protests, and rallies in support of Shi'i public mourning processions and freedom of *waqf* administration e.g.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/maulana-syed-Kalb-i--jawad-naqvi-shia-muslim-cleric-lucknow-imam-e-juma-189143-2014-04-15> [last accessed 30 June 2018].

¹⁴ The landmark text on this esteemed Sunni clerical family is Francis Robinson, *The 'ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic culture in South Asia* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001). The Khandan-i-Ijtihad could be seen in many ways as a Shi'i equivalent to the Farangi Mahallis. Both families shared origins in landowner-scholar families in the Awadhi *qasbahs* (the Farangi Mahal came originally from Sihali, the Khandan-i-Ijtihad from Nasirabad); both, moreover, enjoyed strong relationships with the government of Awadh and influenced its educational and judicial systems, although the Khandan-i-Ijtihad usurped the eighteenth-century dominance of Farangi Mahal through the early-nineteenth century.

¹⁵ The notion of religious 'capital' has been applied widely by modern sociologists of religion, and draws from the framework of Pierre Bourdieu in investigating how religious

questions. First, how has this household of scholars preserved (and, perhaps, perpetually reinvented) its claims to scholarly and pastoral religious leadership over successive generations? Second, how does the reputation of an individual scholar relate to the collective reputation of his household? Drawing from a range of Urdu, Persian and Arabic life-histories (*tazkirahs*) that trace the stories of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad or its individual members¹⁶, this article traces the fate of this family through an eventful spell of several generations after the collapse of Shi‘i Awadh in the 1850s.¹⁷ Investigating the so-called ‘strategies’ by which this ‘*ulama*-household has extended its claims to authority,¹⁸ it asks how this family have

authorities construct cultural ‘fields’ within which they are experts. ‘Genèse et structure du champ religieux’, *Revue Française De Sociologie* (12, 3, 1971), pp.295-334.

¹⁶ I make particular use of those that pay some attention to third- and fourth-generation scholars, especially Kashmiri, *Nujūm al-Samā’*; Naqvi, *Tab Sarah-i-hayāt*; Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt*; Sayyid Murtaza Husain, *Matla‘-i-Anwār: tazkirah-i-Shī‘ah afāzil-va-‘ulamā, kabār-i-bar-i-saghīr Pāk-va-Hind* (Karachi: Rashid Art Press, 1981).

¹⁷ I mostly end in the 1920s, since the following decade witnesses the ascendancy of the family’s *mujtahid* Sayyid ‘Ali Naqi Naqvi (1903-1988), who has been discussed in other work, e.g. Syed Rizwan Zamir, ‘Rethinking, reconfiguring and popularising Islamic tradition: religious thought of a contemporary Indian scholar’, (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 2011); Justin Jones, ‘Shi‘ism, humanity and revolution in twentieth century India: selfhood and politics in the Husainology of ‘Ali Naqi Naqvi’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (24, 3, 2014), pp.415-434; Salamat Rizvi, *Sayīd-ul-‘Ulamā: hayyāt aūr kārnamē* (Lucknow, 1988).

¹⁸ For this framing, see Francis Robinson, ‘Strategies of authority in Muslim South Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’, *Modern Asian Studies* (47, 1, 2013), pp.1-21.

managed to secure and transmit their custody of religious leadership over successive generations, calling upon both their achievements and their distinctions of genealogy.

This approach, foregrounding one *'ulama*-household across multiple generations, differs considerably from most studies of the *'ulama* in modern South Asia, which have tended to assess them as a vocational group working in particular historic moments. It is also an exacting enterprise, not least due to the sheer size of this household. I therefore pick out a finite number of scholars from the family's third, fourth and fifth generations, all of whom were *mujtahids* and/or *marja*'s: these were the figureheads who carried the household name forwards, just as much as they drew personal distinction from it.¹⁹ This takes us through an eventful several-decade period marked by the much-discussed 'shock' of colonial rule that has influenced much work upon the South Asian *'ulama*.

The article picks moves in several stages. A first section offers a commentary on the *'ulama*-household as a focal point for analysing Islam's learned elite, and establishes a framework for understanding the mingling of the reputation of the individual scholar and the collective household in the making of religious authority. The article then moves on to explore three interwoven devices by which the *'ulama* of this one household have endeavoured to maintain their stature since the demise of Awadh: memorialising the family (through biographical writing); preserving genealogical purity (through regulation of genealogy); and

¹⁹ In practice, I look especially at the five *mujtahids* Muhammad Taqi ('Mumtaz al-'Ulama'/ 'Jinnat-i-Ma'ab', 1819-1872), Muhammad Ibrahim ('Firdos-i-Makan', 1843-1890), Muhammad Mustafa ('Imad al-'Ulama'/ 'Mir Agha', 1837-1906), Aqa Hasan ('Qutvat-al-'Ulama', 1865-1929) and Sayyid Ahmad ('Allamah Hindi', 1878-1947). All were each other's close relatives, tutors, collaborators and in many cases, chosen successors.

accomplishing vocational excellence (through community leadership). Finally, it turns to internal family dynamics, exploring how the better-known ‘crisis’ of authority prompted by external factors was manifested in even more consequential moments of fragmentation within the household itself.

The scholar and his household: a framework for examining clerical authority

This article joins a long academic conversation regarding the shifting foundations of the ‘*ulama*’s authority in the contemporary Islamic world.²⁰ A large body of work evoking the so-called ‘crisis of authority’ in modern Islam has highlighted the challenges faced by the traditional ‘*ulama*’ (scholarly elite) in maintaining their former grandeur amidst an increasingly pluralised and combative public sphere. Studies have analysed how a spectrum of so-called lay ‘religious intellectuals’, including a medley of modernists, Islamists, Sufi *shaikhs*, public preachers and politicians, have together undermined the ‘*ulama*’s cherished claims to exclusive ownership of religious expertise.²¹ As one author has put it, ‘the authority

²⁰ While this term of ‘authority’ is used widely in historiography to describe religious leadership in Islam, it has little direct translation in the vernacular sources upon which this article is based. These sources tend to speak in terms including their ‘leadership’ (*marji’yat*, *riyasat*), ‘honour/ reputation’ (*‘izzat*), offering of ‘guidance’ (*rahnama’i/ islah*), ‘certification’ (*istihqaq*) or ‘custody/jurisdiction’ (*wilayat*) over tradition.

²¹ Representative examples include Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, *Speaking for Islam: Religious authorities in Muslim societies* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Dale Eickelman ed., *New media in the Muslim world: the emerging public sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Francis Robinson, ‘Crisis of authority, crisis of Islam?’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (19, 3, 2009), pp.339-354.

and social functions of the traditional *'ulama...* have declined through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.'²²

Fittingly, a number of works have questioned this rather singular narrative of clerical decline, asserting the *'ulama's* comparative success in sustaining their scholarly and social influence. Some landmark studies have examined how the *'ulama* have maintained custody over Islamic 'tradition' by re-emphasising the ongoing requirement for the expertise of scholars to navigate changing conditions.²³ Others have narrated how the *'ulama* have broadened their social bases as 'popular' community leaders, by preaching, providing pastoral guidance, authoring popular literatures, establishing new schools and religious institutions, and engaging in social and philanthropic enterprises.²⁴ Others still have assessed how the *'ulama* have extended their clout through their new social and political involvements, whether

²² Bryan Turner, 'The crisis of religious authority', in Anthony Reid and Michael Gilsenan eds, *Islamic legitimacy in a plural Asia: education, information and technology* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p.58.

²³ E.g. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The ulama in contemporary Islam: custodians of change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Jacob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian state: Muftis and fatwas of the Dār-al-Iftā* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

²⁴ On printing and preaching, see especially Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1982); Richard Antoun, *Muslim preacher in the modern world: a Jordanian case study in comparative perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); for engagements with more contemporary media, Jacob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Global mufti: the phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi* (London: Hurst, 2011). New institutional and organisationally-focused structures of authority were prominent themes within the classic volume Nikki Keddie ed., *Scholars, saints and Sufis: religious*

working as advisors and/or legal consultants for Muslim governments, as for the *'ulama*-councils and advisory bodies that exist in many Muslim nations,²⁵ or taking up visible profiles in political opposition or as protest movements, as they have done under a series of colonial and postcolonial regimes.²⁶ Wisely, all these perspectives emphasise the *'ulama*'s collective adaptability to changing socio-political realities; yet, all share an essential framing of the *'ulama* along largely Weberian lines, as a 'status group', or a corporate body.²⁷ They examine the *'ulama* as 'experts and specialists', or as members of a 'vocation'²⁸: a scholarly elite mutually possessed of academic and legal-bureaucratic authority, and characterised (if not always united) by their associational links to educational institutions (e.g. *madrasas*),

institutions since 1500 (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), and the many studies influenced by it. On the recalibration of a clerical public sphere, see Meir Hatina, *'Ulama', politics and the public sphere: an Egyptian perspective* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010). For an emphasis on the *'ulama*'s ability to engage social networks, build ties with elites and work via a range of public institutions and religious organisations, see Thomas Pierret, *Religion and state in Syria: the Sunni ulama from coup to revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁵ E.g. Jacob Skovgaard-Petersen, 'Towards a typology of state *muftis*', in Yvonne Haddad and Barbara Stowasser eds., *Islamic law and the challenges of modernity* (Oxford: AltaMira

expertise (e.g. Arabic or the Islamic sciences) or agendas (e.g., constraining the encroachment of modern ‘secular’ reforms in law, education or governance).²⁹

This vocational characterisation, however, may understate other sources from which the modern ‘*ulama* have derived their religious capital. In particular, it rather overlooks the significance of a scholar’s ancestry in the making of his authority. In reality, individual scholars built up their reputation not only as members of a corporate unit or professional class, but as members of so-called ‘*ulama*-households.’³⁰ Family background offered genealogical distinction to some ‘*ulama*, and very often, it carried with it vital, long-term societal connections, such as a long-established public profile, or critical relationships built up over generations with patron families. Moreover, historically the ‘*ulama* have often handed vocational offices such as those of *imam* (prayer-leader), *muhtamim* or *mutawalli*

Press, 2004), pp.81-98; Frank Vogel, *Islamic law and the legal system: studies of Saudi Arabia* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

²⁶ This is the focus of much of Meir Hatina ed., *Guardians of faith in modern times: ‘ulama’ in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); see also Ismail Kara, ‘Turban and fez: ulema as opposition’, in Elisabeth Ozdalga ed., *Late Ottoman society: the intellectual legacy* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.162-200. This has also been the perspective of influential studies of the South Asian ‘*ulama*, the earliest of which include Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *Ulema in politics: a study relating to the political activities of the ulama in the South-Asian subcontinent* (Delhi: Renaissance Publishing House, 1985) and Ziaul Hasan Faruqi, *Deoband and the demand for Pakistan* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963).

