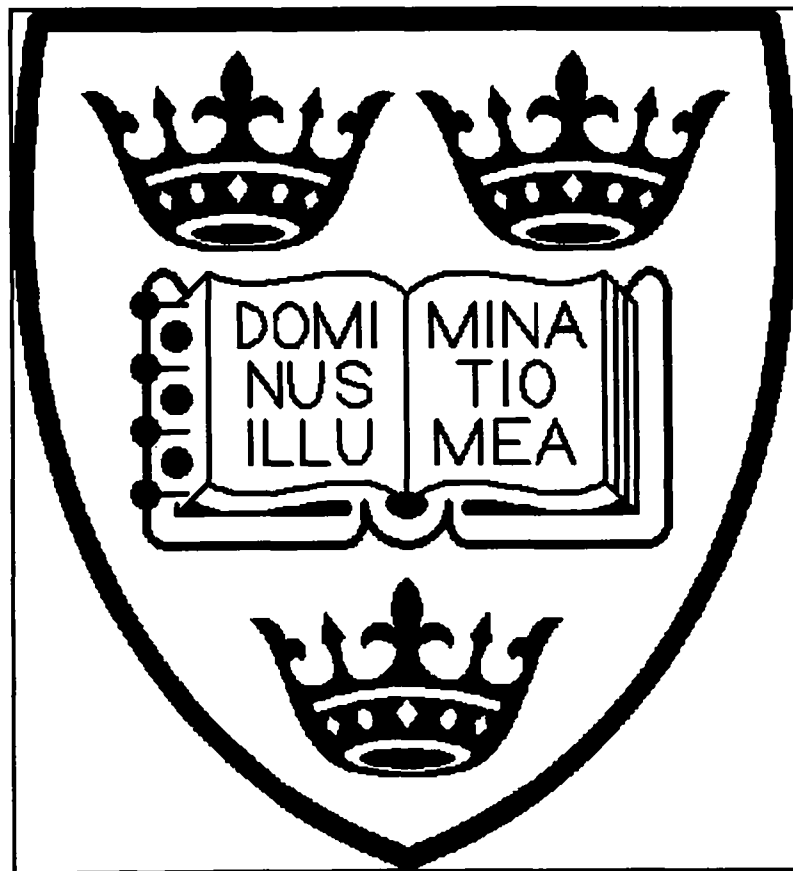


**INDIAN MUSLIM PERCEPTIONS OF THE WEST
DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

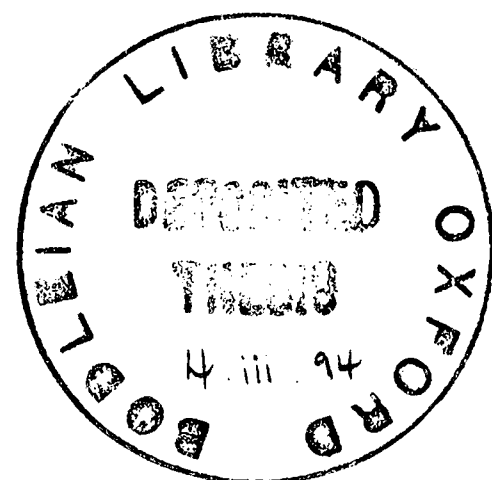
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Faculty of Modern History

University of Oxford

Trinity Term 1993



**This thesis is submitted for the Faculty of
Modern History, University of Oxford,
in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

St. Hilda's College 1993

INDIAN MUSLIM PERCEPTIONS OF THE WEST
DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

*A Thesis for the Degree of D.Phil.
at the University of Oxford*

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St. Hilda's College

Trinity 1993

SHORT ABSTRACT

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The present thesis, entitled "Indian Muslim Perceptions of the West during the Eighteenth century", deals with Muslim images of the West at the turn of the eighteenth century as they were formulated in the minds of Indian Muslim intellectuals. It examines the modalities of experience and categories of knowledge of the West as they were perceived by Muslim scholars who had come into contact with the contemporary West. The main purpose of the present enquiry is to analyze the origins and the nature of such perceptions as were articulated in their writings. With the expansion of British political power in the sub-continent in the late eighteenth century Britain came to be identified with Europe as a whole in the minds of our intellectuals. The Indian intelligentsia's experience of the contemporary Western civilization became in fact its experience of the British society and culture. Extensive quotations from the writings of the authors under consideration are often used to illustrate the principal arguments in this essay. The thesis is based on relatively unexplored source-material which comprises Persian manuscripts in the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the British Library in London. Our writers' perceptions of the Western civilization concentrate on various aspects of European and, particularly, British culture such as social life, religion, political ideas and institutions and scientific and technological developments. The present study also attempts to assess the impact of an alien culture on various socio-economic levels in Indian society, especially since Muslims had largely lost a centralised political control over India. The declining Muslim intelligentsia accepted uncritically the impact of the new and powerful culture but the new knowledge presented in their writings was not significantly implemented in their society; rather, the indigenous society was overwhelmed by the new culture that was imposed upon it and gave in to it and its attraction.

LONG ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to establish the degree of awareness that Muslim intellectuals in the second half of the eighteenth century had of Europe. This awareness is traced back to a number of contemporary works by Indian Muslims who attempted to explain the rise of Europe in relation to their world. These works constitute as yet unexplored source-material: Persian manuscripts lodged in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the British Library and the India Office Library in London. Also, largely unexplored material located in Indian libraries, in particular the Maulana Azad Library in Aligarh, the Bankipur Public Oriental Library in Patna and the K.R. Kama Institute in Bombay. The chapters that follow unfold turn-of-the-century images of Europe as they were perceived by a number of contemporary Indian scholars who had come into contact with the West.

In fact, with the expansion and consolidation of the British imperial rule in India the indigenous intelligentsia came to identify Britain with Europe and the West as a whole. This was true to such an extent that one could generalise and claim that the Indian experience of contemporary Western civilization was indeed their experience of the British society and culture. Unlike the existing multitude of studies on Middle East and the Far East, there are few studies concentrating on the Indian response to the growing ascendancy of Western culture in their country. The present study attempts such an examination. Its theoretical paradigm is built on the Houranian ideas on other Islamic societies and their experience of the West.

It was only recently that historians focusing on South Asia began to explore the eighteenth century in any satisfactory detail. But even these scholars have primarily centred around economic and political matters and largely neglected cultural issues. The contribution of the present study is, hence, twofold: it attempts to increase the existing knowledge of a relatively un-researched period by exploring the cultural paradigm of the eighteenth century; it also provides a new perspective on the relations between the East and the West. It constitutes a departure from Euro-centrism, for here is presented, for the first time, evidence to illustrate the assumption that the Indian intelligentsia was perhaps one of the first in the Eastern world to assimilate Western ideas. This earlier assumption was based on the fact that India was the first Eastern nation to undergo colonial rule; thus, its administrators and scholars were also the first to acquire any knowledge of Europe.

Our writers' perceptions of Western civilization are rich and varied; they concern various aspects of European and, particularly, British culture and focus on such issues as for example social life, religion, political ideas and institutions as well as scientific and technological developments. These wide-ranging topics form the subject-matter of the present study. Since the above mentioned issues concern separate spheres of life, each chapter is preceded by an introductory background of its own. Extensive quotations from the writings of the authors under consideration are often used to support the principal arguments presented in the chapters that follow.

In spite of individual differences between our authors that stem from their diverse social and geographical backgrounds, they all pursued knowledge secondarily to their primary concern, their political careers. All of them were Muslims and the products of a highly personalised system of Muslim education, which influenced their writings on the West. Although each of our writers treated the various issues they examined in their characteristic ways, there can still be identified some common trends in their expositions. Another trait that all our authors shared was their experience of the West. The growing hegemony of Europe in the Afro-Asian world, in general, and the political

ascendancy of the East India Company in India, in particular, brought them into contact with a totally different culture. Any incidents in the European history that are presented here are viewed strictly from their perspective. We do not attempt to divorce the ideas of the writers from the writers themselves.

To this effect, the Prologue attempts to reconstruct the indigenous political and cultural milieu of the period. It concentrates on the socio-cultural concerns of Muslim administrators, their literary preoccupations and scholarly concerns. It is indeed being argued that the decline of the Mughal Empire was not accompanied by a subsequent mental stagnation and cultural decadence. The later decline of the Empire was not the aftermath of a previously golden age; rather, with the exception of the eventual decline and the entailing insecurity and chaos, there is, intellectually, little if any difference between the earlier and later periods in the reign of the Mughals. The eighteenth century represents an unbroken continuity in the country's intellectual tradition. The members of the intelligentsia of the declining regime, who were now turning into historians, geographers, philologists, archaeologists and grammarians to name but a few of the professions they entered to earn their livelihood, were transforming this period of political decline into an age of cultural efflorescence. A separate section in the Prologue sketches an ideal type of Mughal administration, which although never implemented shaped their attitudes and outlook. What is offered in the next two sections of the Prologue is a comprehensive account of the political world of the Muslim administrative elite, an overall view of the eighteenth century political transition, the decline of the Mughal Empire and the subsequent rise of the regional polities as well as the impact of this decline on the country's bureaucracy. Attention is also being paid to the shift of the educated but unemployed and displaced gentry towards Calcutta, the administrative capital of the Company, in search of employment.

In the first chapter we delineate our writers' views on the political expansion of Europe in their part of the world. The preliminary section of this chapter provides some traditional images of Europe in an attempt to identify the general knowledge of Europe in India before the establishment of the British colonial rule there. We then trace the process of the European expansion as it was perceived by our authors in the framework of the greater Islamo-Asian world; the ongoing Anglo-French rivalry in Egypt and the British penetration of Iran are here taken into consideration. We also present the ramifications of the American War of Independence and the impact of the French Revolution on India and the Islamic world as a whole. Abu Talib, Abd al Latif and Ahmad bin Muhammad in particular, exhibited a growing concern about the impact of the European capitalist expansion on non-European civilizations. They were able to view the European ascendancy from a wider perspective because they had observed such phenomena in Iran, their homeland, as well as India, their place of residence. These may also have been the first global perceptions of the early colonialism. Our authors perceived clearly the growing intervention and hegemony of Europe in various parts of the non-European world, but their major concern remained with the growth of the British power in India. Thus, the question of how the East India Company, initially a commercial organisation, transformed itself into a territorial power within one and a half centuries is examined in detail. We focus on the impact of the Company's administration on the socio-economic life of India and particularly in the region of Bengal.

The second chapter focuses on the biographies of our writers. It traces their social origins, educational backgrounds, positions in the contemporary social hierarchy, their professional concerns as well as their experience of Europe in the cases of those who had visited it. The above points are discussed on the basis of the information provided by the authors themselves in their writings, autobiographies and memoirs as well as on the basis of external sources.

The third chapter attempts a necessarily brief delineation of the history of Europe with special reference to Britain. Our writers strove to understand the European dominance of the world and the rise of Britain in particular. Different kinds of national monarchies are described at this point, according always to our authors' viewpoints. This chapter also concentrates on their awareness of the discovery of America and the geo-political and socio-economic information our authors were able to supply. In conclusion to this chapter, we follow our authors in delineating the effects of America's discovery for the rest of the world.

The fourth chapter considers our writers' views on Christianity, a traditional concern of Muslim scholars. It explores various aspects of Christianity including a definition of the faith and its main doctrines, the position of the Pope and the nature of his authority as well as the sixteenth century Reformation and the subsequent ideological divisions within the Christian world. We trace the effects of Reformation as our authors perceived them and include at this point an examination of such issues as the growth of unbelief, agnosticism, atheism, and materialistic philosophy. We concentrate next on the inter-relationships between the revealed faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Controversial issues for Islam and Christianity, such as the arrival of the Paraclete and the nature of prophet-hood are also considered, next to some information on the Anglican Church and the social role of the clergy in Britain.