²⁷ As established in Max Weber, *The sociology of religion* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993 [1920]). We might even speculate that interpreting the ‘*ulama* as a corporate, professional clerical hierarchy reflects a ‘Christianised’ understanding of religious leadership as a

(respectively, manager or trustee of Islamic institutions such as mosques, religious schools or endowments) down their own family lines, keeping valuable social influence and revenue within their family's hands.³¹

This focus upon the so-called 'genealogical pattern of transmitting authority' among the 'ulama is one more familiar to, say, studies of the clerical hierocracies and scholar-families of the medieval period,³² or the early-modern Ottoman or Qajar empires, than those of modern South Asia. For the latter, studies have usually emphasised the vocational lives of the 'ulama as religious professionals, whether as scholar-experts, educationalists or community leaders, and have given less attention to the status of household as a basis of their authority.³³

recognised hierarchy, more befitting for religions with an official 'church', than for Islam's amorphous medley of 'learned men'.

²⁸ Zaman, *The ulama in contemporary Islam*, pp.66, 99.

²⁹ Of course, to see the 'ulama as sharing mutual vocational duties does not imply their unity. On the 'ulama's 'internal criticism' of their own tradition and of each other, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic thought in a radical age: religious authority and internal criticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

³⁰ E.g. Michael Nizri, *Ottoman high politics and the ulema household* (London: Palgrave, 2014). Nizri's work, like this article, sees the 'household unit' as sustained by a combination

Yet, the South Asian *'ulama* (including the Khandan-i-Ijtihad but also many other Shi'i and Sunni *'ulama* alike) did call upon the gravitas vested in their household, whether in terms of its ancestral excellence or its social connections, to authenticate their religious leadership. Francis Robinson's aforementioned work on the Sunni Farangi Mahal household is one of few examples to have taken the household seriously as a basis for analysing the South Asian *'ulama*, in his exploration of the notion of a distinctive 'family *adab*'.³⁴ 'To focus on a family rather than on a profession may seem to be stretching a point', he suggests, before arguing that the family possessed and nurtured its own distinctive 'family code' of character and conduct.³⁵ Yet, aside from a few such studies, the amount of capital that the South Asian *'ulama* have drawn from their household as well as their own vocation has often been understated. Scholarship may be right about the widening of the definition of *adab* to incorporate ideas of moral conduct that are earned as well as inherited³⁶; but for elite, long-

of cultural practices, including marriage alliances, social relationships with family patrons and clients, and the protection of sources of collective reputation and revenue.

³¹ Ibid.

³² This phrase comes from Jonathan Berkey, *The formation of Islam: religion and society in the Near East, 600-800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.150. Writing on late-antiquity, he continues: 'the social authority of the ulama tended to produce family dynasties of scholars, with all of a dynastic system's usual mechanisms for guarding the integrity and value of the family's authority, including nepotism (in which sons succeeded to the offices and privileges of their scholarly fathers) and intermarriage with other socially elite groups.' For a similar focus on the dynastic character of the *'ulama*, see Bulliet, *The patricians of Nishapur*, pp.24-25, 55-57.

established scholar-families, ensuring the sealed quality of their family *adab* sometimes felt like the priority.

Even leaving aside the most celebrated Sunni and Shi‘i scholar-families like the Farangi Mahal or Khandan-i-Ijtihad, the South Asian ‘*ulama* more widely have drawn considerable capital from their household origins, even when they are associated with movements of Islamic renewal that are perceived as discounting the importance of genealogical pedigree.³⁷ The Deobandi movement is a case in point. While the movement is often understood to profess individual accountability before God regardless of one’s origins or social privileges, its key exemplars have consistently drawn upon the stature of earlier generations within their own households. Biographies (*tazkirahs*) of the movement’s historic luminaries open with declarations of their ‘noble lineage’ and ‘high birth’ (*sharif-al-nasab, wiladat-i-sharifah*), before offering meticulous tracings of their ancestry down long chains of Central Asian *sharif*

³³ E.g. in different ways, Zaman, *The ulama in contemporary Islam*; Metcalf, *Islamic revival*.

My own earlier work on the Shi‘i ‘*ulama* could also be accused of taking this more vocational interpretation of the ‘*ulama*: Justin Jones, *Shi‘a Islam in colonial India: religion, community and sectarianism* (New York: Cambridge, 2012), especially pp.32-72. Others still have gone further, arguing that modern movements of Islamic renewal have even *actively eroded* the importance of distinctions of ancestry; for instance, some argue that non-*sharif* Muslims have used participation in ‘*ulama*-led movements to seek their own religious empowerment and social dignification. The important role of the non-*ashraf* in contemporary ‘*ulama* networks is highlighted especially in Arshad Alam, *Inside a madrasa: knowledge, power and Islamic identity in India* (Delhi: Routledge, 2011).

³⁴ *Adab* refers to a mark of good reputation, character or conduct, based on a combination of ancestry, social status and individual piety and good etiquette. See Barbara Metcalf ed.,

(noble) descent.³⁸ The movement found its original social base among north Indian noble and landed elites in the colonial period, while the Deobandi *'ulama*, largely of high birth themselves, fed off the largesse of their family associates, and moulded their teachings in accordance with the latter's *sharif* interests and values.³⁹ Nor have these distinctions been downgraded in relevance for contemporary *'ulama*. Contemporary Deobandi writings and organisations, like those of other *'ulama*-led religious movements, continue to be characterised by allusions to the ancestry of their contemporary leaders. Bonds of social distinction and family association bind these organisations together, while scholar-families sustain their own ties through social ties and family intermarriage.⁴⁰

Moral conduct and authority: the place of adab in South Asian Islam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

³⁵ He continues: 'it is possible to discern as distinctive a form of adab [for the *'ulama*-family] as the forms set out... for the sultan, the qadi or the Sufi.' Robinson, *The 'ulama of Farangi Mahall*, pp.69-70.

³⁶ This interpretation of the gradual shift of *adab* from high birth to include good conduct is evident in many of the contributions in Metcalf ed., *Moral conduct and authority*; c.f. Margrit

This paper explores how the *‘ulama* have often established their reputation on the basis of their family name, alongside their expertise and professional influence. We could, I speculate, interpret their ‘lines’ of genealogy and familial connections (*nasab*, *shajra*) as vectors of Islamic authority parallel to the ‘chains’ (*masnad*, *silsilah*) of transmission linking scholar with student, or saint with follower, in imparting religious capital down the generations. The Khandan-i-Ijtihad’s scholars, I argue, have routinely invoked the gravitas vested in the household to sustain authority across the generations.

Pernau, *Ashraf into middle-classes: Muslims in nineteenth century Delhi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³⁷ For a recent enquiry into the dominance of *‘ulama*-led organisations by *sharif* leaders, who draw from ‘various modalities of *sayyid* authority’ and position themselves as ‘privileged interlocutors’ between religious organisations, see Laurence Gautier and Julien Levensque, ‘The *sayyids* in South Asia: the social and political role of a Muslim elite’, unpublished presentation, European Conference of South Asian Studies, Paris, July 2018.

³⁸ Muhammad ‘Ashiq Ilahi Mirathi, *Tazkira ‘t al-Rashīd* (Lahore: Idarah-i-Islamiyah, 1986 [first published 1908]), pp.13-18.

³⁹ Metcalf argues that the disciplined, literate style of Islam propagated by these colonial-era renewal movements was ‘congruent to the interests of the *ashraf*.’ Metcalf, *Islamic revival*, pp.238-258 (258).

⁴⁰ For instance, some of the major collective biographies of Deobandis allude to the various inter-relationships between scholar-families, such as those between the Qasmi and Usmani clerical dynasties. ‘Aziz ul-Rahman, *Tazkirah-i-mashā’ikh-i-Dēōband* (Bijnor: Medina Press, 1958); Muhammad Taqi Usmani, *Akābir-Dēōband kiyā thē?* (Karachi: Maktabah Ma‘arif-ul-Qu’ran, 2003).

But we must also explore how the family's individual scholars have combined references to their hereditary family distinctions alongside their own personal accomplishments when justifying their claims to authority. A useful framework is developed in Elvire Corboz's recent so-called 'sociological study of clerical leadership', focused upon two leading Shi'i *marja'* families (the al-Hakim and al-Khu'i) based in modern Iraq. Acknowledging the grasp that these *'ulama*-households have sustained upon global Shi'i religious leadership, she explores how *marja'*s from these households have built their authority upon a specific notion of honour, or reputation (*hasab-va-nasab*), based on twin distinctions: those earned through vocational deeds (*hasab*), and those inherited through ancestral pedigree (*nasab*). These two sources of honour, she argues, blend together: the inherited pedigree of a family line bestows value on the actions of its members, and in turn, the achievements of individual family members reinforce the honour carried by the household.⁴¹ A comparable dynamic of religious leadership, I suggest, is also visible within the Khandan-i-Ijtihad, whose representatives have engaged in perpetual efforts to blend their own individual accomplishments with the wider charisma of the household reputation.⁴² It is to this dynamic of authority within this one family that we now turn.

⁴¹ Elvire Corboz, *Guardians of Shi'ism: sacred authority and transnational family networks* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp.6-8, 196-7. An influential earlier account of *nasab* and *hasab* respectively as combining 'the influence of a man's pedigree' and 'honour acquired through deeds' is made in Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and leadership in an early Islamic society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.98.

⁴² The language of *hasab-va-nasab* is used throughout some family biographies used in this study, e.g. Hindi, *Wārthat al-Anbīyā'*, passim.

Religious authority through remembrance: writing life-histories of the ‘*ulama*

While this article explores the intermingling of hereditary distinctions and personal achievement in building and sustaining an ‘*ulama*-household’s claims to scholarly and social leadership, we begin with another device crucial to propagating their reputation: the publication of ‘life histories’ (*tazkirahs*) to memorialise the individual or collective members of this household. More generally, there has been a growing tendency for Islamic biographers in South Asia to adopt the ‘*ulama* themselves as worthwhile historical subjects, and throughout the colonial period and particularly through the middle decades of the twentieth century, ‘*ulama*-biographies were written in particular abundance.⁴³ They are examples of what Roy Mottahedeh coined as ‘‘ulamalogy’, a format for writing history that foregrounds the lives and achievements of Islam’s learned men, and uses these characters as a lens to trace the evolution of Islamic learning and culture more broadly.⁴⁴ The history of the ‘*ulama*, in other words, is construed as the history of Islam.

⁴³ A few key examples of biographies from these decades, both Sunni and Shi‘i, include Mirathi, *Tazkira ‘t ul-Rashīd*; Rahmat ‘Ali, *Tazkirah-i- ‘Ulamā-i-Hind* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1914); Muhammad ‘Inayatullah Ansari, *Tazkirah-i- ‘Ulamā-i-Farangī Mahāl* (Lucknow: Asha‘at-i-‘Ulum Barqi Press, 1928); Sayyid Muhammad Husain Nauganwi, *Tazkirah-i-bī-bahā ‘ fī tarīkh al- ‘ulamā* (Delhi: publisher unknown, 1934); Muhammad Mian, *Tarīkh-i- ‘Ulamā kā Shāndār Māzī* (Lahore: Ishtiaq Press, 2005 [1957-60]); Rahman, *Tazkirah-i-mashā‘ikh*; ‘Abd al-Ha‘i al-Hasani, *Nuzhat al-khawātir* (Hyderabad: Da‘irat al-Ma‘arif, 1970).

⁴⁴ ‘The overwhelming majority of biographical dictionaries (in the medieval Islamic world) were written by ‘*ulama* for ‘*ulama*... Ulemalogy is a noble science – at least we have to think so, because it is almost all the Islamic social history we will ever have.’ Roy Mottahedeh,

The stature of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad ensures that this family has been the subject of dedicated biographical writings throughout the modern period. However, while many of these biographies were written by admiring ‘lay’ Shi‘i essayists,⁴⁵ it is striking that several representatives of this household themselves invested considerable efforts in penning life-histories of their own ancestors. We are used to thinking of the *‘ulama* as scholars in disciplines like *tafsir*, *fiqh* and *kalam*, but even some of the major *mujtahids* of this family supplemented their duties as experts of the Islamic sciences with a further calling as prolific family biographers. For them, the family biographies that they penned were almost veiled autobiographies, since they implicitly re-emphasised their authors’ own illustrious family connections to these past figureheads, and so validated their inheritance of this command.

Perhaps the most noteworthy of these works is *Wārthat al-Anbīya* (‘Heirs of the Prophets’), authored by the fifth-generation family *mujtahid* Sayyid Ahmad and first published in 1918.⁴⁶ This voluminous biography, which focused upon the family’s first two generations, was the

‘Review: *The patricians of Nishapur: a study in medieval Islamic social history*’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (95, 3, 1975), p.495. On works of *‘ulamalogy* in South Asia, see Jamal Malik, *Islam in South Asia* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 2012), pp.61-2.

⁴⁵ E.g. Kashmiri, *Nujūm al-Samā*’.

⁴⁶ Sayyid Ahmad is best remembered for his almost permanent presence in Iraq, where he picked up his title ‘Allamah Hindi. He established a circle of students in Karbala, and was central to the overhaul of the Awadh Bequest, the Indian endowment that funded pilgrimage and education circles in Najaf and Karbala. For his biography, see Hindi, *Wārthat al-Anbīyā*’, pp.15-35.

first in what he intended to a comprehensive household history.⁴⁷ Later household members also propagated their family's history. Through the mid-twentieth century, the family luminary 'Ali Naqi Naqvi, a prolific author of popular religious tracts, penned at least four biographies of individual family figureheads.⁴⁸ Subsequently, other more distant relations in both India and Pakistan would do the same, showing how these cheap-print biographies could perpetuate the family's memory across Shi'i South Asia, regardless of modern political boundaries.⁴⁹

These family life-histories draw from two distinct literary genres of Islamic biographical writing, both of which were well-established in early-modern South Asia: those of the *tabaqat* ('class') and *tazkirah* ('remembrance') literatures. The former, drawn from a long Arabic-Farsi Islamicate biographical tradition, is the classic format for the Arabic '*ulama*-biography, comprising a style of 'historical narrative which arranges events not through history but through people'.⁵⁰ Applied to the '*ulama*, it catalogues their genealogies of

⁴⁷ This title, 'Heirs of the Prophets', alludes to the status of guardians of the Islamic law and was used primarily to refer to the earliest jurists. See Jonathan Brockopp, *Muhammad's heirs: the rise of Muslim scholarly communities, 622-950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Al-Hindi never completed the intended second volume.

⁴⁸ 'Ali Naqi Naqvi wrote biographies of Dildar 'Ali, Sayyid Muhammad, Sayyid Husain, and Muhammad Taqi, all of which are cited above. For the author himself, see above, fn.18.

⁴⁹ 'Agha Mahdi Lakhnawi, an essayist of Karachi who wrote tracts on Dildar 'Ali, Sayyid Muhammad and Muhammad Ibrahim that were published in both Lucknow and Karachi (all cited above), claimed to be a distant family relation.

⁵⁰ Heather Sharkey, 'Tabaqāt of the twentieth-century Sudan: Arabic biographical dictionaries as a source in colonial history', *Sudanica Africa* (6, 1993): pp.17-18. The classical

ancestry and descent, as well as their chains of learning, successions of teachers and students, and their subjects' authorial achievements. Historically, the *tabaqat* has even become a form of Islamic science itself, since by recording the interpersonal 'chains' of learning between generations of '*ulama*, it authenticates the very expertise that they transmitted.⁵¹

Al-Hindi's aforementioned work in particular takes this form, offering encyclopaedic records of its subjects. It records their lines of lineage (*wiladat*), their certifications of scholarly excellence (*fazilat*), their writings and juristic abilities (*tasanif, ijtiḥad*), and inventories of their students (*talamzah*). It also provides dense accounts of these *mujtahids*' perfections of character, attributes and manners (*kamalat-i-naḥsani, ausaf, 'ibadat, akhlaq*); and of their historic religious duties, including delivering Friday sermons and Muharram lamentations, running Islamic trusts and foundations, and 'serving the king' (*masa'ib, waza'if, khidmat-i-irada't-i-sultan*).⁵² Moreover, this biographical dictionary clearly affirms the historical importance of these scholars both for Lucknow's own Shi'i history, but also for those centres in Iraq where they had studied and taught. Echoing the *tabaqat* form, it was clearly intended for both Indian Shi'i readers and for the transnational networks of religious scholars across the Shi'i world, including in Iraq where al-Hindi built much of his career.

Yet, other biographies of this family, especially later Urdu tracts intended for a chiefly South Asian readership, take a different tone, and borrow more from the *tazkirah*, an Indo-Persian

tabaqat genre first emerged to document ruling or royal histories, but subsequently, was expanded to catalogue the '*ulama*.

⁵¹ Guy Burak, *The second formation of Islamic Law; the Hanafī school in the early-modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.68-100.

⁵² As in, e.g. the account of Sayyid Husain. Hindi, *Wārthat al-Anbīyā'*, pp.101-212.

biographical genre more associated with narrating the lives of Sufi saints or poets. The *tazkirah*'s approach is typically more hagiographical and embroidered, often embellished with lyrical recordings of conversations (*malfuzat*), moral tales (*qaside*) and verse (*sh'ar*), all of which emphasise the spiritual qualities of their subjects.⁵³ These tracts situate their subjects less within a global network of Islamic scholarship, and more within the local cultural life of their own city. For instance, as well as being religious authorities, these texts portray the Khandan-i-Ijtihad scholars as cultured Lucknawi gentlemen. They talk of their subjects in languages of character resonant of this setting: those of a scholar's temperance, sweetness, patience, honesty, humanity, even one's 'magical smile'.⁵⁴ They also remind their readers that the family's key members were trained not just in Islamic sciences but in the finer arts of Awadh; to give a few examples, Muhammad Taqi was an accomplished poet, his son Muhammad Ibrahim was allegedly an expert astrologer, perfume-maker and apothecary,

⁵³ On the classic form of the *tazkirah*, see especially Frances Pritchett, *Nets of awareness: Urdu poetry and its critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp.63-76; Marcia Hermansen and Bruce Lawrence, 'Indo-Persian tazkiras as memorative communications', in David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence eds., *Beyond Turk and Hindu: rethinking religious identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2000), pp.149-175; Bruce Lawrence, 'Biography and the seventeenth-century Qadiriyya of north India', in Anna Dallapiccola and Stephanie Zengel-Avé Lallemand eds., *Islam and Indian religions* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993), pp.399-425.

⁵⁴ E.g. Kashmiri, *Nujūm al-Samā'*, Vol. II, pp.160-4; Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt*, pp.5-7, 47. These texts also provide anecdotes which illustrate these luminaries' mannerly sophistication; for instance, in reference to their gracious reception of envoys, their accomplished travel on horseback, and most frequently, the red-carpet treatment that they would receive as guests of noblemen and rulers. Ibid, pp.22-3, 28-30.

while Muhammad Husain and Muhammad Mustafa were trained in the Nawabi arts of soldiery (*sipah-gari*).⁵⁵ These personalities are thus moulded according to an older prototype of the *'alim* as a broadly learned gentlemen-scholar, versed in Islamic knowledge and local noble cultures alike,⁵⁶ rather than the professional scholar-jurist familiar from studies of the modern *'ulama*.

Indeed, part of the appeal of these family *tazkirahs* to their readership may be that they do not merely recall the *mujtahids* themselves, but also evoke the seat of Nawabi and colonial-era Lucknow in which their stories unfolded. Marcia Hermansen and Bruce Lawrence have studied the *tazkirahs* of Sufi saints as 'mnemonic devices' for, among other things, sacralising contemporary religious spaces: by situating their subjects so closely within their own geographical setting, they argue, these life-histories re-imbue these contemporary spaces with their presence.⁵⁷ We also see this in the biographies of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad. Replete with references to recognisable events, landmarks, neighbourhoods and persons of Lucknow, twentieth century *tazkirahs* in effect bring the nineteenth-century city to life, and place these figures at the heart of its history. Indeed, perhaps the appeal of these biographies to readers may rest not only in their remembrance of these scholars themselves, but their remembrance

⁵⁵ Ibid, pp.47-8; Naqvi, *Tabsarah-i-hayāt*, pp.16, 25; Husain, *Matla'-i-Anwār*, pp.520-24, 600.

⁵⁶ Meir Litvak, 'Madrasa and learning in nineteenth-century Najaf and Karbala', in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende eds., *The Twelver Shia in modern times* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp.63-4.

⁵⁷ Hermansen and Lawrence, 'Indo-Persian *tazkirahs*', pp.150-57.

of old Lucknow, a city whose memory continues to command nostalgia across Muslim South Asia.⁵⁸

Even more strikingly, the various life-histories about this family seem to exude the influence of the Sufi *tazkirah*-prototype by even implying their subjects to possess a kind of *baraka* (charismatic power) more resonant of saints. Readers are told that the death of Sayyid Muhammad in 1867 prompted buildings to shake, doors to fly open and buildings to crack ('the death of a scholar leaves a crack in Islam'), while he appeared to his sons in their dreams after his death.⁵⁹ Another text portrays a family luminary as steering a *hajji* steamboat to safety through turbulent weather simply through his presence on board, and ensuring a follower's career promotion simply by his blessing.⁶⁰ We also find typically Sufic imagery implied in images of followers' deferential behaviour towards their scholar-masters, such as that of a *mujtahid*'s disciple holding out the skirt (*daman*) of his garment to receive his words.⁶¹ It seems somewhat paradoxical that literary remembrances of an '*ulama*-household

⁵⁸ For an account of the 'urban mythology' that has grown around Lucknow's memorialised history, see Justin Jones, 'Urban mythologies and urbane Islam: refining the past and present in colonial-era Lucknow', *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* (11, 2015), pp.1-21; C.M. Naim, 'Interrogating "the East", "culture" and "loss" in Abdul Halim Sharar's *Guzashta Lakha'u*', in Alka Patel and Karen Leonard eds., *Indo-Muslim cultures in transition* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp.189-204.