The fifth chapter centres on our authors' perceptions of contemporary social life in Britain. It explores various aspects of British society as for example family-life, food habits, dress, manners, the social values and norms of the rising bourgeoisie, the moral and social education of their children, the nature of men-women relationships and the position of women in British society; our information comes from those among our writers who had visited Britain. We also concentrate on the concepts of equality, freedom and social justice in Britain as well as individual differences among the English, the Irish and the Scottish people; as always the views presented are those of our authors. An account of the social life of the British in Calcutta is included in this chapter which is largely descriptive; special attention is being paid to our writers' ways of discussing various aspects of British social life and which throw some light on their own social milieux as well.

In the sixth chapter we briefly address the gradual rise of "Orientalism" in Britain. Our authors' views and observations on the status of oriental learning, the reasons of interest in Persian, language and literature, and their opinions on the Orientalists are analyzed here. Next, we look briefly at the existence or absence of a relationship between the comprehensive interest of the West in oriental societies, on the one hand, and the phenomenon of colonisation, on the other.

The seventh chapter is concerned with the social and intellectual progress of Europe, in general, and Britain, in particular. The chapter begins with a picture of the socio-intellectual milieu of Britain in the eighteenth century. Close attention is being paid to the reasons that prompted the intellectual achievements of the West, the institutionalisation of knowledge through the establishment of schools, colleges, universities, scientific observatories and such learned societies as the Royal Society as well as, finally, the State patronage to the above institutions. The role played by the discovery of printing is also pointed out. In a separate section in this chapter we analyze our authors' perceptions of seventeenth century scientific developments and the impact of Newtonian ideas. Special emphasis is placed upon the reception of the teachings of the new astronomy, namely of the Copernican heliocentric world-view, and the tension it created in their mental world. We further look at their attempts to assimilate these new ideas into their traditional Greco-Arab framework. The chapter briefly mentions various scientific inventions which were treated as objects of curiosity by our authors. We also

consider our writers' views on the technological achievements of the first phase of the Industrialisation and the Industrialisation's impact on the socio-economic life of Britain.

The eighth chapter delineates our authors' views on British political ideas. It centres on their knowledge and appreciation of British political institutions, the nature of constitutional monarchy, the parliamentary system and the administration of justice.

The Epilogue presents the continuities and changes in the Indian perceptions of Britain and takes into consideration some mid-nineteenth century writings on the West to this effect.

A certain dichotomy and ambivalence is discerned throughout our authors' writings on the West: they admired the scientific and technological advances of the West, its stable political institutions and the freedom that the common people enjoyed in Britain but, interestingly enough, they also often criticised British society, which had given rise to these institutions after protracted struggles. The declining Indian elite could not incorporate its images of European society and culture within its existing ideological framework. The indigenous Muslim intelligentsia became a passive recipient of the European heritage, rather than an agent for change after its initial acquaintance with it. Henceforth, a sense of resignation and surrender would colour the uncritical attitude of the indigenous intellectuals towards the new and powerful materialistic culture that had been imposed upon their country.

We avoided the temptation of a comparison between the experience of colonialism in India and other countries. Anyone who is acquainted with similar studies on countries of the Middle East could not help but notice the similarity of their and our authors' experience of the West; on the other hand, studies of countries of the Far East such as Japan and China for example, present a different perception of the West than our authors'.

A number of studies have focused on the history of India in the nineteenth century. The issues that became prevalent in that period fall outside the scope of this thesis. The present enquiry concentrates on various developments in the eighteenth century. Scholars who concentrated on the nineteenth century tended to treat the various issues that dominated that era as isolated phenomena or as something specific to that period alone. Although the present study does not offer any evidence of the influence of the earlier on the subsequent writings, it reveals indirectly the extent of political and social transformations. Such transformations were so great that the events and issues of the later period tended to appear as specific to that period alone. It is here demonstrated for the first time that there were people who lived in a remote part of the world, kept faithful to the values of their traditional world, had not been trained by Western education and who still responded favourably to the dominance of the West in their part of the world. The Muslim elites' response even at this stage was not purely economic in nature, but rather reflected a merge of economic, political and cultural interests.

There was initially no perceived qualitative distinction between Orientals and Europeans, though such a distinction was to become later one of the major characteristics of colonial rule in India. Europe was simply regarded as another part of the world. The only discernible distinction was that from the sixteenth century onwards Europe was witnessing major social transformations in the form of a continuous scientific and technological progress, as well as a great development of political and social institutions. It was these changes in the course of the history of Europe that had made it more powerful in many areas and enabled it to dominate less energetic peoples.

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The author's signature has been removed from this electronic version of thesis.

Gulfishan Khan (Mrs.)

DEDICATION

To my father Mohammad Ajmal Khan

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations in the text are here fully expanded:

Bodl. Bodleian Library (Oxford)

B.L. British Library (London)

I.O.L. Indian Office Library (London)

PROLOGUE

This thesis proposes to examine the Muslim awareness of Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century as revealed in a number of contemporary works by Indian Muslims, who attempted to explain the rise of Europe in relation to their own world. Their perceptions of the West were rich and varied, and they included many aspects of the British society: the social and political institutions of its members, their religious practices and intellectual, scientific and technical achievements. With the expansion of British political power in the late eighteenth century, contact with Europe came to be identified with contact with Britain, to the effect that it may be said that the Indian Muslim experience of contemporary Western civilization is in fact the experience of the British culture and society. This introductory chapter attempts a reconstruction of the indigenous cultural milieu and the political world of these Indian Muslim writers.

0.1 Political Decline and Cultural Decadence

The eighteenth century saw the decline and dissolution of the Mughal empire, simultaneous with the rise of the regional potentates. The empire, which geographically had reached its farthest limits in the Deccan by 1707 A.D. The imperial principle established almost over the entire sub-continent, there were already discernible symptoms of crisis in its body-politic. These breaches and chasm jolted the entire imperial edifice, which collapsed within forty years after the death of Aurengzeb (1707 A.D.). The invasion and destruction of Delhi by Nadir Shah the Persian monarch in

1739 left the emperor, Muhammad Shah, with his prestige irrevocably diminished. Muhammad Shah died in 1748 and was succeeded by his son Ahmad Shah Bahadur who was deposed, imprisoned and blinded in 1754. He, in turn, was succeeded by Alamgir II, who himself was assassinated in 1759. Shahjahan II, who had succeeded Alamgir II, was deposed the following year and was succeeded by Shah Alam (1759-1806). None of these rulers enjoyed any real authority or power. In 1788 Ghulam Khan attacked Delhi and blinded the emperor. The invasion irretrievably damaged the status of monarchy and ruined the imperial image as the embodiment of law and authority. The imperial governors did not formally deny their allegiance to Delhi, but one after the other they began asserting their autonomy. Nizamul Mulk Asaf Jah in the Deccan declared independence in 1724, while the eastern province of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa separated at about 1740, followed by Gujarat and Sindh in 1750 and Oudh in 1754. Various independent Pathan dynasties ruled in Farrukhabad and Rohilkhand within striking distance of the capital. In the far south, the former kingdom of Mysore was gradually growing powerful under the adventurous Hyder Ali and his son and successor, Tipu Sultan. Similarly, the southern-most parts were divided up into a number of small principalities.

Amidst all these changes a new force was emerging on the political horizons of India, in the shape of the British "East India Company". Beginning as suppliant merchants in the coastal regions and under the military leadership of Robert Clive, the British first triumphed over their European rivals in Deccan. Subsequently they established their control over the maritime provinces of Bengal and Madras. Later on, they extended their authority over northern India by concluding treaties with the powerful state of Awadh and reducing the emperor to the status of a pensioner. They then moved towards Central India, and challenged the might of Marathas by entering

into alliances and counter-alliances with rival Maratha chiefs, Nizam of Hyderabad and Hyder Ali. In the end, they succeeded in crushing Tipu Sultan of Mysore. Finally, in 1803 A.D., Lord Lake entered Delhi, the imperial capital, by defeating the Maratha chieftain Sindhia, who had been operating as the protector of Shah Alam.¹

In recent years, the complex causes of the Mughal political and economic decline and the formation of the successor states have been subjected to intensive reassessment. Besides Herman Goetz who was first to detect some order in this seemingly chaotic period, there have been other serious and comprehensive studies that reassess the century's events and cast doubts on the bleak perspective of previous historians.² Some of these studies have modified long-held views on the nature and incident of the universal "decline and desolation", while suggesting that the turbulent events of the century reflected not the final dissolution of the Mughal empire, as much as the emergence of regional dynastic rulers who initiated new cycles of growth and regeneration. As a result of such studies, the debate on pre-colonial societies has received a new revival.³ However, as most of these studies mainly focus on the decline

¹ The classical study of the late Mughal Delhi, including the expansion of the East India Company's rule, is Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals* (Cambridge, 1951; reprinted Delhi, 1969).

² For the debate on the causes of the Mughal empire's fall, cf. Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-48* (Delhi, 1986), esp. pp. 1-17; the author critically assesses various theories of the decline of the empire advanced by modern scholars. For focus on Awadh, cf. Richard B. Barnett, *North India Between Empires, Awadh the Mughals and the British, 1720-1801* (Berkeley, 1980). Michael H. Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British and the Mughals* (Maryland, 1987), examines the cultural atmosphere of Awadh, its rulers, officials, land holders, the general populace and their relations and perceptions of British in their indigenous settings. Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *A Fatal Friendship: the Nawabs, the British and the City of Lucknow* (Delhi, 1985), shows how the architecture of Lucknow reflects the changing place of the European community in the city.

³ Cf. C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge, 1983); also his *Indian Society and Making of British Empire, New Cambridge History of India*, II i (1988), and *Crisis of the Empire*. For a brief critique of the above studies, cf. M. Athar Ali, "Recent Theories of the Eighteenth Century", *Indian Historical Review* (hereafter *IHR*), XIV, pp. 102-10 and his "The Eighteenth Century: An Interpretation", *IHR*, V, pp. 175-86; this author suggests that the inability of the Eastern World to absorb Western scientific and technological developments contributed to the fall of the various empires. For a different, but somewhat more detailed critique, cf. Z.U. Malik, "Core and Periphery: A contribution to the debate on the Eighteenth century",
(continued...)

in terms of economic change, thus neglecting the political and cultural framework, the debate on the eighteenth century has been so far partial. Whether the "decline" or "disintegration" was accompanied by a process of political and cultural decadence, remains unexplored. (Nonetheless, with the ending of the isolation of the eighteenth century, the process of breaking down the conventional assumptions has begun.) Still, more work needs to be done to fill in the factual base of the period in question.

A number of scholars focus on the eighteenth century in order to find the causes and explanations of various nineteenth century phenomena. The eighteenth century needs to be studied on its own, not in terms of what preceded and what followed it.⁴ The political decline and the chaos that followed the loss of power by the ruling elite does not entail that the later Mughal period was a "wreck of a golden age"; quite the contrary is true in terms of intellectual development, in respect of which the earlier and the later Mughal period in India presents an unbroken continuity. Political decline and the ensuing process of decay and decomposition of bureaucracy, the premier beneficiaries of the empire, was not accompanied by cultural decadence and mental stagnation, mainly because, deprived and dispossessed of the political power and authority, the members of the earlier ruling elite turned more and more towards inner aspects of life, expressed in their growing preoccupation with poetry, literature, history and the arts. It is true that this preoccupation may be seen as a form of escaping the realities of the present. The

³(...continued)

Indian History Congress, 1990, who argues that the decline of the empire in the early eighteenth century marked a set-back to the strength of the Indian political, social and economic structure that enabled the British conquest to take place by eliminating all elements of internal growth. But along with political decline, the period presented a continuity in cultural activities. The debate continues.

⁴ Cf. the various contributions on different parts of the Islamic world in Thomas Naff and Roger Owen (ed.), *Studies in Eighteenth century Islamic History* (Illinois, 1977). Also Simon Digby, "Changing horizons of thought in eighteenth century Muslim India", *Colloquium on the Muslim World in the eighteenth century*, an unpublished paper, University of Pennsylvania, 1971 (hereafter *Changing Horizons of Thought*), who, by providing an overall view of the rich literary pieces of the period, presents a picture of eighteenth century India as being in a period of cultural efflorescence and intellectual vigour.

Indian Muslims of that time searched their past, not only in an effort to comprehend the disaster, but also in order to feel that there has been a time of greatness. But this is a different, though not unrelated issue altogether: that the cultural and intellectual efflorescence of the period may also be seen as an indication, if not the result, of the growing feeling of insecurity, political deprivation and loss of opportunities, does not mean that it was unimportant. A question which arises concerns the way that the various socio-intellectual currents (already present in the seventeenth century, or even earlier), manifested themselves when coming into contact with another culture, that of the Western civilization. This question circumvents (but does not ignore) the issue of political decadence, in order to see those lasting effects that this cultural and intellectual revolution had on Indian Muslim society.

Why has the eighteenth century been regarded as a period of cultural decadence? There are several strands in the historiography of decadence which tend to strengthen the stereotypical view of the period. One of the reasons lay in contemporary European perceptions of the ruling classes of India: the stereotypes of the sensual, cruel and circumspect Muslims found in the European travellers' accounts who had not looked upon the dominant classes with a very friendly eye. Sir Thomas Herbert in 1634 A.D. found the Indian Moors saucy, proud, bloody, traitorous and cowardly.⁵ The dislike and condemnation for the people were mitigated by comparatively respectful descriptions of the riches and the extent of the Mughal empire, even though by the second half of the seventeenth century it was possible for an acute observer like Bernier to diagnose the

⁵ Cf. *Changing Horizons of Thought*.

malaise of the Mughal society in the lack of observance and proper respect for the principles of private property.⁶

In the second half of the eighteenth century, with the decline of the political power and when the nobility and aristocracy of the empire was without its earlier riches, wealth and military power, such accusations of progressive decadence were more easily and frequently made. Robert Orme, an East India Company official, writing in 1752 believed that "the Tartar (i.e., the ancestors of Mughals) are known to be honest and simple in manners, if at times fierce and cruel", but as regards their descendants he said that "a licentiousness and luxury peculiar to this enervating climate have spread their corruption."⁷ This line of thought seemed to have gained increasing currency. Contemporary British periodical literature carried extracts from the works of British officials that usually portrayed such images. Luke Scrafton explained that the word 'Moor' was employed to express the "Mahomedans of all sects and countries who are settled in India", for, as his justification went, "whether Patan, Persian, or Tartar by birth, it matters not, the enervating softness of the climate soon forms but one common character of them, the distinguishing qualities of which are perfidity and sensuality".⁸ On this basis, he then attempted to explain how a government could subsist with so little a virtue.

Sometimes, contemporary Indian authors contributed to and strengthened this view of a decadent ruling class. Such was the impression derived from *Siyar al mutakhkhirin*, of Ghulam Husain published under the title: "A Character of Assof ud-Dowla, the

⁶ *Op. cit.*

⁷ *Op.cit.*

⁸ Cf. "A Character of the Musulmans, or Moors, of Hindustan (from the letters of Luke Scrafton, Esq.)", *The Asiatic Annual Register for 1800* (London, 1801), pp. 19-22, under the subsection "Character".

Nawab of Oude".⁹ The editor of the journal added his own comments towards the end: "The above account of Assof-ud Dowlah written by a man celebrated in Hindustan for his impartiality and accuracy will give our readers a just idea of enormous profligacy and cruelty of that abandoned tyrant, who does not appear to have possessed a single good quality".¹⁰ Furthermore, the British who wrote the early modern histories of India had their own interest in presenting a bleak portrayal of its immediate past. The fact that contemporary Persian chronicles have also projected the period as one of total chaos and failure not only suited the interest of the British writers, but also lent strength to their interpretations. These Persian chronicle-writers were invariably members of an erstwhile ruling elite who suffered as the imperial system broke down. The decline of their fortunes has been portrayed in their own writings as the decline and decay of the entire society. For these historians, the Mughal throne and the emperor himself were central to their vision; hence, the decline of the imperial edifice was tantamount to a total collapse of society. Paradoxically, the sufferers themselves could not realize that they were adding the powers of their pen to make the political decline a period of cultural efflorescence. These literary productions were not just the means of expression of political trauma and the nostalgia for a glorious past, but also the source of survival for the members of a declining bureaucracy.

Turning from the historiography of decline and decay of the service elite to the literary productions of the class under study, one may challenge the assumption that the loss of political power was accompanied ^{with} intellectual decline. On the contrary, the period in

⁹ Cf. *The Asiatic Annual Register for 1801* (London, 1803), pp. 32-44. Ghulam Husain had his own reasons to censure Asafuddaula, with whom he sought in vain to find employment at Awadh — see the reference to the author's biography in the next chapter.

¹⁰ *Op.cit.*

question was one of great intellectual activity, as almost every branch of learning and scholarship was being pursued. It was not only poetry which lay at the heart of the cultural life of the period. Other traditional areas of learning flourished as well: historiography, the compilation of biographical dictionaries, as well as the sciences proper, like natural philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, geometry and medicine. Such a vast amount of literary works had been produced by the administrator-scholars and intelligentsia of the erstwhile ruling elite that it is almost impossible to do them all justice by providing a broad comprehensive view. Every discipline came to be cultivated by the members of displaced service elite when necessity for maintenance turned them into historians, geographers, philologists, archaeologists and grammarians.¹¹

Persian was the language of administration, scholarship and *belles-lettres*, as well as that of polite social intercourse. Because literature itself lay at the heart of an inherited culture and, as such, it could not easily assimilate any outside influences, the innovations and progress it witnessed came from within its traditional structure. To begin with, there occurred a break in the unity of literary fashion between India and Iran. In Iran, the ornate taste in prose and poetry, characteristic of the seventeenth century, was replaced by a simple style, both innovatory and looking back to older literary models. This new style came to be known in Iranian literature as *bazgasht*, i.e. "return".¹² On the Indian sub-continent, the seventeenth century poetical style, *Sabk i Hindi*, that originated in Persia, was cultivated and brought to perfection. It had also enjoyed favourable atmosphere in the Turkish and Tadjik literature and continued to be greatly admired and elaborated upon in the eighteenth century. Varied forms of poetical

¹¹ For an idea of the literature produced, cf. the excellent bio-bibliographical work by C.A. Storey, *Persian Literature A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, published in several volumes (London, 1933-92). Almost every volume contains works of the period (under a relevant heading).

¹² Cf. John Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht, 1968), pp. 305-9. Turkistan and Afghanistan maintained their adherence to the Indian style.

expressions such as *qasidah*, *masnawi* and *ghazal* were cultivated with arduousness and vigour (though *ghazal* acquired more prominence). Possession of a *diwan*- the poetical collection, was part of elite literate culture and a hall-mark of every educated person. Consequently, the poetical output of the period turned out to be voluminous.¹³ Poetry completely permeated the literate sections of society whether the aristocracy or the notables. Even the lesser nobles down to the petty clerks were almost without exception associated with this genre. It was not surprising that the reigning emperor Shah Alam (d. 1806) himself was a poet whose literary compositions still survive.¹⁴ His poetical verses were quoted by his contemporaries as *Aftab*.¹⁵ Poetry was considered the best mode of expression for creative thought as well as personal emotion. In a parallel manner, being a poet and being a scholar were synonymous. The biographies of contemporary poets illustrate the point: those who cultivated this art, were equally well-versed in other branches of learning such as philosophy, jurisprudence, the natural sciences, astronomy and mathematics. In addition to their proper name, every literate person had two more names: one which identified them with their birth-place, the "Bilgramis", "Azimabadis", "Dihlawis", "Jhajjari", "Jaisi" and so on, and an adoptive name called *takhallus*, such as "Azad", "Zafar", "Wali", "Arzu", "Ashob", "Ghalib", "Mir", "Sauda", "Dard", "Ishki", and "Mushtaq".¹⁶ A literary man composing poetry

¹³ One may form an idea by looking at the catalogues of various libraries where poetical output runs under "Diwan" on to several pages. Cf., for example, Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 Volumes (London, 1879-83).

¹⁴ For the poetical collections of Shah Alam, cf. his *Diwan i Aftab*, Bodl. Persian MS. Ouseley 94. Shah Alam began with the following verses, praying for the prosperity of his regime: "*Ilahi az karam chun padshahi dadah ma ra: Mutih hukm ma az lutf kun iqlim dilha ra.*" *Ibid.*, ff. 69b. (Translation: "O God, you who bestowed upon me this Kingship, with your boundless generosity, with your compassion, make the people of this kingdom obedient to my command.")

¹⁵ For samples of Shah Alam's poetry, cf. Ali Ibrahim Khan, *Gulzar i Ibrahimi*, Bodl. Ouseley, Add. 42, ff. 2b.

¹⁶ For the idea of every literate man being something of a poet, cf. the biographical sketches of the contemporary poets by the French Orientalist Joseph Heliodore Garcin de Tassy, *Histoire de la littérature Hindouie et Hindoustanie*, 3 Volumes (Paris, 1870-71, second ed.).

without a *nom de plume* was considered an exception.¹⁷ The predominance of poetry as a natural medium of expression can be gauged from the fact that Abu Talib chose to record his experience of the new society to which he was exposed upon his arrival in London in various forms of poetry, especially *ghazal* and *mathnawi*.¹⁸ The naturalness of poetical expression is established in verses in praise of tobacco as the "bel-esprit",¹⁹ or as varied themes such as the discovery of America and the teaching of modern astronomy. It was, however, classical writers like Saadi (1184-1292), Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273) and Hafiz Shirazi (d. 1388), who in their mystical and didactical verses expressed their views of existing norms, manifested in standards of conduct and moral imperatives, and criticised the Western notions of mechanical progress. Poetry was also the vehicle of serious expressions, whether in recalling the classical age of Islam and the days of pious Caliphs, or in descriptions of India's immediate historical past and of contemporary political events, such as the Maratha-Abdali war or the defeat of Sirajuddaula in the battle of Plassey and subsequent failure of the combined Indian forces at Buxar.²⁰

From the early eighteenth century onwards Urdu was gaining momentum, gradually replacing Persian as the medium of poetical expression. This age of what is

¹⁷ For instance, Mir Husain is mentioned by Abu Talib as a poet without a *nom de plume*; cf. *Khulasat al afkar*, Bodl. Persian MS. Elliot 181, ff. 340a-342b. Also Zulfikar Ali Mast, *Riyaz ul Wifaq*, where Mir Husain is mentioned as the owner of a *Diwan* containing six hundred verses. Masnawi Saqinama, the "Cupbearers tale", is also without a *nom de plume*; for the details, cf. Aloys Sprenger, *A Catalogue of Arabic, Persian and Hindustani Manuscripts of the Libraries of King of Oudh*, compiled under the orders of the government of India by A. Sprenger, Vol.I (Calcutta, 1854), pp. 165-72.