⁵⁹ These events allegedly marked the death of Sayyid Muhammad. Kashmiri, *Nujūm al-Samā'*, Vol II, pp.158-9, 163-4.

⁶⁰ Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt*, pp.26-27.

⁶¹ Ibid, 22-3; c.f. Hermansen and Lawrence, 'Indo-Persian tazkiras', p.155.

that, historically, had done so much to strip Indian Shi‘ism of its Sufi inheritances⁶², might be conjured in such an openly saintly idiom. Yet simultaneously it is perhaps a marker of the inadequacy of typologies such as the ‘Sufi-‘*ulama* paradigm’ to categorise constructions of Islamic religious authority that have historically exhibited such intertwining between scholarly and spiritual communications of leadership.

Ultimately, the life-histories written about (and often by) the members of this scholar-household serve as a mechanism for authenticating the household’s historic and enduring leadership. Ultimately, like the *tabaqat* and *tazkirah* works of old, they establish its luminaries as the central pivot of a Shi‘i community history, and imbue the family’s later representatives with distinctions inherited from their ancestors.⁶³ Moreover, these texts reveal how the household’s various biographers have had to uphold the family’s reputation via references to multifaceted markers of distinction. They refer not just to the scholarly or juristic excellence of their subjects, but to their perfect character, ethical integrity, elite ancestry, their immersion in the cultural world of local nobilities, and even their virtual saintliness and spiritual power. These texts thus illustrate perfectly the multi-polar credentials of authority to which the ‘*ulama* have had to ascribe in contemporary times, as they seek to establish their importance before an ever wider spectrum of clerical and public audiences.

⁶² This is argued in Rizvi, ‘Faith deployed’.

⁶³ Sabrina Mervin argues that contemporary Shi‘i ‘*ulama*-autobiographies show the influence of the *tabaqat* genre in how their authors establish their presence in landmark religious locations and historical events, thus placing themselves at the centre of a community historical narrative. See Sabrina Mervin and Haïtham al-Amin eds., *Autobiographie d’un clerc Chiïte du Ġabal ‘Āmil, tiré de: Les notables chiïtes (A’yān al-šī’a)* (Damascus, 1998), pp.14-29.

The household's later representatives have also endeavoured to adapt their ancestors' life-histories to move with the demands of changing times. The Noor-i-Hidayat organisation's contemporary outputs, like its serialised publications *Khandan-i-Ijtihad* and *Shu'a-i-'Amal* and even its website, comprise a new format for the 'ulama-biography. Cherry-picking extracts, anecdotes and verses from a canon of older *tabaqat* and *tazkirah* works, the organisation effectively adapts these older prototypes for circulation among a contemporary and increasingly transnational Shi'i audience, rendering it in simplistic Hindi and Urdu, and removing much of the excess detail and Persianate lyricism.⁶⁴ 'Ulama life-histories may now be conveyed through magazines and websites rather than printed lithographs, but these contemporary, consumable biographical formats, cut-and-pasted from earlier biographies and cheaply printed or digitised, are just the latest incarnation of the family's long-term endeavour to record, propagate and manage the life-histories of its ancestors.

Inheriting religious authority: the importance of genealogy

Another device through which the household has maintained its reputation is the preservation and perpetuation of the family's ancestral pedigree (*nasab*). The meticulous records of genealogical succession (*shajra-i-nasab*) preserved in these family biographies indicates just how significant was traceability of bloodline in ensuring the family's ongoing prestige. Distinguished ancestry has sometimes been considered more important for the Shi'i than Sunni 'ulama, since Shi'ism has traditionally insisted that only *sayyids*, as direct descendants

⁶⁴ The biographical essays in these periodicals clearly source much of their information from the works cited above, such as Hindi, *Wārthat al-Anbīyā*', Shuhstari, *Aurāq al-dhahab* and Kashmiri, *Nujūm al-Samā*', and present it in simpler, shorter form.

of the Prophet and the Imams, can provide clerical leadership.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the declaration of authentic lineage is prominent even in biographies of Sunni *'ulama*, indicating the importance of so-called 'genealogical memory' in constructing the social authority of the modern *'ulama* regardless of the particulars of schools of thought.⁶⁶

The Khandan-i-Ijtihad's life-histories record the household's *sayyid* lineages back to the tenth Imam, and their attention to detail allows us to construct a diagrammatic representation of some of the modern relational ties with this family (Fig. 2). The family tree displayed here is far from complete: it only shows the patrilineal descent of a few major family figureheads who feature in this article, and omits most of this voluminous household's members (the *mujtahid* Aqa Hasan alone, for instance, allegedly had 22 children). Nevertheless, even this incomplete representation offers important glimpses into how this household reaffirmed its collective honour by regulating its *shajra* through the generations.

First, we can see the use of intra-family endogamy, chiefly the established *sharif* conjugal practice of inter-cousin marriage, both to protect the purity of *shajra* and to integrate different

⁶⁵ For the different manifestations of religious, cultural and social distinction implied by *sayyid* status in various contexts, see Kazuo Morimoto ed., *Sayyids and sharifs in Muslim societies: the living links to the Prophet* (London: Routledge, 2012). For South Asia specifically, see Gautier and Levensque, 'The *sayyids* in South Asia'.

⁶⁶ Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and his movement, 1870-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.97-110. The seminal *mufti* Ahmad Raza Khan's ancestral origins in a family of *sayyid pirs* (saints) in Rohilkhand were carefully preserved, and were central to his credentials within the *sayyid* networks centred around local shrines.

branches of the household.⁶⁷ A diagram such as this cannot convey the extent of interlinkage between family branches achieved through inter-cousin marriage, but these links were perpetual, and meant that a large number of the family's later scholars hold both patrilineal and matrilineal (*najib-ut-tarafan*) descent from Dildar 'Ali – a distinction sometimes affirmed in household biographies. Second, we can see examples of tactical intermarriage between different 'ulama-families active in Lucknow. The household incorporated highly regarded scholars of associated ancestral lines into its own fold through intermarriage, giving itself an even greater dominance within the city's scholarly networks.⁶⁸ Intermarriage between 'ulama-households has been a widely known custom across the Islamic world. It has been documented, for example, among the 'ulama in Qajar Iran and among Sanussi Sufis in north Africa,⁶⁹ and it was such a 'prevailing practice' in Ottoman-era West Asia that inter-family endogamy turned the high 'ulama of cities such as Damascus into a virtual 'closed caste.'⁷⁰ Likewise, this custom clearly played an important role in modern South Asia for families such as the Khandan-i-Ijtihad. Some of the major Shi'i 'ulama of north India married into this

⁶⁷ As in the case of the marriage of Muhammad Taqi's daughter to Muhammad Mustafa, his cousin's son.

⁶⁸ E.g. Muhammad Taqi's other daughter married the regarded *mujtahid* Abul Hasan (d.1895), a highly regarded *mujtahid* (not to be confused with other individuals with the same name within this family).

⁶⁹ Joanna de Groot, *Religion, culture and politics in Iran: from the Qajars to Khomeini* (London: Palgrave, 2007), p.93; Leon Carl Brown, 'The religious establishment in Husainid Tunisia', in Keddie ed., *Scholars, saints and Sufis*, p.89.

⁷⁰ Margaret Merriweather, *The kin who count: family and society in Ottoman Aleppo, 1770-1840* (Austin: University of Texas, 2010), p.145; c.f. Nizri, *Ottoman high politics*, pp.61-7, c.f. 14-15.

household, and thus became part of it; some, like Aqa Hasan, even became the family's key representatives after being 'married in' from cognate lineages.⁷¹

Third, the household exercised comparably strategic marital alliances with non-clerical noble dynasties (*amara*'), including descendants of the Awadh royal family.⁷² Prior studies of Awadh have revealed how the royal family and Shi'i nobility appropriated marriage alliances to bolster hereditary distinctions and uphold important social and political relationships,⁷³ and similar strategies were clearly employed by this '*ulama*-household. Indeed, it resembles similar arrangements within other Islamic royal households (including early-modern Ottoman and Qajar and, indeed, contemporary Saudi) who have similarly sometimes employed family intermarriage to engrain their political relationships with the families of other political and societal elites on whose beneficence they rely.⁷⁴

The Khandan-i-Ijtihad has thus utilised the tight regulation of marital practices both to uphold the inherited honour transmitted by *nasab* and also to shore up the family's social influence

⁷¹ Aqa Hasan originally belonged to a separate line of Naqvi *sayyids* from the adjacent *qasbah* of Ja'is.

⁷² Muhammad Husain, for instance, married the daughter of Mirza 'Ali Qadr, a former royal and Husainabad trustee.

⁷³ Michael Fisher, 'Political marriage alliances at the Shi'i court of Awadh', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (25, 4, 1983), pp.593-616; Muhammad Amir Ahmad Khan, 'Local nodes of a transnational network: a case study of a Shi'i family in Awadh, 1900-1950', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (24, 3, 2014), pp.400-4.

⁷⁴ There were occasional marriages between Ottoman '*ulama*-households and *vizier* (ministerial) and mercantile families. Nizri, *Ottoman high politics*, pp.61-67.

among both clerical and courtly elites. Moreover, the way that this family has flaunted its chains of lineage has itself moved presentationally with the times. The long, unbroken listings of names typical of the nineteenth-century *tazkirah* have been replaced, in magazines and websites, by newer, graphic representations of this lineage, perhaps even ‘neo-calligraphic models’ that appropriate the new technologies of the digital age.⁷⁵ Like the portrait of the family figures reprinted above (Fig 1), they can select a small body of carefully chosen household figureheads, and depict their links to their illustrious ancestors in a highly simplified form, prime for quick absorption by the casual or online reader.

A final thought might be spared for the family’s women. Wives and daughters are themselves silent and nameless figures in household histories, mentioned only as those ‘granted’ (*mansub*) in marriage to their scholar-husbands (many of whom themselves, it seems, married multiple times).⁷⁶ Yet, despite their consistent anonymity in biographies,⁷⁷ the family’s women obviously played an important role as the conduits who transmitted the household’s cherished genealogy.

⁷⁵ This notion of ‘neo-calligraphy’, or the redevelopment of visual and calligraphic models from older Islamic literary genres to impart contemporary Shi‘i clerical authority, is discussed in Morgan Clarke, ‘Neo-calligraphy: religious authority and media technology in contemporary Shiite Islam’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (52, 2, 2010), pp.351-383.

⁷⁶ Muhammad Ibrahim, for instance, married three times, though whether these were parallel or consecutive marriages is unclear.

⁷⁷ There is little evidence, even outside of male-focused *tazkirahs*, of these women having significant social roles; this contrasts with, say, the high ‘*ulama* in Qajar Iran, whose female relations sometimes worked as lay preachers and tutors for other elite women.