¹⁸ Cf. Abu Talib, *Diwan i Talib*. The only known copy has survived in a Bodleian MS. Pers. e. 9. These poems were translated into English by Talib's student George Swinton, under the title *Poems of Mirza Abu Talib Khan* (London, 1807).

¹⁹ Cf. Karim Khan Mushtaq Jhajjari, *Mirat i Giti numa*, India Office Library, I.O.D.P. 724, ff. 95b-96b, where the author discussed the origin of tobacco as an American product imported to India by the Europeans during the period of Queen Elizabeth and cited verses in praise of this product.

²⁰ Cf. *Khulasat al afkar*, ff. 347a-350, where Abu Talib provided specimens of poetical composition by Mirza Muhammad Bakhsh Ashob.

known as pre-modern Urdu poetry was spanned with the distinguished names of Muhammad Rafi "Sauda" (1713-1780), Mir Taqi "Mir" (1723-1810) and the mystical poet Khwaja Mir "Dard" (1719-1785). For the history of Urdu literature, the eighteenth century in the Indo-Gangetic plain was a period of successful innovation and of great vigour, when it developed into a literary language and attained its maturity in the urban environment of Delhi and Lucknow.²¹ Curiously enough, the rise and development of Urdu poetry in North India coincided with the decline and fall of the Mughal empire. It was nurtured, nourished and brought to life by those who themselves were suffering from the economic disasters and political chaos. These echoes of decline find their expression in a new genre commonly known as *Shaihr i Ashob* (Verses of the Afflicted). Sauda's masterpiece *Qasidah i Shaihr i Ashob* is a detailed picture of the ebb and flow in the fortunes of consumer classes, a graphic account of the decline and degeneration of various professions in Delhi. It describes how once flourishing professions sunk low, and how their practitioners once held in high esteem had fallen in debasement. Similarly, *Tazhik i rozgar* depicts the impoverished nobility and its helpless subordinate service gentry, the *amil*, *buyutat*, the physicians, *diwan*, and the poets who traditionally thrived under the patronage of their superior elite. The feeling of economic insecurity, pessimism and gloom acquired added poignancy in the hands of sensitive sufferers, who had to leave Delhi in search of employment in other places that filled them with nostalgia for Delhi.²² Although Urdu was replacing Persian as the *lingua-franca* in major parts of India in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, yet the Urdu literature consisted almost entirely of verse until the close of the century. The total output of Urdu poetical literature in Urdu that survives from the eighteenth century is

²¹ Cf. Abd al Latif Shushtari, *Tuhfat al alam*, Bodl. Pers. MS. Elliott 382, ff. 209b.

²² Cf. Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Delhi, 1984, revised ed.). For an excellent treatment of the emergence of Urdu, cf. *infra*, chapter "Historical Background".

considerable, but not enormous, compared to its counterpart in Persian. The significance of Persian as the dominant language of literary expression is emphasized in the fact that the history of Urdu literature as recorded in the biographies of literary figures called *Tazkira*, i.e., the biographies of the Rekhta poets or Hindi poets, (both words, 'Rekhta' and 'Hindi' were synonymous), were written in Persian.²³ Urdu was more a medium of aesthetic enjoyment than of serious belletristic prose. Perhaps it is not incidental that Indian Muslims who visited Europe in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century chose to record their experiences and impressions of West in Urdu as spoken in north Indian plains and the Deccan. Previously, it was Persian which used to be employed for the same purpose.²⁴

Excessive preoccupation with literary pursuits boosted another form of literary writing known as *Tazkira-nawisi*: collections of specimens of poets along with their biographical memoirs. The writers of *Tazkira* tried to establish direct contact with their contemporary poets and writers to obtain first-hand information.²⁵ In this respect, a major trend-setter was Muhammad Ali Hazin (1692-1766 or 1767), who migrated from Iran and settled for some time in Delhi, after being granted a land-grant (*suyurghal*) by Muhammad Shah. Subsequently, he chose Benares as his permanent residence, and there he attracted scholars, poets and philosophers, making his new abode a centre of learning. Hazin compiled a biographical account of his contemporary literary figures, entitled

²³ For example, Mir Taqi Mir's *Tazkira* of Rekhta poets, entitled *Nikat al shuara*, contains biographies and specimens of the poetry of more than a hundred Hindustani poets (Bodl. Persian MS. Elliot 394). And the *Tazkira i Ishki* of Rahmatullah Ishki of Patna, completed about 1800-1801, is written similarly in Persian (Bodl. Persian MS. Elliott 396).

²⁴ Cf. Karim Khan Jhajjari, *Siyahatnama*, B.L. Or. 2163. This travelogue is written in simple, sober and concise style, interspersed with indigenous terms of local origin. Also, Yusuf Khan Kammalposh, *Ajaibat i Farang* (Delhi, 1847), which is written in Dekkani Urdu, mother-tongue of the author. Yusuf originally descended from Hyderabad, but was serving in Awadh in the military contingent of the *nawab-wazirs* of Awadh.

²⁵ For instance, cf. the letters of Ali Ibrahim Khan sent to various poets in his effort to obtain literary pieces.

Tazkirat ul muasirin,²⁶ followed a decade later by his autobiography, *Tazkirat ahwal* (Description of conditions) which inspired a number of writers to write similar autobiographical accounts.²⁷ The *Tazkira* writers attempted to enlarge the sphere of these researches. Abu Talib, for example, included prose specimens in his *Khulasat al afkar* (Quintessence of Thought), while hitherto it was exclusively poetical pieces, along with discussion on prosody diction and rhyme.²⁸ Abu Talib's inspiration came from an earlier *Tazkira* compiled by Ali Quli Khan Daghistani Wali (d. 1756), entitled *Riyaz us Shuara* (Garden of Poets).²⁹ It was not just the literary men who made the subject-matter of writings; many nobles as well as Mughal dignitaries composed biographies of their own class. Among such works devoted to the ruling class, a distinguished place is held by *Masir ul umara* of Abdur Razzaq Aurengabadi, better known as Shahnawaz Khan (d. 1758).³⁰ He was followed by the equally famous and contemporary Mir Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami (1704-1786), who wrote biographical dictionaries of poets, scholars, sufis and theologians. His works are among the best and most authentic accounts of the period.³¹ Ali Ibrahim Khan, during his tenure as the administrator of Benares, devoted his energies to this form of literature and sought to introduce innovations by separately treating *Rekhta* poets³² and those who wrote *masnawi*.³³

²⁶ Cf. Shaikh Muhammad Ali Hazin, *Tazkirat al muasirin*, I.O.D.P. 493.

²⁷ Shaikh Muhammad Ali Hazin, *Tazkirat al ahwal* Bodl. Persian MS. Ouseley 273. For an account of Hazin's life, cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 234b-237a.

²⁸ For the treatise on prosody, cf. the *Risala dar ilm i qawwafi*, in Abu Talib, *Khulasat al afkar*, Bodl. Persian MS. Elliott 181, ff. 360a-361b.

²⁹ Ali Quli Khan Daghistani, *Riyaz us Shuara*, Bodl. Persian MS. Elliott 402.

³⁰ Cf. Mir Abd al Razzaq Aurangabadi, *Masir ul Umara*, Bodl. MS. Ouseley, Add. 43. Also Maulawi Abdur Rahim and Ashraf Ali (eds.), 3 Volumes, Bib. Ind. (Calcutta, 1888-95).

³¹ Cf. Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami, *Khizanah i amirah*, Bodl. Persian MS. Ouseley, Add. 6. Also *Masir ul Kiram*, 2 Vols., lithographed edition (Hyderabad, 1913).

³² Ali Ibrahim Khan, *Gulzar i Ibrahimi*, (Garden of Ibrahim) contains the lives of more than three hundred Rekhta poets (Bodl. Persian MS. Ouseley, Add. 42).

Finally, he compiled another Tazkira, *Suhuf i Ibrahimi*, containing biographies of more than three thousand poets.³⁴

While there is little influence on the art of biographical literature from the West, yet another form of *tazkira* writing, namely topographical *tazkiras*, was directly stimulated by the British presence. British Indologists and administrators both out of scholarly curiosity as well as for the fulfilment of the administrative prerogatives, tried to learn more and more about India's immediate past as well as its ancient heritage. They commissioned numerous displayed service-elites and scholars to write accounts of cities, their shrines, tombs and historical monuments. The earliest monuments to arouse such curiosity was the splendid mausoleum of emperor Shahjahan's beloved wife, Taj Bibi, referred by contemporaries as *Rauza-i-Mumtaz Mahal*. Numerous accounts were written of this historical monument giving details on its architecture, weights and measures of stones and wood-work. Other topics included the climate of Agra, tomb of the sufi saint Muinuddin Chishti.³⁵

³³ *Op. cit.* Cf. also *Khulasat al Kalam*, Bodl. Per. Elliot 183-4, which contains notices of seventy-eight *masnawi* writers.

³⁴ Cf. *Khulasat, Suhuf i Ibrahimi*, Bankipur viii 708. At a later date, Sir Henry Elliot attributed Ali Ibrahim's "critical acumen [...] in selecting and comparing dates and circumstances" to his "close intimacy with the Europeans". Further, the fact that Ali Ibrahim produced such amount of literature was thought to have been the result of the peace and tranquility that prevailed in the provinces during the ascendancy of the British power. These factors favoured the formation of extensive libraries in the cities of Lucknow, Patna and Benares, to all of which he had of course access. (In fact maintaining libraries was part of the elite culture. Cf. N. Bland, "On the earliest Persian Biography of Poets", *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, ix (London, 1848), pp. 153-8.)

³⁵ For details of the above topographical works, cf. *Persian Literature*, Vol. II. pt. I, pp. 143-5. Such topographical researches began in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and continued to flourish in the first half of the 19th century, when British Indologists' efforts culminated in the establishment of an Archaeological Society at Delhi in the 1840's. For the Proceedings of this Society, cf. *Journal of the Archaeological Society of Delhi*, 1850 and 1853, both printed at the Delhi Gazette Press. The significant topographical and biographical account of the principal buildings of Shahjahanbad and Old Delhi were written on the inspiration of this society. For example, cf. Sangin Beg (b. Ali Akbar Beg), *Sair al manazil*, B.L. Add. 24053. Also, the more celebrated works by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Asar al sanadid* (Saiyyid al Akhbar Press, Delhi, 1847) and C.W. Troll, "A Note on the Early Topographical work of Sayyid Ahmad Khan: *Asar al-Sanadid*", *Journal of the Royal Society of the Great Britain and Ireland* (1972), pp. 135-44.

Next to poetry and biography stood historiography, where the traditional Islamic method was too strong to be influenced by any other trend, yet its scope was widened immensely due to new influences on society. The works produced during the period under consideration included general, local and universal histories. Abu Talib envisaged his *Lubb us Siyar u jahan numa* ("The Essence of World Biographies") to be a world history.³⁶ There was a clear tendency to give pompous titles, such as *Mirat i al ahwal i Jahan numa* ("The Mirror of the Conditions of the World"), a reflection of the historians' wish to embrace the developments of a wider world. What was new in these eighteenth and early nineteenth century universal histories was an attempt to include two other continents, Europe and the Americas. In the realm of the dynastic histories, more than fifty works were written about the Mughals alone, while regional rulers imitated the Mughals and patronized scholars and historians who were encouraged to record their own dynastic histories. Consequently, the historical accounts of regional rulers turned out to be of immense proportions. To these should be added all the family histories, written by members of the erstwhile service gentry, such as the *Sharaif i Usmani*—a family history of the Shaikzadas of Bilgram. The author of *Sharaif i Usmani*, Ghulam Husain Farshawri, had contacts with the British officials and scholars at the Awadh court. He sought to prove his true service gentry *ashraf* lineage by including the royal *farmans* and *parwana* issued to his ancestors by the reigning Sultans and emperors since the thirteenth century.³⁷ There was also a sudden spurt in local histories, which was to continue well into the next century, when local histories were written in easy and concise Urdu. Under the influence of the British administrators who naturally desired

³⁶ Abu Talib, *Lubb us Siyar u jahan numa*, Bodleian Persian MS. Elliott 181, ff. 382b-438b.