Acquiring religious authority: the importance of vocation

What, then, of the other element of family honour: *hasab*, or that acquired afresh through the deeds of household scholars, both individually and collectively, in each generation? The Khandan-i-Ijtihad, especially from their third generation onwards, made a pronounced self-transformation from a courtly into a communitarian form of leadership. No longer able to rely on commissions and duties provided by Awadh's Shi'i rulers, from the 1860s they turned with increasing clarity towards roles in the social and spiritual guidance of India's Shi'i population. Clerical biographical dictionaries talk about the family departing their earlier careers in advising the King's administration, and instead serving the Shi'i faithful (*mominin*). This experience mirrors that of many Sunni '*ulama* in colonial-era South Asia who, we similarly know, turned towards Muslim lay communities as their chief benefactors and clients, by expanding their activities of religious education, sermonising and pastoral guidance.⁷⁸ Yet, for the Khandan-i-Ijtihad, who had enjoyed a far more formal, entrenched (and recent) relationship with the Awadhi ruling elites than the Sunni '*ulama* had ever held with the Mughal-led administrations of the Doab and Rohilkhand, the collapse of Muslim power may have felt even more acute, making their ability to make this transition so suddenly especially striking.

Indeed, after 1857 the family showed considerable deftness in reformulating elements of established Shi'i thought and religious practice to make the necessary adjustment to new political circumstances. Just one striking example is how they revised stipulations concerning practices of religious observance, as in one case centring on the issue of congregational

⁷⁸ Metcalf, *Islamic revival in British India* et al.

prayers. Almost immediately upon annexation, Sayyid Husain's son Muhammad Taqi was asked by his tutoring *mujtahid* whether it was legitimate for a congregation to elect a *peshnamaz* who had not received 'official ('*adalati*') appointment, if they were unanimous in their support for him. This question was significant, since the role of city *peshnamaz* had historically been a *de facto* royal appointment in Lucknow over the lifetimes of its two main previous occupants, Dildar 'Ali and Sayyid Muhammad. Issuing an *istiftah* (answer), he answered the question in the affirmative, receiving an *ijazah* (certification as a *mujtahid*) from a *marja'* of Najaf for his reasoning.⁷⁹ As well as enabling the ongoing appointment of a *peshnamaz* despite the fall of the king's court, Muhammad Taqi's juristic revision also legitimised his own succession into this position, and meant that thereafter, the Khandan-i-Ijtihad's key representatives effectively controlled this influential office in conjunction with the mosque's trustees. The household's retention of the office of Lucknow's Shi'i *peshnamaz*, which continues until today, remains possibly the single most significant platform for projecting the family's profile and public influence.

There were other means by which the Khandan-i-Ijtihad maintained its grasp over the colonial-era city's key religious life. Especially important was their sustained hold over several large *auqaf* (religious endowments) that had been set up by the former Shi'i rulers to support Lucknow's Islamic culture. Under the Awadh court, the Khandan-i-Ijtihad's senior clerics had often been assigned roles of trustee (*mutawalli*) over such foundations, giving this 'ulama-household influence control over a substantial amount of revenue and, in turn, over the mosques, *imambarahs* and other institutions that they supported. One key example was the Waqf-i-Mumtaz ul-'Ulama, one of Lucknow's most important Shi'i *waqfs*. Established by several Nawabi courtiers soon before British annexation, it drew rental revenue from a

⁷⁹ Naqvi, *Tabsarah-i-hayāt*, p.16.

number of houses, shops and kitchens across the old city to finance some of the city's major religious institutions, including the Tehsin 'Ali Khan mosque and several lodges for the city's itinerant religious scholars, as well as providing a stipend to the trustee (typically the household's current main representative) and his family. After annexation, Muhammad Taqi, took up the post of *mutawalli* (trustee), after which, the office stayed in the hands of his descendants.⁸⁰

In other cases, the Khandan-i-Ijtihad's family alliances gave them indirect leverage over the city's religious life. Crucially, their close connections with former royalty gave them ongoing influence over the Husainabad Trust, an enormous endowment that was controlled by a board of royal and courtly descendants, and which supported Lucknow's Shi'i Friday mosque, the Asafi Masjid, and the Asaf-ud-Daula *imambarah*, the city's largest Shi'i congregational space.⁸¹ Especially important was one component fund of the Husainabad Trust: the Awadh Bequest, that funded religious education and pilgrimage in the holy cities of southern Iraq. The Khandan-i-Ijtihad's simultaneous links with the Bequest's managers in Lucknow, and with the *marja*'s of Najaf and Karbala (under whom they had often studied), enabled them to position themselves as interlocutors between trustees and beneficiaries, and between Iraqi and Indian Shi'i centres. Earning the attention of the Husainabad trustees and the colonial administration on this basis, members of the family exacted considerable influence over the fund's dispensation in the holy cities. Most particularly, Sayyid Ahmad Hindi used his influence among the fund's managers to shape the Bequest's management under the tutelage of the British Resident in Iraq in the 1910s-1920s, leading to the fund's remittances being

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp.27-30.

⁸¹ Literature on the Husainabad Trust includes Aishwarya Pandit, 'The Husainabad Trust: the case of a Shi'a heartland?' *Modern Asian Studies* (52, 5, 2018): 1692-728.

circulated among a wider range of scholars and causes than simply the cities' single most senior *mujtahids*, including a larger number of South Asian '*ulama*'.⁸²

Simultaneously, many of the household's endeavours after annexation focused upon building up new bases of societal support and influence. A good example was the household's ongoing role in religious tutorship, and the building up of master-student networks. Although Lucknow's main Shi'i *madrasa*, the Madrasa-i-Sultaniyah, was closed upon annexation, the family's successors proved remarkably adept at sustaining a family reputation as religious tutors despite the absence of a recognisable institute of learning. One only need look to the *tazkirahs* of Muhammad Taqi who, in the 1860s, continued the household legacy into its third generation by developing his own '*hawzah-i- 'ilmiyah*': a circle of his students who were said to have 'spread to all corners of India.'⁸³ A similar network is attributed to his son Muhammad Ibrahim, the reach of which created a similar geography of Indian Shi'i learning in the 1870s-80s with Lucknow at its centre.⁸⁴ The exhaustive lists of the students of each *mujtahid* as preserved in biographies show that many of the most prominent Indian Shi'i

⁸² The fund and its reform, including Sayyid Ahmad Hindi's central personal role, are discussed in several works, e.g. Juan Cole, *Sacred space and holy war: the politics, culture and history of Shi'ite Islam* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), pp.78-98; Jones, *Shi'a Islam*, pp.132-37.

⁸³ Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt*, p.19. His students of the 1860s included a number of relatives and members of the former royal family, as well as some who progressed to work as '*ulama*, *imams*, sermonisers, debaters and tutors in places as distant as Saharanpur, Lahore and Jaipur. *Ibid*, pp.19-23.

⁸⁴ Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt*, pp.43-46 lists students from across north India, Punjab, Hyderabad and elsewhere.

'ulama of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were, in one way or another, direct or indirect students of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad.

Strikingly, the main educational enterprise in which the family were involved in the decades after annexation was not in the institutional, collective format of the *madrassa*, which was being appropriated by the *'ulama* at Deoband and elsewhere. Instead, as presented in these texts, it focused upon the individual family scholar, who built up a circle of students who would subsequently carry the family name farther afield via their own vocations. Strikingly, the *tazkirahs*' application of the term *hawzah* to imply a circle of students tied to an individual master was quite distinct from the meaning of the term as applied to centres such as Najaf or Qom, for which it denotes an integrated network of scholars, educational institutions and curricula of learning.⁸⁵ In early-colonial Lucknow, which lacked a Shi'i *madrassa* of note, it seems that the *'ulama*-household, rather than any formal institution, could define itself as the core of the city's *hawzah*.

Simultaneously, these later generations of *mujtahids* continued to foster the household's relationships of patronage with influential Shi'i *sharif* patrons, drawn from among north India's nobilities, landowners, ex-royals and *subehdars*. Without state commissions, private supporters and benefactors seemed all the more important to sustaining influence both socially and economically. So, while prior to 1857 it was 'not the practice' of the senior *mujtahids* to travel beyond the city to meet their patrons,⁸⁶ household representatives thereafter would more commonly accept invitations to deliver *khutbah* or *majlis* sermons on

⁸⁵ E.g. Meir Litvak, *Shi'i scholars of nineteenth-century Iraq: the 'ulama' of Najaf and Karbala'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp.15-17.

significant dates, and would sometimes travel to their patrons' towns as a regular seasonal commitment.⁸⁷

However, the *'ulama* were also reaching out beyond landlords and noblemen to a wider catchment of the Shi'i population. Part of their work was made up of answering enquiries regarding Shi'i beliefs, ritual practices and stipulations of law, as received from followers. Muhammad Taqi was fielding this kind of correspondence even in the decade after annexation, and as early as the 1870s, at least two of the family's figureheads, Muhammad Ibrahim and Muhammad Mustafa (the latter being the former's student, successor and son-in-law all at once), were managing offices (*daftars*) in Lucknow to handle enquiries. They received questions both in person and via post and telegram, to which they formulated and despatched answers in response, even allegedly taking personal responsibility for sealing the envelopes.⁸⁸ These endeavours mirror the trend seen among Sunni Deobandi and other *'ulama* to direct their answers and *fatwas* (legal decisions) towards the lay population during this period; and while these *mujtahids*' decisions were never compiled systematically (as was latterly done for the letters and *fatwas* of notable Sunni *muftis*) and were mostly lost, there seems little reason to doubt their impact: they are said to number in the many thousands, and sometimes appeared in the Urdu press.

⁸⁷ Abul Hasan frequently travelled to Allahabad at the invitation of a local landowner (*ibid*); for Muhammad Husain, who did the same for the Nawab of Rampur; and 'Ali Muhammad ('Taj al-Ulama', 1846-1894), who regularly offered *khutbah* by noble invitation in Patna and Jaunpur. Kashmiri, *Nujūm al-Samā'*, Vol II. pp.160-2, 248-50.

⁸⁸ Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt*, pp.40-1; Husain, *Matla'-i-Anwār*, pp.600-1.

Given the household's historic training as *muftis* (jurists) in Iraq, and the employment of its first two generations as jurisconsults by the court of Awadh, it is unsurprising that the dispensation of 'legal' advices (*fatwas*, *hukums*) to their petitioners became a major aspect of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad's vocational duties. Yet, the change of emphasis between generations is striking. Many of the edicts of Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Husain especially, issued at the peak of Shi'i political power, had essentially been validations of governmental interests and priorities.⁸⁹ Yet, by the third and fourth generations, with Shi'i rule over, the household 'ulama's juristic reasonings and responses, where they can be traced, refocused to offering direct guidance to Shi'is in a new environment in which they had to govern their own religious life rather than relying upon the state to do so.