³⁷ Cf. Ghulam Husain Farshawri, *Sharaif i Usmani*, Aligarh Muslim University History Seminar Library Collection, MS. 63.

to enhance their knowledge of the local area which came under their jurisdiction, we have historical accounts of not only the obvious urban centres of India like Delhi, Azimabad and Benares and the Qasbahs like Bilgram, Kakori and Jaunpur which were the seats of learning, but even of small villages like Jais.

Since the time of Akbar, when translation of Sanskrit works into Persian took place on a large scale, a positive interest in India's past developed that formed part of the elite literate culture. The trend was further continued by Dara Shikoh whose own composition *Majama al Bahrain* (Mingling of Oceans) popularised Hindu ideas and Sufi doctrines among scholarly circles. It is difficult to ascertain as to what extent contemporary writers were influenced by Indologists in studying Hinduism. Murtaza Husain, who had the brief experience of serving Jonathan Scott as a *munshi*, included many Hindu themes and ideas in his account: the doctrine of reincarnation, the transmigration of soul (*tanasukh*), the story of the creation, the cosmic cycles of Hindu mythology and, generally, other cosmological ideas related to the Absolute Being, such as the idea of resurrection and the final release as absorption into the Absolute. These ideas, however, were largely discussed without any deeper understanding of the necessary theoretical background, as discussions of the doctrine of four world-ages (*Jug*) reveal. The *Shastras* were known as the sources of all the ancient Hindu wisdom and learning, including the sciences like astronomy, astrology and mathematics. On the other hand, Hinduism was interpreted as a monotheistic faith, idol-worshipping being a means to reach one and Absolute God.³⁸ More significantly, there were attempts to assimilate this knowledge into an Islamic framework of learning such as the idea that one of the

³⁸ Cf. Murtaza Husain Bilgrami, *Hadiqat al aqalim* (Lucknow, 1879), pp. 30-9. For similar interest in the ancient past of India, cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 186-94.

Vedas had foretold the advent of the Prophet Muhammad.³⁹ Appreciation for India's fauna and flora became part of early Muslim elite writings within the pattern set by Amir Khusrau Dehlawi. In various contemporary images Hindustan was viewed as a melting pot of various cultures. The Europeans who were arriving in India in ever increasing numbers were, like the Turks and Mughals, the earlier immigrants. "Half of the riches of entire world were concentrated in one country of Hindustan. Various people from distant lands, including Europeans (*Rumis* and *Firangis*), Africans (*Zangis*), Persians (*Irani*) and, finally, Turks (*Turani*), all came to Hindustan. Gradually with the passage of time, all of them became Hindustani—the Indians. Those who came as paupers, destitute and indigents came to acquire immense riches, but they strove hard for these comforts of life and accumulation of wealth".⁴⁰

The applied sciences such as medicine (*hikmat*) were slow to change, partly because they were deeply rooted in Islamic culture and partly because in many ways they had not been made obsolete by new discoveries. In the seventeenth century, a European medical scientist could still learn from the works of Ibn Sina. Yet, growing signs of interest in European medical discoveries were not missing. Translations of European medical writings appeared in the mid-eighteenth century.⁴¹ Treatises were also written on zoology and mineralogy. Subjects like music, warfare, games, weights and measures, astrology, interpretation of dreams were also main topics of these small treatises. The Mughal architecture, on the other hand, was greatly admired by the British

³⁹ Cf. Murtaza Husain Bilgrami, *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 31-2, 36. The historical development of Delhi as the imperial capital ensued also from the time the city was known as Inderprastha, under Muslim rulers (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 39-53).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 35ff.

⁴¹ Dominic Gregory Bautist, surnamed Dakhani Beg, a Portuguese, settled in Udaipur and there compiled the *Tuhfat al Masiha*, a book claiming to contain the Eastern and Western medicine. Cf. W. Ivanow, *Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian manuscripts in the Curzon Collection, Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1926), No. 610 (hereafter Ivanow). Muhammad Husain Khan included new drugs introduced by European in the *Khatima* of his *Majma al jawami*, India Office Ethe. 2361.

architects who imitated it in Britain (cf. the country house "Sezin court" in Gloucestershire in 1806, the Royal Pavilion and the Royal Stables at Brighton in 1803-32.⁴²)

In religion, the eighteenth century produced one of the most profound thinkers in the history of Indian Islam, Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi (1703-62), who was the first authority that tried to analyze the causes of the down-fall of Muslim power. For him, the Muslim rulers must rule in accordance with the precepts of Islam, and Islam should be purified by teachers using their *Ijtihad* on the basis of the Holy *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. He also suggested that the four schools of thought (*mazhab*) should be merged in a single system of morality and law. He translated the Holy *Qur'an* into Persian and, what is of principal importance, founded a tradition of religious scholarship and a school which was to influence religious thought for generations to come. Shah Wali Allah's ultimate aim was to reach the whole of the Muslim world; he, therefore, wrote in Persian as well as Arabic. His ideas got disseminated throughout the wider world of Islam and laid the foundation of that kind of Sufism which emphasized the strict observance of *Sharia*.⁴³ Another reform movement originated with Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahab (1703-92), first in Central Arabia in the early eighteenth century and then throughout the Muslim world. His emphasis on strict obedience to the Holy *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, and his insistence on the necessity for return to the teachings of Islam, combined with the rejection of all that was regarded as *bida'*, innovations, influenced many contemporary and later thinkers.⁴⁴

⁴² Cf. P. Conner, *Oriental Architecture in the West* (London, 1979), chapters 9-11.

⁴³ Cf. J.M.S. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi 1703-1762* (Brill, 1986).

⁴⁴ For a small biographical sketch of Muhammad ibn i Abd al Wahab's life, his main reforming ideas and his teaching in Arabic, cf. Abd al Latif Shushtari, *Tuhfat al alam* (Hyderabad, 1877), suppl., pp. 12-20. Also Abu Talib, *Masir i talibi*, Bodleian Persian MS. Ouseley, 108, ff. 226b-230a.

The Indian Muslim scholars maintained their links with the heartlands of Islam through the *Haj* — a permanent and unbroken channel. Those who went to perform the pilgrimage, sometimes prolonged their stay in the holy cities in order to study at Medina. A number of Indian Muslims visited Hejaz and some even migrated for the explicit purpose of studying classical theological sciences. When those scholars eventually came back to India, with imbibed inspiration of writing in Arabic, advocated and spread the study of the *Hadith*. Shah Waliullah, for example, upon his return to India, chose Arabic as the language of *Hujjat Allah al Baligha*. Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami (d. 1785), another Muslim scholar, also composed his works in Arabic and Persian. Arabic was chosen as medium of expression to reach the learned readership both in India and abroad. Some of these scholars chose to stay on longer in other Islamic countries. Murtaza Ali Bilgrami (1732-91), for example, a contemporary and compatriot of Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami and a disciple of Shah Wali Allah, went to Arabia, lived for some time in Zabid in Yemen, a significant centre of learning, and then moved to Cairo.⁴⁵ In Egypt Murtaza devoted himself to the study of the *Hadith*, wrote a commentary on Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-din*, and produced the *Taj al Urus*, a voluminous lexicographical commentary on the famous *Qamus* of Majd al Din Firozabadi.⁴⁶

Also during this period, India's exposure to the outside world encouraged another kind of literary genre, travel literature. A Muhammad Abdullah, for example, went to Central Asia, Russia, China and Tibet in order to get his ancestral property restored by

⁴⁵ For Murtaza's contact with leading scholars such as Muhammad Khalid al Muradi (1760-91) and Abd al Rahman al Jabarti (1753-1825), cf. Albert Habib Hourani, *A History of the Arab People* (London, 1991), pp. 255-6. Murtaza asked Jabarti to help him in collecting biographical material; that was the impulse in turning Murtaza's younger contemporary's mind to history-writing, the last great chronicle in the traditional style.

⁴⁶ Cf. Aziz Ahmad, "An Intellectual History of Islam in India", in *Islamic Surveys*, vol. 7 (Edinburgh, 1969).

the British authorities. He did not produce any interesting account of his travels, but enumerated the various stages of his routes with an account of his distinguished reception at the Chinese court and by the Empress of Russia.⁴⁷ Similarly, another Mughal Beg accompanied his British employer Colonel Frances Wilford to Afghanistan, Iran, Punjab and Peshawar, for the collection of topographical information which he compiled in 1790-91 under the suitable title of *Sair ul Bilad*.⁴⁸ Travel to Eastern world seemed to have been partly influenced by Britain's diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, China, Russia and Iran. Educated Indian Muslims were considered the most appropriate means to secure knowledge of these places, partly because of their religious affinity and partly because of their linguistic competence. Numerous glossaries and lexicons which were compiled in Persian or other languages such as Pashto, Turkish and Arabic seemed to have been written in order to facilitate communication. Several works were also compiled as hand-books for the pilgrims.⁴⁹ The Indians equally undertook journeys to Europe under various motives.

Thus, the eighteenth century in India saw the broadening of horizons of thought and changes in sensibilities in the mental landscape of its traditional elite. The identity of such elite, their academic, political and cultural outlook is the pre-requisite for any inquiry on the bi-lateral intellectual dialogue. The present study is mainly purported to address these vital academic issues. However, it seems imperative to draw a picture of the political world of this elite on a wider scale.

⁴⁷ Cf. B.L. Persian MS. Or. 1119, "An Account of a Journey to Russia and China". The routes are (i) from Bukhara through Ovenburg and Qazan to Moscow and Petersburg, (ii) from Moscow to Kashghar, (iii) from Moscow to Macrieve, (iv) from Bukhara through Qazan to Peking and thence through Tibet and Kashmir to Bengal from Bukhara to Herat and Mashhad.

⁴⁸ Cf. Mughal Beg, *Sair al Bilad*, I.O.L. Nos. 3731 and 3746.

⁴⁹ Cf. Bandah Ali Bin Mirza Khayrat Ali, *Manazil al Haj* ("Station of Pilgrimage"), Ivanow, no. 287. This work describes two pilgrims' routes, from Baghdad through the Shammer region and Syria.

0.2 *The Mughal State: An Ideal Type*

Before assessing the impact of the contemporary political transition on the service-elite in India, it is essential to have an overview of the position and functions of the bureaucratic class in the Mughal empire. The system where their ancestors had served, and within which they functioned, equally shaped their mental attitudes and outlook. The successor states which sprang up on the ruins of the Mughal empire, such as Murshidabad, Hyderabad and Awadh, continued to work within the institutional framework of their predecessor. It was again members of the same bureaucratic families who filled various posts, high and low in the administrative set-up of these regional states. Even the British, after the grant of *Diwani* by the emperor Shah Alam in 1764, sought to integrate themselves within the Mughal imperial system. When the indigenous political system began to crumble down, in order to give way to new political powers, it was the ideal type of the centralized Mughal state which they wished to see re-established. The elite tried to employ the same skills which their ancestors had learnt in their service of the empire. Therefore, it would not be simply a digression to establish a comprehensive picture of the contemporary world of bureaucracy.