Muhammad Taqi's revaluation of congregational prayers from a political to a community-regulated issue, described above, is a clear example. But the surviving *fatwas* of Muhammad Ibrahim and Muhammad Mustafa largely seemed to reflect the trend towards a more disciplined, regulated form of Shi'i religious practice that followed the perceived excesses of the Nawabi era. One tale tells of Muhammad Ibrahim's scoffing at the giving of dowry (*jahez*): criticising an older relative who was planning to provide a dowry for his daughter's

⁸⁹ Sayyid Muhammad's legal decisions included upholding the distinctions of *sayyid* ancestry as enduring social leaders; allowing interest (*riba*) to be taken on loans made to non-Shi'is; praising the accumulation of wealth, since the wealthy were less likely to fall into sinful practices; blessing Wajid 'Ali Shah's numerous *mut'ah* (temporary marriages) as legitimate acts; and disallowing *jihad* and other agitations against state authority in the absence of the hidden Imam. Cole, *Roots of north Indian Shi'ism*, pp.153-55, 255-63. Rulings of both Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Husain were compiled as Musharraf 'Ali Khan Lakhnawi, *Bayāz-i-masā'il* (Lucknow: publisher unknown, 1835-6).

marriage so large it had to be transported on camelback, he urged instead that no dowry be given at all.⁹⁰ Another anecdote relates to a noblewoman who wished to go on *hajj*, but was forbidden from doing so by her husband. Muhammad Ibrahim urged that, since she had the independent financial means, she should not be beholden to him and should follow her own conscience.⁹¹ Others from among Muhammad Ibrahim's instructions embody a similar ethic of personal accountability. Legal rulings could not be changed for personal gratification, they claimed; proper inheritance laws could not be transgressed; children should obey their elders, and women their husbands or male guardians; all those who could afford to travel on *ziyarat* or *hajj* were obliged to do so.⁹² He also wrote treatises on the strictures of prayer, of fasting, and the virtues of avoiding personal indulgences like immodest clothes and sitting for portraits.⁹³ The household thus placed itself at the centre of the shift towards an 'ethical' Islam of personal responsibility quite typical of the era and comparable to the Deobandi, Barelwi and other movements of renewal. Likewise, these third and fourth generation scholars are depicted as embodying these values in their own conduct. Perhaps in contrast to the tales of extravagance that surrounded the family's early generations, these characters are depicted in their *tazkirahs* in terms of more disciplined virtues like politeness (*shaistah*), humility (*'ajizi*), and piety (*diyanat*).⁹⁴

Yet, with the *marja*'s of Najaf and Karbala by now using telegraph, print and teaching networks to dispense their own *fatwas* on an increasingly global scale, this household were

⁹⁰ Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt*, pp.6-7.

⁹¹ Ibid, pp.10-11.

⁹² Ibid, pp.50-52.

⁹³ Ibid, pp.37-40.

⁹⁴ E.g. ibid, pp.6-7, 26-27, 31.

simultaneously finding ways to assert their own sustained command of guidance on points of law for the Indian Shi'i population. A *fatwa* by Muhammad Taqi offers a lucid example. In the 1860s, a Shi'i gentleman in India had apparently lost a hand in a fight and, in a bizarre experiment, had grafted a corpse's hand onto himself in replacement. Subsequently, the question of whether this hand could be considered his own for the purposes of *'ibadat* (acts of worship) was dispensed around Shi'i scholarly circles, and reached both Muhammad Taqi in Lucknow, and Shaikh Za'in al-'Abidin Mazandrani (d.1891/2), at this point the highest *mujtahid* in Karbala (who had, incidentally, conferred *ijazahs* upon some of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad *mujtahids* themselves).⁹⁵ These two scholarly luminaries apparently issued different answers. When al-Mazandrani was pressed further, he answered that there was no conflict between the two *mujtahids*, but that '*hum rijāl va-nahnu rijāl*': 'they are men and we are men', extrapolated here in Urdu to indicate 'each man to his own place'.⁹⁶

This episode is revealing for its illustration of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad asserting its ability to offer different commands from the *marja*'s of Iraq: most Indian '*ulama* acted in deference to such illustrious scholars as al-Mazandrani, and to show such juristic independence was itself

⁹⁵ Al-Mazandrani's biography is available in Muhammad Mahdi al-Mousawi, *Ahsān al-wadī'ah* (Najaf: publisher unknown, 1968), pp.95-98.

⁹⁶ '*Voh mard-i-mēdān hēn apnī jagah; ham mard-i-mēdān hēn apnī jagah*'. Naqvi, *Tabsarah-i-hayāt*, pp.17-18. The original Arabic phrase is a long-established legal maxim which has been used by Sunni reformists to legitimise the ongoing practice of independent judicial reasoning by modern '*ulama* rather than solely by the early jurists. Khalid Abou El-Fadl, *Reasoning with God: reclaiming shari'ah in the modern age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), p.211.

a mark of high stature.⁹⁷ Yet, the fact that the family's later *tazkirahs* have chosen to preserve this tale for posterity is equally revealing. The issuing of *fatwas* carved out the contours of an 'Indian' Shi'i community whose composition and needs, this tale implied, were not identical to those of Shi'is in West Asia. This twentieth-century *tazkirah* thereby marks out the Khandan-i-Ijtihad as the essential guides of an Indian Shi'i population, regardless of any claims to the increasing centralisation of Najaf or Qom as global centres of Shi'i leadership during this same period.⁹⁸

While all these endeavours of community guidance mirrored similar efforts among the Sunni 'ulama, there was a major issue on which they often differed: this household's apparent willingness to engage the colonial administration. While many Sunni 'ulama, including those of Farangi Mahal, Deoband and Ahmad Reza Khan's 'Barelwi' movement, often refused any meaningful political or intellectual cooperation with the colonial state,⁹⁹ the long-established

⁹⁷ Cole, *Sacred space*, pp.92-3.

⁹⁸ Most scholarship has argued that the increasingly global reach of Najaf and Karbala's scholarly networks, and the elaboration of a more hierarchical clerical order under a single Shi'i *mujtahid* (*marja' al-taqlid*), was leading to a 'monopolisation' or 'centralisation' of global Shi'i leadership during this period. E.g. Litvak, *Shi'i scholars*. These family-authored *tazkirahs* of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad give the alternative impression of their largely autonomous juristic reasoning in India.

⁹⁹ The figureheads of the Farangi Mahal in this period insisted that scholar-families should 'avoid all dependence or even association with the government.' Robinson, *The 'ulama of Farangi Mahall*, pp.91-92. This was not true of all Farangi Mahallis, however: some among the family's Bahr al-'Ulumi section seemed more willing than others to accept government honours, medals and offers of jobs. Ibid, pp.92-94.

historical links that this particular family held with Awadh's political elites meant that its members were rather more reluctant to surrender the opportunity to engage with British officials. A number of family *mujtahids* of the third generation onwards, including Bandeh Husain, ('Malik al-'Ulama', d.1879), Abul Hasan and Muhammad Husain ('Bahr al-'Ulum', 1851-1907), accepted seats at the District Commissioner's *darbars* (public audiences), an honour shunned by many Sunni and Shi'i 'ulama alike.¹⁰⁰ Some 'ulama of the household even worked for the British administration, most obviously Sayyid Muhammad's son Sayyid 'Ali Akbar (1833-1900), who after 1856 became a *munsif* (court judge) and ultimately the Deputy Collector of Bahraich.¹⁰¹

This willingness to engage with the state meant that the household's scholars could position themselves as interlocutors, representing the city's Shi'i community to the colonial administration. In the 1880s, Muhammad Ibrahim reversed his earlier refusal to communicate with the British overlords, and made appeals to Lucknow's Municipal Commissioner on two separate Shi'i confessional issues. The first, in 1884, was a successful appeal for the British to evacuate the Asaf-ud-daula *imambarah* and mosque compound, Lucknow's major Shi'i congregational space, which had been in a British military garrison since 1857. This allowed *namaz-i-jum'ah* in the mosque for the first time in almost three decades, with Muhammad Ibrahim himself instated as *peshnamaz*.¹⁰² The second, in 1889, was an equally successful

¹⁰⁰ Husain, *Matla'-i-Anwār*, pp.50, 128-9.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p.348.

¹⁰² Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt*, pp.18-21. In the interim, prayers had been held in the inadequate Tehsin 'Ali Khan mosque, that was deficient as a venue both for its size and location.

attempt to resist government restrictions upon the Shi‘i *azan*.¹⁰³ According to his *tazkirah*, Muhammad Ibrahim went over the head of the Municipal Commissioner by writing directly to ‘Queen Victoria’, and praising the ‘British values’ of justice and religious freedom to win the argument.¹⁰⁴ Both feats were key in these scholars’ self-positioning as community representatives before the state, something that did not yet have wide parallels among the Sunni, or many other Shi‘i, ‘*ulama*-households in the same period.¹⁰⁵

This array of engagements with the wider population crystallised further from the 1900s, when household members began to set up a range of *anjumans*: public associations that organised religious functions or offered platforms for discussing community needs. Of these, the most significant was the Anjuman-i-Sadr-al-Sudur, a Shi‘i public organisation founded by the young *mujtahid*, Aqa Hasan. The organisation aspired to bring together the city’s ‘*ulama* and *amara*’ (religious and social leaders) to address the community’s needs, and after a few initial sittings it morphed into the larger All India Shi‘a Conference.¹⁰⁶ Yet, the organisation illustrates much about how this household’s figureheads utilised their public involvements to engrain the family name into Shi‘i public life. Carrying the weighty title of ‘Chief Jurist’ familiar from pre-British Awadh, an office that had been controlled by this family’s

¹⁰³ Some Sunni clerics of the city had argued that the Shi‘i *azan*, which contained a reference to Imam ‘Ali as first Caliph, was deliberately antagonistic towards Sunni Muslims, and should be proscribed by the British administration.

¹⁰⁴ Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt*, pp.21-25.

¹⁰⁵ India’s Sunni and Shi‘i ‘*ulama* became more widely involved in petitioning the colonial state a few decades later, especially during the pan-Islamic campaigns and legislative debates about *waqf* reform in the 1910s.

¹⁰⁶ As discussed further in Jones, *Shi‘a Islam*, pp.50-52, 115-25.

ancestors, the organisation's name asserted this household's ongoing community headship. By implication, the contemporary Shi'i community, much like the legal subjects of the *sadr-al-sudur* in the judiciary of old Awadh, became a populace over whom the scholarly household sustained command.

Over subsequent decades, this 'ulama-household set up a plethora of *anjumans* that also imprinted the family name and ethos within the city's landscape. Around 1910, Sayyid Ahmad al-Hindi and Aqa Hasan set up a publishing organisation that they called the Yadgar-i-'Ulama (literally, 'Memorial to the 'Ulama'). Founded explicitly to 'conserve the memory' of the household, the organisation provided the foundations for Sayyid Ahmad's authorship of the definitive family *tazkirah*, and reprinted some of Dildar 'Ali's key works.¹⁰⁷ Other organisations were established in honour of household luminaries, like the Anjuman-i-Jinnat-i-Ma'ab, a popular religious organisation formed by 'Ali Naqi in the honorific title of Muhammad Taqi, soon after India's independence.¹⁰⁸

In parallel with other 'ulama in colonial India, the Khandan-i-Ijtihad have, since the late-nineteenth century onwards, appropriated the opportunities provided by the evolving public sphere. Their engagements with a purported 'community' of followers have included a range of deeds including tuition, sermonising, publishing, managing religious endowments and providing advices on religious law, as well as public representation on community social issues. However, we must caution against interpreting all these vocational endeavours as

¹⁰⁷ These included Aqa Hasan's translation of one of Dildar 'Ali's works: Dildar 'Ali Nasirabadi, *Tarjumah-i-'Imād-ul-Islām ,hēsa-i-awal: Kitāb-al-Taūhīd* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, c.1905-10).