The Mughal state was monarchical in character, and as such centred around the person of the emperor, who took all the major decisions and led the empire using a closely controlled and loyal bureaucracy. The highly-centralized character of the empire was largely due to the achievements of its architect emperor Akbar (1556-1605), who divided it into large administrative divisions called *Suba*. Each *Suba* was divided into *Sarkar*, and each *Sarkar* was divided into *Mahals* or *Parganas*, the latter being the smallest territorial unit in the empire.⁵⁰ At the centre, the highest post (in terms of

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At its greatest, the Mughal empire comprised the territories of three present-day countries: Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, as well as a large part of Afghanistan. Cf. Irfan Habib, *Atlas of the Mughal Empire* (Delhi, 1982).

status) was of the *wakil*, theoretically the agent of the emperor in all matters, but in practice, having as much power as the emperor might allow him. (After 1640-41, with the death of Asaf Khan, the office of *wakil* was practically abolished.) The officer next in rank was the *wazir i mamalik*, or *diwan i kul*, who controlled all the financial matters with the assistance of three principal subordinates: the *diwan i tan*, in charge of *jagir* assignments; the *diwan i khalisa*, in charge of the territories held for the emperor's income; and the *diwan i buyutat*, in charge of the imperial expenditure. The *Mir Bakhshi* or *Bakhshi i mamalik* was in charge of the grants as well as resumption of *mansabs*, posting of commanders, checking their contingents, and information-gathering machinery of the empire. He had three major subordinates the first, second and third *bakhshis*.⁵¹ The *sadr us sudur* was the minister in charge of imperial charities in the form of land and cash grants. He also recommended the appointment of *Qazis*, or judges.⁵² The *mir saman* or *Khan saman* managed the imperial establishment, while the *Mir adl* assisted the emperor in the process of justice; and the *Mir bahr* controlled ferries and river boats. It is rather surprising to know that the Mughals did not have a separate department for foreign affairs, despite the fact that they followed an active foreign policy and sent out and received many embassies. Although there are frequent mention of the *munshis*, from Shahjahan's period onward it is referred to as the *dar al Insha*, which was not a separate department but a bureau of correspondence attached to the office of *bakhshi*. The head of the *Dar al insha* (state-chancellery) was designated with various titles such as *Mir munshi*, *darogha i darul insha* and *Munshi i mamalik*; in all cases meaning the chief

⁵¹ For the standard description of the Mughal system of administration, cf. Ibn Hasan, *The Central structure of the Mughal Empire and its practical working upto the year 1657* (Oxford, 1936). Also P. Saran, *The Provincial Government of the Mughals (1526-1658)* (Allahabad, 1941). The usual picture of administration through chains of official position, though accurate, is misleading in that it falls far short of describing the actual operation of the imperial system.

⁵² Cf. Rafat M. Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments of the Mughal period, 1556-1707* (Delhi, 1984).

draftsman of imperial letters, *farmans* and documents. Even after the establishment of a separate bureau, the Mughals usually assigned the drafting of important documents to ministers and dignitaries other than the official *munshis*. Akbar's royal letters were drafted mostly by Abul Fazl who did not occupy an official position as a secretary. Shahjahan's letters to foreign potentates were drafted mainly by Sadullah Khan, the Chief Diwan. The status and emoluments of *mir munshi* were not very high, but the proximity (*taqarrub*) to the person of the emperor gave the post conferred the incumbent an immense amount of prestige.⁵³ During the eighteenth century, although the *Dar ul Insha* existed as a bureau, the *Mir Munshi* was not confined to one department, but were transferrable to other departments like that of *Diwani*.⁵⁴

At the provincial level, each *suba* had a governor (*Nazim, Sahib i suba, Subedar*) directly appointed by the emperor, and was by and large the supreme military commandant of a part of his province. The remaining area of a governor's province fell under the jurisdiction of a military commandant called *faujdar*, who was directly appointed by the emperor. The *faujdar's* main task to maintain law and order through his jurisdiction might not correspond to the division called *sarkar*, or *chakla*, as it was called in Shahjahan's time. Important forts had castleman (*qiladaars*) appointed to them; some times strategic posts (*thanas*) had *thanedars*, directly named by the emperor. In addition, each *pargana* had a Muslim judge (*Qazi*), who was appointed under an imperial *farman*, to head and settle criminal cases. Two semi-hereditary officials called *Qanungoes* and *Chaudhuris*, were concerned with tax collection. Each *Suba* had a set of officials similar to, or identical with that in the rest besides a governor who was

⁵³ Cf. *Katib* in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Vol. IV (Leiden, 1978), pp.758-60.

⁵⁴ Yahya Khan head of *Darul Insha* was transferred as *Diwan* of the Crown lands under Muhammad Shah. Cf. *Makhzan al Gharaib*, Bodl. Persian MS. Elliott 395, f. 515a.

directly responsible to the emperor. Other provincial officials, namely the *diwan*, *bakhshi* and *waqainawis* and *sadr* were directly subordinate to the corresponding central minister (*Diwan i kul*, *Mir bakhshi* and *Sadr us sudur* respectively). Consequently, the functions and jurisdictions of the central ministers and the *suba* officials were rigorously defined and at the same time restricted the government's powers. In India, unlike the Ottoman empire, none of the offices was hereditary.⁵⁵ Although, like other Islamic societies, the *Ulama* in India enjoyed a distinct status. They had been the ideologues and traditional supporters of the state and they almost exclusively staffed the legal department. The *zawabit*, the state laws and secular considerations, regulated the policies and functions of the state in medieval India, but *Sharia* remained a point of reference in daily civil and penal matters. The situation was fairly flexible as the religious intelligentsia could also enter the other departments.

The bureaucracy was organised into hierarchies through *mansabdari* institution. Accordingly, every officer serving in the army and bureaucracy, and the distinction between these two was not always sharply marked, was given a *mansab*, i.e. rank. This meant that he held a personal rank, *zat*, expressed in numerical terms and determined his pay, his status, and the type of responsibility and position he could expect to hold. In other words, *zat* signified the bureaucratic status of the holder and the power which he enjoyed at the imperial court. The *sawar* number was denoted by intricate rules, the number of fully equipped cavalry-men and their mounts that he was required to recruit, command any pay.⁵⁶ The *mansabdars* were paid in the form of assignment of areas of

⁵⁵ Cf. Albert Hourani Habib, "The Middle East in the Eighteenth Century", in *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 141-56.

⁵⁶ For a clear description of the *Mansabdari* institution, cf. M. Athar Ali, *Mughal Nobility under Aurengzeb* (Bombay, 1968). This work is concerned with imperial elite having *mansab* above one thousand. Another work by the same author is primarily a detailed dictionary of nobles, again having *mansab* above one thousand; cf. *The Apparatus of the Empire* (Oxford 1985). So far, the position of petty bureaucrats in the organisation has not been studied.

lands known as *jagir* from which they were entitled to collect the land revenue and all other taxes imposed or sanctioned by the emperor. Since their ranks had a final cash value, the amount of income that the emperor diverted as salaries to the high ranking *mansabdars* was immense.⁵⁷ Since the Mughal economy was a land-based economy the dominant mode of payment for subordinate officials was also in the form of land-revenue assignment.⁵⁸

To a large extent, the Mughals succeeded in uniting together various heterogenous groups: Central Asians (Turans, Persians, Afghans, Abyssinians), Arabs and Indian-born Muslims (the Shaikhzadas and the Sayyids), as well as the Rajputs and Khattris into a service gentry. Traditionally, the Iranis formed a significant prop of the Mughal imperial bureaucracy and this element was constantly replenished by continuous immigration.⁵⁹ Since the Mughal empire employed Persian both for administrative purposes and as the court language, the educated Iranians migrating to wealthy India were already in an advantageous position for the occupation of high posts, especially as some of them belonged to families of high repute and eminence whose members had been in the service of the Safvids. This time also saw the arrival of a considerable number of scholars, poets, scientists-physicians, who all sought their patrons among the well-placed nobles of the empire. The Iranian immigration continued unabated during the entire eighteenth century. As has already been pointed out by recent researches, the Afghan conquest of Isfahan in 1722 was followed by the migration of many well-educated families which were heavily supported by the Safwid rulers in the form of the land-grants and religious offices, who came to India in search of employment in the regional

⁵⁷ For a clear description, cf. Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707)* (Bombay, 1937), esp. the chapter on "Agrarian Assignments".

⁵⁸ Cf. *Hadqat al aqalimi*, pp. 671ff.

⁵⁹ Cf. Athar Ali, *Mughal Nobility Aurengzeb*.

courts as literary men, civil servants and physicians.⁶⁰ Especially during the second part of the eighteenth century, therefore, the Iranians were a major force in the bureaucracy of the Awadh state, but also in other regional states. The regional rulers of Awadh as well as Murshidabad themselves were of the Iranian extraction.

The *Umara* class of officials, closely tied to the emperor and dependent for their position and power directly on him, constituted the core of bureaucracy and stood at the top of the bureaucratic ladder. This relatively small group of officials consumed the vast bulk of the resources of the empire as well as the major responsibility of administering and protecting it.⁶¹ At the same time, the administrative requirements of the state gave rise to a very large professional class whose members were largely recruited from the middle-income group that was becoming increasingly prosperous. Its prosperity was discernable down to the lowest ranks, such as the petty officials *karkun*, *amin*, *peshkar* and *patwari* at the *pargana* level. This official class, working at the grass-root levels in subordinate positions at central, provincial and *pargana* levels, was numerically stronger than the genuine nobility. The characteristic features of this professional class were that of a two-fold mobility, inter-professional and geographical. An average accountant, record-keeper and *insha*-writer, for example, could serve in such far-flung places as Kabul, Lahore, Agra, Gujarat, Bengal and Deccan during his whole service-career.⁶² The emperor, however, sought to maintain direct relations with all officials. As the sole source of authority in the system, he personally approved the recruitment, advancement

⁶⁰ Cf. J.R.I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiism in Iran and Iraq* (Berkeley, 1988).

⁶¹ The Arabic-Persian term *Umara*, plural of *amir*, is nearly synonymous to the English term 'nobility'. During the time of the Mughals it was applied to all officers who held the *mansab* of one thousand or above. A rank holder was an *amir* (plural *Umara*), if his *zat* number was higher than one thousand. The highest *zat* number was reserved for princes and important nobles, who could then be called *haft hazari*. Cf. *Mughal Nobility*, p. 2.

⁶² Cf. Iqtidar Alam Khan, "The Middle Classes in the Mughal Empire", *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Aligarh Session, 1975.

in rank, and posting of all but the lowliest of *mansabdars*.⁶³ Recent findings show that all appointments to government office, including central and provincial posts, were personally signed by him. As the empire expanded towards east and south, the Shaikhs, Sayyids, Kayasthas and Khatris moved into Bengal, Orissa, Gujarat and the Deccan.⁶⁴ All administrative officials, those employed as well as those directly given ranks in the imperial service (*mansabs*) and those employed in private capacity by the nobility, were thus tied to the Mughal emperor. This fact promoted a strong sense of corporate identity and loyalty among all the ranks of administrative officials.⁶⁵

The education of these bureaucrats began at home and usually consisted in studying grammar (Arabic and Persian), the Holy *Qur'an* and its interpretation (*tafsir*), the traditions of the Prophet (*Hadith*) and the Islamic law, including the "juridical theology" which underlay it (*fiqh* and *usul i fiqh*). Later on in life the student would possibly travel in order to study a particular subject with some reknown scholar, the latter's fame being more decisive in determining the journey than his place of abode. The place, in fact, usually came to be associated with the scholar who lived there, such as "Jaunpur the town of Mulla Mahmud Jaunpuri" (d. 1532). Those who were more inclined towards scientific subjects (*maqu. lat*) were usually not *madrsah* trained, but taught by teachers who were known for their taste for scientific enquiries. The education in Mughal India was thus highly-personalized. Unlike the Ottomans, the Mughal empire did not have the specialised colleges established by the state for the training of its

⁶³ Cf. John F. Richards, "Imperial Crisis in the Deccan", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 35(1976), pp. 237-56. Also his *Official order of Appointments in the Mughal Empire* (Cambridge, 1988).

⁶⁴ Cf. *A Calendar of Acquired Persian Documents in National Archives of India*, vol. II (New Delhi, 1986).

⁶⁵ Cf. J.F. Richards, "Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal officers", in B.D. Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 266-71.

bureaucracy.⁶⁶ Education at the elementary level was usually imparted through the *maktabs*. The *madrshs* were the institutions of higher learning, for those who aspired to enter state service. The *madrshs* were not directly state-controlled, but supported by the state in the form of a land-grant or through the munificence of the high-placed nobles. Those who wished to enter the legal professions obviously paid more attention to Muslim law and jurisprudence, whereas others who wished to establish themselves in independent professions learnt directly from the practitioners. Nonetheless those who entered the state services spent time as apprentice, watching their superiors performing various duties in particular department.⁶⁷ This highly-personalized system of education survived after the decline of the empire and even kept on thriving under the regime of regional potentates. Although places like Delhi and Lucknow were the pre-eminent centres of learning, the former in virtue of its being the capital and the latter of its being a metropolitan city, it was the small *qasbahs* like Bilgram, Gopamau, Kakori and Jais that became foci of learning under the local gentry, consisting of local *Qazi* and *muhtasib*. For example, Mir Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami, member of a typical bureaucrat family, the Wasiti Sayyids of Bilgram, received his early education from Mir Tufayl Muhammad at his home-town Bilgram where he was born in the first decade of the eighteenth century.⁶⁸ Later, he went to Delhi and subsequently to Siwistan, a town in Sindh, where he stayed with his uncle Mir Abd al Jalil Bilgrami (1660-1725) who was then serving as the *bakhshi* and *waqainigar*. Azad received instructions from him in language (*lughat*), biographies and "Traditions of the Prophet" (*Hadith wa Siyar*), as well lessons in polite literature (*adab*). At the same time he was inducted in state service

⁶⁶ Cf. H.A.R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West* (London, 1950), I, pt. 2.

⁶⁷ For more details, cf. the biography of Itisam, *infra*.

⁶⁸ For the life-sketch of Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami, *Khazana i amrah*, ff. 105a-116b. Also, *Khulasat al afkar*, ff. 31.

through the influence of his uncle who got him appointed as his deputy (*naib*) at the age of twenty-five.⁶⁹ Azad continued his education even after entering the official service and, having served for five years, left for the Holy cities of Mecca and Medina where he performed pilgrimage and studied further. He read *Sahih Bukhari* from Shaikh Muhammad Hayat Sindi al Madani and received a certificate (*sanad*) from him. At Mecca, he studied *Hadith* and various related sciences (*ulum i Hadith*) with Abd al Wahab Tantawi.⁷⁰ In 1739, he returned to India, entered into the service of the Nawab of Hyderabad and settled at Aurangabad where he pursued a highly productive career, writing almost on every subject, including the *Hadith*, belles-letters, history, biography and poetry.⁷¹

The maintenance of libraries (*Kutub Khana*) was an essential part of the elite culture. The Mughals had an established tradition of maintaining libraries which served the needs of scholars and students alike. In addition to the royal library at Delhi, individual nobles maintained their own libraries. The religious intelligentsia living in qasbahs and villages had its own libraries along with the houses, the madrasahs, and the mosques.⁷² In imitation of the great Mughals, the regional potentates found their own libraries. Particularly rich was the collections at Lucknow, where the treasures of the royal library of Delhi were transferred when the imperial capital was shaken by political instability. Moreover, the enormous collections of the Pathan warrior Hafiz Rahmat Khan, a prolific writer, were taken by the Awadh Nawabs to Lucknow. This is where the German scholar Sprenger examined them in the mid-nineteenth century and found

⁶⁹ Cf. *Khazina i Amrah*, ff. 105a.

⁷⁰ *Op. cit.*

⁷¹ *Op. cit.*, where the author gave an extract from his work.

⁷² Cf. *Crisis of Empire*, pp. 121ff. The village-based *madad i mash* holders maintained libraries like the qasbah-based gentry.

books on military organisation, history, poetry, law, Islam, astronomy and mathematics. Abd al Latif, who visited the library at Lucknow in the company of his intellectual friend Tafazzul Husain, reported six hundred thousand volumes, all elegantly inscribed and under the charge of an official for every hundred volumes and under the overall supervision of a keeper of books (*tahwildar*). These books related to varied subjects falling under the domain of sciences and arts (*aqsam funun wa asnaf ulum*), of Arabic, Persian and English prose and poetry, history and biographies (*diwan*), along with invaluable pieces of calligraphy from the hands of ancient as well as modern calligraphers (*khush nawisan*). The library also contained rare pieces of paintings from the brush of many Muslim and European painters. Latif conjectured that a whole life-span would not suffice to see these treasures alone. With the decline of the empire, all the literary treasurer of the Mughals, including seven hundred autographs which were received in past by the Mughals, found their way in the library of Nawabs of Awadh from the royal library (*Kitab Khana Salatin i taimuriya*).⁷³

0.3 Eighteenth Century Transitions and Bureaucracy

From the early eighteenth century onwards weak rulers succeeded one another. This fact, coupled to the constant wars for succession, significantly weakened the central authority. Consequently, the revenues remitted to the centre also diminished and it became increasingly difficult to maintain the military and bureaucratic machines. Numerous small *mansabdar*, soldiers, subordinate officers in the revenue and military department, clerks and other officials began to loose their jobs. When Malwa and

⁷³ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 240-1. Also, Sprenger, *A Catalogue*. Of Sprenger's work only one volume was published, on the biographical works alone. The plan was interrupted due to Sprenger's leaving for his country after two years at Lucknow, at which time he examined "only" ten thousand manuscripts. For reports on Tipu Sultan's library, cf. Charles Stewart, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Oriental Library of the late Tippoo Sultan of Mysore* (Cambridge, 1809).

Gujarat came under Maratha depredations, numerous *madad i mash* holders were evicted from their revenue-free land assignments. The provincial *subedars*, unable to raise revenues to pay their troops, tendered their resignation to the emperor. The central administration came under serious strains and stresses.⁷⁴ It seems that the question of the fate of the established Mughal bureaucracy has not been adequately dealt with by scholars working on the period. Ideally, we should have a full picture of the bureaucracy in its proper historical perspective, discerning the changes in their composition and their absorption in the regional states of Murshidabad, Awadh and Hyderabad. Although it is far beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt an enquiry into these issues, we would like to point out some major trends in the employment-pattern of this class at the time the British presence became an all pervasive-phenomenon in the country. The class's own historians provide ample data to construct the portrait of their destinies.

Recent studies show that, with the weakening of the central authority, local officials made almost all offices related to *Qazi* and *Sadr* hereditary,⁷⁵ while some of the members of the service gentry began to enter the services of regional potentates in Awadh, Murshidabad and Hyderabad. There were others who went to Deccan and had political careers, such as the family of Shaikhzadas of Gopamau, who traditionally served as the local *faujdar* of Etawah, Firozabad and Shikohabad districts under the Mughals. A member of this family, Anwar al Din Khan (d. 1749), went to Deccan where he was conferred the office of *subedar* of Arcot by Asaf Jah, the Nawab of the Deccan. Upon the death of Anwar al Din Khan, his son Muhammad Ali (ruled Arcot, 1750-95) secured the position with British help against his brother who was supported

⁷⁴ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 640-1. In 1730, Sarbuland Khan, Mughal governor of Gujarat, unable to realize revenue due to increasing Maratha pressure in the region, tendered his resignation to the emperor Muhammad Shah. The emperor, as a stringency major, replaced Sarbuland with Abhai Sing Rathor as the governor of the province.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Crisis of Empire*.

by the French.⁷⁶ Muhammad Ali, who held the royal title of *Nawab Umdat al mulk Walajah*, attracted poets, scholars, as well as foreign trained physicians to his court.⁷⁷ Obviously his court was a place of entertainment as well as a source of income for the British with whose support he obtained the position.

With the advent of the Company's ascendancy, Bengal was the first province which fell under the British. The entire bureaucracy of the province was dispossessed of their offices, as well as *jagir*, *altamgha* and other grants.⁷⁸ The old ruling class and the aristocracy suffered heavily from the Bengal revolution.⁷⁹ Ghulam Husain presented a picture of extreme insecurity prevailing among the bureaucracy of the old regime on accession of Nawab Mir Qasim. Few were reconfirmed in their positions, but then only temporarily.⁸⁰ The worst sufferers lost both position and wealth.⁸¹ Others who could manage to regain positions by virtue of close proximity to the British were suspected by the Nawab as being in secret alliance with the British officials.⁸² A few retained their positions for longer, in virtue of their being thought of as indispensable for the

⁷⁶ For an opinion of Muhammad Ali by a member of his own class, cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 155.

⁷⁷ For the history of his court, cf. *Tuzuk i Walajahi*, composed by Munshi Burhan Khan, I.O.L. Ethe 501. Hakim Sikandar, who came to India from Istambul, became physician to Muhammad Ali, and wrote several books on medicine; cf. his *Qanun i Sikandari*, Bodl. Persian MS. Ouseley 347.

⁷⁸ Cf. Abdul Majed Khan, *Transition in Bengal 1756-1757: A study of Sayyid Muhammad Reza Khan* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 155ff. Muzaffar Ali, the author of *Muzaffarnama*, wrote that "A number of officers lost their livelihood" (as quoted in *Transition in Bengal*, p. 121).

⁷⁹ Cf. *Transition in Bengal*.

⁸⁰ Cf. Ghulam Husain Khan Tabatabai, *Siyar al Mutakhkhirin* (Nawal Kishopr Press, Lucknow, 1866), pp. 774-5 (hereafter *Siyar*). Mir Ruh al Din Khan was reconfirmed in his positions as in charge of Purnea, on account of loyal services rendered to Clive. However, he soon fell in disfavour.

⁸¹ Nazr Ali Khan was not only dismissed from his office as Superintendent of Hall of Audience (*Darogha i diwankhan*), his property was also confiscated and he was sent into confinement. Cf. *Siyar*, p. 713.

⁸² Such was Sayyid Ali Khan, son of Hidayat Ali Khan, *Bakhshi al mamalik* of Shah Alam and brother of Ghulam Husain. He was suspected by Qaim Khan for passing information to the British (*ahtamal i jasusi*). Cf. *Siyar*, p. 713.

interest of Company officials.⁸³ The new *nawab* tried to appoint his own relations and trusted advisors.⁸⁴ A good case is that of Muhammad Reza Khan, whose career as *naib nazim* of Bengal was marked with constant conflict with the British authorities as he struggled to protect the old order and institutions against the encroachment which British sought to introduce.⁸⁵ The Calcutta *pargana* had been the first to come under the Company's administration. The Directors reported that they "immediately turned out all those who stood between the government and the cultivators, with consequent ruination of many families".⁸⁶ The Company's administration in Burdwan, Chittagong and Midnapur, though not as alarming, had scarcely been more encouraging.⁸⁷ It was in these circumstances that Ghulam Husain appreciated the British because they "left the *jagir* untouched, *altamgha*, and *imlak*, in the possession of original holders who enjoyed these from the days of Aliwardi Khan and his successors". Ghulam considered it as one of the token of Divine goodness and marks of English munificence." Otherwise, continued Ghulam Husain, "it would have been difficult for any one of them to live for a single day in these regions nay, at any place under the sky of whole of Hindustan".⁸⁸ Before the final abdication of Nizamat in Bengal the revenue administration was reorganised and various officials, such as *amils*, were withdrawn from the districts and

⁸³ For example, Jasarat Khan, *naib* of Chakla Jahangiranagar, was helpful for the Company's tobacco trade; cf. *Transition in Bengal*.