¹⁰⁸ Hindi, *Wārthat al-Anbīyā*, pp.18-19.

somehow supplanting distinctions of lineage in maintaining the household's authority. To the contrary, many of the key occupational achievements of these *'ulama* - whether their foundations, printed works or their public associations - have carried the names of family members, or of the offices historically associated with the household. Viewed like this, the contemporary Noor-i-Hidayat is simply a recent example within a long line of organisational ventures to embed the stature of the *'ulama*-household in the city's public sphere and the Shi'i community's collective memory.

Family fortunes, family feuds: crises of authority within the household

While these scholars proved relatively adapt at periodically renewing their custody of religion, the household nevertheless felt the impact of the alleged 'crisis' of authority which afflicted the *'ulama* more generally in this period. The family's re-stamping of its claims of religious headship was accompanied by considerable resistance. Significantly, this came both from outside the household, from opponents of the *'ulama*, but significantly, also from inside, as different family branches engaged in damaging, somewhat fratricidal arguments.

While all of South Asia's *'ulama* experienced a combination of indifference or attack from more secular minded Muslim literati and professionals, the Khandan-i-Ijtihad appeared to be a particular target within the Shi'i the community. Perhaps due to their clear association with the *ancien regime* of the Awadh Court, they were vulnerable to a wider social critique of Nawabi excess and parochialism. One of the major issues which brought the household under scrutiny was their attitude to the reformist 'Aligarh movement' of the later nineteenth century, which sought to formulate a modernist Islam compatible with Western knowledge and sciences. Compared to some other families of Shi'i *'ulama*, the Khandan-i-Ijtihad

scholars seemed distinctly hostile to the Aligarh programme, whether on account of their scholarly commitment to Islamic learning, or their deep ties to the former nobility who shared a similar mistrust of the emerging professional literati that the movement represented. Two family voices were quick to vilify the movement. Bandeh Husain, a highly-ranked *mujtahid* of the household's third generation, produced an edict (c.1874) critical of the unqualified acceptance of Western education, accusing Sir Sayyid of *nechriyat* (materialism) and denial of the *mi'raj* (ascension of the Prophet).¹⁰⁹ Aware of the influence of this family, Sayyid Ahmad Khan himself tried to enrol support from Bandeh Husain's half-brother, 'Ali Muhammad; however, 'Ali Muhammad not only shunned these overtures but, as a well-established *munazir* (debater), subsequently built a reputation as a major opponent of the Aligarh programme, penning several treatises criticising Aligarh's 'atheism' and its collusion with Christianity.¹¹⁰

This episode, and several equivalent later sagas, earned the household considerable public criticism. Aqa Hasan was widely condemned in 1904 for organising an assembly of Shi'i and Sunni Muslims alike to protest the agenda of the Muhammadan Educational Conference, an organisation affiliated to the Aligarh movement. While the meeting established Aqa Hasan as an influential opponent of Aligarh modernism, it also made him a magnet for attack by major Shi'i Aligarh supporters: Mohsin-ul-Mulk, Sayyid Husain Bilgrami and Badr-ud-Din Tyabji of Bombay all denounced his intervention.¹¹¹ There were similar squabbles between the Khandan-i-Ijtihad and younger Shi'i modernists and politicians at various later junctures.

¹⁰⁹ Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt*, p.12; Kashmiri, *Nujūm al-Samā'*, vol II, pp.153-64, esp.161.

¹¹⁰ 'Ali Muhammad wrote a Farsi tract entitled *Havāshi-i-Qur'ān dar-radd-i-Sayyid Ahmad Khān nēcharī*, refuting the Aligarh project. Ibid.

¹¹¹ 'Ali Naqi Safi, *Sahīfa't ul-millat-i-ma'rūf be-lakhat jagir* (Lucknow: undated), pp.7-8.

They occurred in 1920 when Aqa Hasan put himself at the forefront of efforts to keep the Shi‘i community out of the Khilafat movement, in spite of popular will towards support.¹¹² Another controversy was sparked when in the same decade Kalb-i-Husain (‘Imad al’Ulama’, 1892-1963), one of the family’s key younger representatives and Aqa Hasan’s successor as the city’s prayer-leader, took the novel decision of himself taking out *mut‘ah*: a temporary marriage. This custom had been well-established among the old Nawabi nobility, and indeed several Khandan-i-Ijtihad members had written edicts establishing its legality in Shi‘i law,¹¹³ but this practice had fallen from general acceptance among Shi‘is after the demise of Nawabi power. Kalb-i-Husain’s opponents publicly accused him of dabbling in barely concealed prostitution.¹¹⁴

Perhaps even more consequential was a series of feuds that emerged within the family during the same time period, and which have inflicted lasting damage upon intra-household relationships ever since. The emphasis on vocation common to studies of the *‘ulama* means that the internal conflicts plaguing *‘ulama*-households has rarely been considered; nor do *tazkirahs*, wishing to portray their cherished subjects as representatives of a solid household

¹¹² Jones, *Shi‘a Islam*, pp.172-83.

¹¹³ Those to have done so included Dildar ‘Ali, Sayyid Muhammad, Muhammad Ibrahim and ‘Ali Naqi Naqvi. Lakhnawi, *Sawānih-i-hayāt*, p.37; Ali Naqi Naqvi, *Mut‘ah aūr Islām* (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qaumi Press, 1933).

¹¹⁴ Petition to the Governor, 2 September 1926, Political File 254/1926, Uttar Pradesh State Archives (UPSA). As one British administrator noted, ‘the aim of the progressive party is to injure the reputation of the... chief Mujtahids.’ Deputy Commissioner and Advisor to the Trustees of Husainabad to the Commissioner of Lucknow, 2 September 1926, *ibid*.

unit, tend to mention these feuds. They are nevertheless recoverable from other sources, including official archives, and *ikhtilafat* (religious disputation) literature.

Perhaps the most notable of these quarrels, and one worth narrating in detail, was a heated contest between different *'ulama* within the household for appointment as the *peshnamaz* of the Asafi mosque. As described above, this position represented one of the family's key platforms for public influence and respectability, and their hold over the office had been re-established and closely guarded. But when the holding *peshnamaz* Abul Hasan died, a dispute over intra-family succession resulted. The branch of the family long in possession of this post supported Muhammad Mustafa, Abul Hasan's chosen deputy and one of Dildar 'Ali's great grandsons, for the role. However, some members of the ex-royal family of Awadh, who sat on the committee of the powerful Husainabad Trust and claimed responsibility for the mosque's management on this basis, tried to appoint a different candidate from within the household: Muhammad Husain, a second-cousin of his opponent and, unlike the latter, one descended from Sayyid Muhammad Nasirabadi, Dildar 'Ali's oldest son.¹¹⁵

Both sides sent petitions to the British Lieutenant-Governor, who confirmed that the decision should lay with the *peshnamaz* and hence certified Muhammad Mustafa's succession. But a decade later Muhammad Husain tried to secure the position again when Muhammad Mustafa died, and the latter's nominated successor (as well as nephew and former pupil), Aqa Hasan, took up the role. Muhammad Husain approached Lucknow's Commissioner, claiming that the Aqa Hasan was an unsuitable candidate, and that he himself would be a more appropriate choice, on account of his direct descent from Sayyid Muhammad, his greater age and deeper

¹¹⁵ Porter, Commissioner of Lucknow division, to Chief Secretary, undated, Political File 95/1906, UPSA.

learning (he even claimed to have been the tutor of the other claimant), as well as the support he held among the ex-royal family and Husainabad trustees.¹¹⁶ His claims were bolstered by some other *‘ulama*. Sibte Husain (1867-1952), a distant relation, wrote to the Lieutenant-Governor that Aqa Hasan was the lesser of the two scholars, and that his *ijazat* were forged. Evoking Aqa Hasan’s anti-Aligarh politics, he went on to claim that he ‘prohibits men and women to learn [sic] English arts and language’, and that he was an opponent of British rule; Muhammad Husain, by contrast, was a ‘well-wisher’ of the government.¹¹⁷ He urged the British administration to intervene to demote Aqa Hasan from the position of *peshnamaz*. Counter-petitions flew in from self-proclaimed representatives of the ‘Shi‘i public’ supporting Aqa Hasan as the rightful successor.¹¹⁸ While Muhammad Husain would never wrest this position from the other household line, this damaging feud badly tarnished intra-family relationships for several decades.

An equally damaging dispute within the household broke out later over control of the endowments that the family administered. Key here was the Waqf Mumtaz ul-‘Ulama, the family’s most important endowment which, as discussed above, was created in the mid-nineteenth century, with Muhammad Taqi as its trustee. The trusteeship stayed in the hands of his own descendants, but in 1918, attempts were made by rivals within the family to have his grandson, Muhammad Taqi bin Muhammad Ibrahim (1875-1922), removed from the position of trustee, on allegations of using the monies for personal ends. As with many Islamic *waqfs* that sparked court cases, the root of debate lay in the ambiguity of the endowment from its very foundation. The sitting trustee claimed that the *waqf* had been

¹¹⁶ Petition of Syed Muhammad Husain to Lieutenant-Governor, 4 June 1906, *ibid*.

¹¹⁷ Syed Sibte Husain, ‘Mujtahid of Karbala’, to Lieutenant Governor, 9 May 1906, *ibid*.

¹¹⁸ Telegram, ‘Shia public of Lucknow’ to Lieutenant Gov, 19 Feb 1906, *ibid*.

established as a family trust (*waqf-i khass*, *waqf 'ala al-aulad*), created partly to provide for the trustee's family, which gave the current holder complete discretion over its use. Those relatives who took the case to court claimed instead that it had been founded as a public *waqf*, the revenues of which must be used only for charitable or religious benefit. In 1919-20, Muhammad Taqi was taken to court and stripped of his trusteeship, and the legal wrangles between opposing sections within the family continued for a half-century thereafter.¹¹⁹

These episodes, and others, broke the household into several lines, and show how little substance sometimes lay behind the appearance of a single, cohesive household that all these scholars simultaneously worked so hard to project. It is equally ironic to observe the descendants of one of the world's foremost Shi'i judiciaries, just two or three generations later, calling up British officials and filing petitions in government courts to handle their intra-family disputes. How can we explain the outbreak of these injurious rivalries, when many family members had so much vested in the household's reputation?

The expansion of the household, as it enlarged and disaggregated from a crisp *khandan* into a bloated *khanwadah* over several generations, may underpin the breakout of these feuds. As those claiming the mantle of the household swelled in number, and as the household simultaneously lost much of the wealth and social influence that it previously commanded, it seems that different family branches became locked in increasing competition for ever decreasing funds and social capital. Furthermore, a critical moment seemed to be the decision after 1857 of the family's main representative, Sayyid Muhammad Nasirabadi, to distribute his various posts and functions – as prayer leader, tutor, and trustee of numerous endowments

¹¹⁹ Ibid; Husain, *Matla'-i-Anwār*, p.506; To O'Donnell, 9 October 1918, GAD 806/1918,

UPSA.

– among his various sons and nephews.¹²⁰ Sayyid Muhammad himself had relatively few obvious male heirs to whom he might hand these occupations (at least three of his sons died somewhat prematurely before 1860), and so the handover of his duties may have unintentionally pre-empted the shift of influence away from the descendants of Dildar ‘Ali’s eldest son towards those of the youngest, Sayyid Husain.¹²¹ Once the latter’s son, Muhammad Taqi, assumed the highly influential appointment of *peshnamaz*, this office was retained within the latter’s own family line; conversely, Sayyid Muhammad’s own sons found themselves increasingly estranged from roles of public leadership, despite their scholarly credentials and their father’s illustrious reputation.¹²² From the third generation onwards, the family effectively split into separate branches, and the incremental shift of command from one to the other almost certainly helps to explain the ferocity of intra-familial arguments like these.¹²³

¹²⁰ He may have distributed these roles amongst multiple relations in order to reassure the British that Awadh’s Shi‘i judiciary had been fully disassembled.

¹²¹ Encapsulating this shift of power across family branches, Sayyid Ahmad’s household biography allots approximately four times the space to Sayyid Husain as it devotes to his older brother, Sayyid Muhammad. Hindi, *Al-Warthat al-anbīyā’*.

¹²² It seems that while Sayyid Muhammad’s most influential sons, Bandeh Husain and ‘Ali Muhammad, had unparalleled reputations as *faqih*s (jurists) and debaters (*munazirs*), they carried less popular acclamation than some of their cousins.

¹²³ Robinson suggests a similar trajectory within the Farangi Mahal household, which also split into varying lines during the twentieth century. ‘The life of Jamal Mian of Farangi Mahal, 1919-2012’, unpublished seminar paper, Royal Asiatic Society, London, 17 April 2018.

More generally, we may speculate that the collapse of Awadh and the fragmentation of the patronage networks on which the state rested greatly enhanced possibilities for friction within the family. Before the fall of Awadh, the public offices held by the *mujtahids* (as prayer-leaders, trustees etc) were effectively royal appointments, certified by the monarch in consultation with his court. But there was no such singularity of command in British India. Instead, as in the case of the row over the appointment of *peshnamaz*, various factions claimed the right to make the decision. Without the king, it was unclear whether the power to select the next prayer-leader lay with the incumbent *peshnamaz* (the usual stipulation under Shi'i law), the mosque's trustees (the convention written into the deeds of some of the city's endowments), or the British administration (following the precedent of the Awadh king's ultimate control of the appointment). The demise of Awadh clearly eroded the structures of religious leadership, and exacerbated possibilities for internecine rivalry within the family.

Conclusions: the Khandan-i-Ijtihad after *ijtihād*

This article has sought to use the household, rather than vocational qualification and deeds alone, as a window for viewing how clerical authority is designated and transmitted among the South Asian *'ulama*. For the learned men recounted above, the 'household' was a holistic source of reputation: it conferred upon them their noble lineage, it authenticated their chains of education and expertise, and it provided the social, financial and political connections on which their own vocations rested. While the strategies of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad's individual figureheads to sustain their own authority – commanding networks of patronage and learning, providing guidance to followers, cultivating roles as social leaders and political interlocutors, and so on – resemble those familiar from other studies of the South Asian *'ulama*, this article suggests that all these vocational duties were enmeshed with the reputation (*hasab-va-nasab*)

of the whole household, past and present. Individual scholars grounded their works in a form of collective distinction that was ancestrally grounded and genealogically transmitted, while in turn, their own particular achievements perpetually refreshed the memory of the historic household and renewed its ongoing power.

One could argue that this framework for understanding religious authority may apply more clearly to a household like the Khandan-i-Ijtihad – a family of Shi‘i *sayyids* unequal in its noble pedigree and long-established socio-political influence – than it might to other ‘*ulama*-households. Nevertheless, I have indicated throughout this article that this same dynamic may help us to understand the authority of the South Asian ‘*ulama* more generally. Given the noble ancestries of the dominant proportion of high-ranking Sunni and Shi‘i ‘*ulama* alike in this same period, the emphasis placed on their family origins and connections in their public profiles, and the *sharif* social networks through which they have historically operated, there is every reason to reconsider these figures too along similar lines, and to revisit the importance of the inherited, alongside the acquired, sources of religious authority in the command of the South Asian ‘*ulama*.

Much of the above discussion has proceeded along the lines of the apparent *success* of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad at perpetually renewing itself as India’s dominant Shi‘i ‘*ulama*-household through every generation. Given the household’s continuing fame and influence, which is visible through every medium from the nineteenth-century biography to the twenty-first century website, there is certainly much truth in the longevity of the family name, and this interpretation works in tandem with the many works that have emphasised the ability of the ‘*ulama* to recalibrate their own roles and significance in each historical moment.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ See the works cited above, fn.23-26.

Yet, there is another interpretation here: that the huge investment that this household has put into its own memorialisation reflects its temporal decline. This article has hinted at many reasons for this family's deterioration throughout this very same period. Their weakening financial and political influence, increasing challenges from clerical and non-clerical opponents alike, and just as importantly, the explosion of intra-family conflicts, all exerted considerable pressure on the household. This same decline has worsened since India's independence, following the damage wrought by Muslim emigration and *zamindari* reform on noble Muslim patronage, and the collapse of *waqf* funding. The increasing inaccessibility of Iraq's scholarly centres since the 1970s has added to the perils, as this household has become ever more estranged from the *hawza* of Najaf from which it had once drawn so much of its reputation.¹²⁵ By common consensus, the family luminary 'Ali Naqi Naqvi, who died in 1988, was the last of the family's confirmed *mujtahids*.¹²⁶ To read this even more ungenerously, the title of 'Khandan-i-Ijtihad', a retrospective designation more commonly heard in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries than it was the nineteenth, seems to have become more prevalent alongside the extinction of the family's *ijtihad* itself.

Could it be, then, both for the Khandan-i-Ijtihad and other comparable '*ulama*-families, that the growth of the '*ulama*-biography as literary genre that we witness in the early-mid

¹²⁵ For discussion of the alleged fragmentation of the Shi'i scholarly milieu in post-independence South Asia, see Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, 'Relocating the centers of Shi'i Islam: religious authority, sectarianism and the limits of the transnational in colonial India and Pakistan' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2015), pp.165-173.

¹²⁶ The family's contemporary figureheads are usually classified as *hujjat-allah*, a title that falls short of the performance of full *ijtihad*.

twentieth-century is less a reflection of the sustained authority of these scholars, but more a symptom of its decline? Just as the fascination with Islamic history prevalent in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century South Asia accompanied the sense of an urgent Muslim deterioration from former greatness,¹²⁷ as the renewed interests in Islamic poetic and musical traditions in the same period was symptomatic of the erosion of Indo-Persian cultural forms,¹²⁸ and as a fascination with Mughal architecture developed in parallel to the crumbling of its buildings,¹²⁹ then could it be that the project of memorialisation undertaken by these ‘*ulama*-biographies is, in fact, a reaction to the reality of forgetfulness? The Khandan-i-Ijtihad household continues to invest in efforts to renew its own historic reputation across the generations, against the possibility of failure to sustain its own legacy.

¹²⁷ This is common to well-known works by Muslim ‘historians’ in this period, including Shibli Nu‘mani, *Sirat al-Nabi* (1898), Ameer Ali, *A short history of the Saracens* (1899), and the historical fantasies of poets like Muhammad Iqbal. On romanticisations of Islam’s South Asian past in colonial-era Urdu literature, see Eve Tignol, ‘Nostalgia and the city: Urdu *shahr āshob* poetry in the aftermath of 1857’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27, 4 (2017), 559-573; C.M. Naim, ‘Interrogating “the East”.’

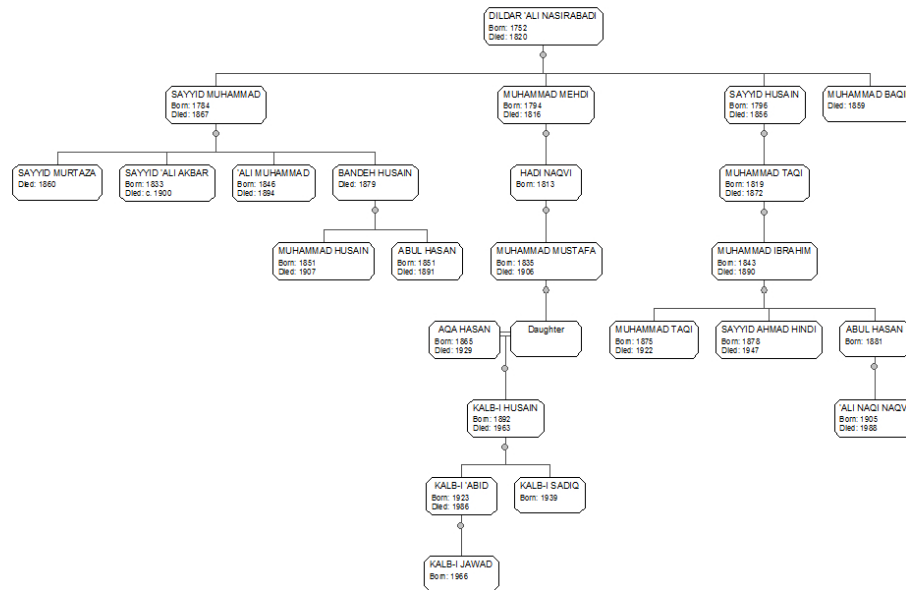
¹²⁸ E.g. Richard Williams, ‘Hindustani music between Awadh and Bengal, c.1758-1905’, unpublished PhD dissertation, King’s College London (2015), pp.127-74, 242-53.

¹²⁹ E.g. C.M. Naim, ‘Syed Ahmad and his two books called ‘Asar-al-Sanadid’, *Modern Asian Studies* (45, 3, 2011), pp.669-708; Daniela Bredi, ‘Nostalgia in the reconstruction of Muslim identity in the aftermath of 1857 and the myth of Delhi’, *Cracow Indological Studies* (11, 2009), pp.137-56.



Typical graphic depiction of some of the major scholars of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad, published by the Noor-i-Hidayat (2006). The image shows the family's founder, Dildar 'Ali Nasirabadi, at the head, with ensuing generations displayed below, including the family's recent figureheads, Kalb-i-Jawad and Kalb-i-Sadiq, bottom left and bottom right respectively.

178x233mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Partial, patrilineal family tree (shajra-i-nasab) depicting the relational ties between some of the major members of the Khandan-i-Ijtihad.

269x185mm (96 x 96 DPI)