⁸⁴ Turab Ali Khan, maternal uncle of Mir Qasim was being dismissed from his office of deputyship (*niabat*) of Murshidabad. His office was bestowed upon Sayyid Muhammad Khan, another relative of Mir Qasim; cf. *Siyar*, p. 713. Mir Qasim retained some of his loyal supporters and promoted his *munshi*, a confidant and advisor, to *Mir Munshi*. He also gave him the title of Hafiz Asrar Khan; cf. *Siyar*, p. 616.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Transition in Bengal*, p. 125.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁸⁷ *Op. cit.*

⁸⁸ Cf. *Siyar*, p. 775.

replaced by British supervisors and their *gumashtas*.⁸⁹ An entire official class working at district and *pargana* levels, including the *qanungo*, *muhtasib*, *waqainigar*, *sawanihnigar* and *akhbarnawis*, were finally abolished.⁹⁰

From the late eighteenth century onwards, other regional states of Awadh and Hyderabad were also dominated by the British. The Company, having consolidated its position in Bengal, began to exercise greater control in the court of Awadh.⁹¹ Under these difficult financial situation, Sirajuddaula resumed the land-grants in the areas of Allahabad and Awadh.⁹² The local historian Murtaza noted with some depression and nostalgia that "Innumerable stipend holders (*wazifa-khawaran*) were deprived from their means of livelihood (*wajuh i maash*)." He also reminds us how the Mughals had been the liberal rulers, bestowing revenue-free grants and stipends upon the Sayyids, the Shaikhs and other communities (*Qaum*), Muslim as well as Hindu.⁹³

0.4 Employment with the British

Some of the displaced service gentry moved further towards the north. Ali Ibrahim Khan (d. 1793-4), for example, born and brought up at Patna (Azimabad), served in the regional court of Murshidabad and enjoyed full confidence of Mir Qasim until, with the deposition of Mir Qasim, he assisted Colonel Sykes in the collection of revenue and served as *Diwan-i-Sarkar*, Controller of Expenditure. Later, on account of his close

⁸⁹ Cf. *Transition in Bengal*, pp. 264-77.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 225-6, 297, 319 and 345. Also, P.J. Marshall, *Bengal: the British bridgehead, eastern India, 1740-1828*, *New Cambridge History of India*, ii, 2 (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 138-79. The plight of Muslim gentry was a wide-spread phenomenon in Bengal; cf. *Transition in Bengal*, pp. 138-9.

⁹¹ Cf. Michael H. Fisher, "British Expansion in North India: The Role of Resident in Awadh", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 18(1981), pp. 69-82.

⁹² Cf. *Crisis of Empire*. This region had particular concentration of gentry families.

⁹³ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 152-3.

association, he was appointed by Hastings as the judge of Benaras, in 1781.⁹⁴ While performing his official duties, Ali Ibrahim had a most productive literary career. However, those like Ali Ibrahim Khan, who succeeded in gaining a higher position and enjoyed the confidence of higher authorities by a combination of administrative skill and literary acumen, were few. For the majority, hard times were yet to come. The displaced service gentry began to associate themselves with the British officials serving in the regional courts as residents. They sought to cultivate client-patron ties with these officials, ingratiating them with presents of their literary compositions. A large number of historical works were compiled for presentation to the British in expectation of employment.⁹⁵ The majority of these elites had previously served under regional rulers of Awadh, Bengal, Bangash Pathans of Furrukhabad and Rohillas. Again taking example from the region of Allahabad and Awadh, Ghulam Basit Amethawi was forced to leave his home-town when his revenue-free land-grants, an inheritance from his ancestors who served the "Emperors of Hindustan" for about three hundred years, was resumed. Consequently, he was being reduced to immense distress and misery, and "In order to

⁹⁴ Cf. his declaration respecting the manner in which he administered the city, his maintenance of public order, the impartial justice of the administration and the relief measures taken for the famine which ravaged the city. This Persian document is followed by Hindi translation in Devnagri character, along with the signatures of various local inhabitants of Benaras. British Library Add. 29, 217 (Warren Hasting papers).

⁹⁵ The *Shaikhzadas* of Bilgram, Ghulam Husain Siddiqi Farshawri, for example, attached himself to Jonathan Scott and wrote a history of Marathas for him (*Badi az ahwal i Ahmad Shah Badshah Abdali*, India Office Library, I.O. 3958). He was also the author of *Sharaif i Usmani*, a family history of Usmani Farshawri containing biographies of the eminent Bilgramis. Similarly, Murtaza Husain who served as *Munshi* to Scott wrote *Hadiqat al aqalim*. Mir Rahimuddin, a Bukhari Sayyid of Kannauj, served as *munshi* to Major Paim, a post secured through Scott (cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 172). Muhammad Bakhsh Ashob (1716-1785), who had served Mughal nobles and Asafuddaula, sought close ties with Scott, Colonel Polier and Richard Johnson whom he met in Lucknow; he copied various Persian works for Richard Johnson and later on wrote a history of Muhammad Shah's reign, entitled *Tarikh i Shahadat i Farrukh Siyar u Julus i Muhammad Shah* (I.O. Ethe 422). Ashob had a highly productive literary career: apart from a history of the reign of Muhammad Shah, he wrote his autobiography (*Sawanih i ahwal i Ashob*, I.O. 3940) and *masnawis*, one called *Falak Ashob* and another on Ahmad Shah Abdali's Indian campaigns. In addition to these, he also had a Persian *Diwan*. Sayyid Ghulam Ali wrote two historical works: the *Imad us Sadat* (Aligarh Muslim University, Subhan Allah Collection MS. No. 955) which is a history of Awadh, and the *Nigarnama i Hind* (B.L. Or. 1896) for presentation to Colonel John Baillie, the British Resident at Lucknow. Ali Ibrahim Khan wrote a history of Marathas and presented it to Cornwallis (*Tarikhi i Ibrahim Khani*, I.O. 3957).

secure his livelihood he assumed the title of *munshi*, and through the grace of God and the kindness of his masters he, at last obtained sufficient provision for himself and for his children and prayed God for the welfare of the English who had supported him." In 1782, he accompanied his employer General Giles Stibbert, for whom he wrote a general history of India.⁹⁶ Another Shaikhzada of Awadh, Ghulam Husain Zaidpuri (d. 1817), left his home-town Zaidpur for Bengal, where he found employment with the British; subsequently, he served as *Dak- munshi* at New Maldah, devoting his spare time in teaching and writing. He compiled a history of Bengal entitled *Riyaz us Salatin*.⁹⁷ What these amateur historians primarily sought to satisfy was their masters' curiosity about indigenous cultural life and local traditions; hence, they mostly compiled the local history of places where British officials were serving.⁹⁸ Khairuddin Allahabadi (1751-1827), left his home-town following the resumption of his land-grant by Shujaudaula, where he was teaching in a local *madrсах*. He sought employment with officials of the Company and subsequently accompanied Captain W. Bruce in the siege of Gwalior fort in 1780. He also assisted James Anderson, the British Resident at Sindhia's camp, in negotiation with the Marathas. He then returned to Allahabad and engaged in teaching for sometime. Finally from 1794-5, he served two more British officials at Jaunpur. It was at Jaunpur, an ancient seat of learning, that he wrote on theology, logic, philosophy,

⁹⁶ Ghulam Basit Amethawi, *Tarikhi i mamalik i Hind*, B.L. Or. 27250. For the passage quoted, cf. ff. 9a. Such a trend has already started in Bengal; Munshi Salim Allah, *Mir Munshi* in the court of Murshidabad, accompanied Henry Vansittart, Governor of Bengal (1760-4), to Calcutta, as the latter's *munshi* and wrote a history of Bengal (*Twarikh i Bangala*, I.O.L. Ethe 478).

⁹⁷ For a small biographical sketch of the author, cf. "Ghulam Husain Salim Zaidpur", by Bazmee Ansari, in *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

⁹⁸ Ghulam Hasan Zaidi, for example, a Wasiti Sayyid who served as *Munshi* to Charles Chisholme at Jaunpur, wrote an account of Jaunpur and Calcutta for him.

rhetoric, grammar and, of course, local histories.⁹⁹ A number of these individuals served on diplomatic missions in the neighbouring countries. Mehdi Ali Khurasani was deputed for Iran and Iraq as agent (*gumashtagin*) for the Company.¹⁰⁰ Some members of the displaced service elite, the traditional intelligentsia in search of employment, travelled as wide as Russia, China, Afghanistan and Tibet, collecting information about life conditions and routes to these countries; someone called Abd al Qadir Jaisi was sent to Nepal with the task to submit reports of internal situation to the British authorities.¹⁰¹ Tafazzul Husain (d. 1800), the scholar-administrator of Awadh, was employed for extensive negotiations with the Maratha chiefs. He accompanied Colonel Palmer in his diplomatic mission with local chiefs and drafted diplomatic letters for Maratha Chiefs on behalf of the British.¹⁰² Abdul Latif was commissioned by Palmer, who was Resident at Puna, to negotiate on his behalf with Peshwa Baji Rao.¹⁰³ A few could secure positions as *munshis* in the residencies where they mainly drafted diplomatic letters in Persian, addressed to another regional power elite.¹⁰⁴ A few were

⁹⁹ Khairuddin's works include *Ibratnama*, I.O.L. 3908-10, and *Tuhfa i taza* or *Balwantnama*, I.O. 3894, written at the request of Abraham Wellend, judge at Jaunpur, and a history of Jaunpur entitled *Jaunpurnama*, Bodl. Pers. MS. Ouseley Add 141. Also *Gwaliarnama*, I.O.L. 3947, written on the request of Dr. Bruce, a history of the city and its capture by Colonel Camac in 1780; also *Takzirat al Ulang*, biographies of scholars connected with the Janpurs, I.O.L. 4028; and *Alam i Ashob* (world of affliction), an account of Nadir Shah's invasion.

¹⁰⁰ For the career of mehdi Ali Khan and his relations with the british officials, cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 252b-254a. For the diplomatic srvice rendered to the Company, cf. Rose Greaves, "Iranian Relations with great Britain and British India, 1798-1921", in Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, Charles Melville (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7 (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 357-7.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Abd-al Qadir Khan Jaisi, *Tarikh i Imad al mulk*, I.O.L. 4000, and *Hashmat i Kashmir*, B.L. Or. 2699.

¹⁰² For Taffazul Husain's role as intermediary with Marathas, cf. *The Asiatic Annual Register for 1803*.

¹⁰³ *Tuhfat al alam*, pp. 4-5 (supplement).

¹⁰⁴ Azizullah Shahjahanbadi (a man from Delhi), served in the office of the Resident at Hyderabad, where he was mainly engaged in correspondence work (*shaghal i insha*). After the death of Azizullah, his brother Mir Amanullah occupied a similar position in the Residency. Both were poets of Hindustani (*shaihri hindi*). Cf. *Mirat al ahwal* ff. 81a; also Sprenger, *A Catalogue*. For the role of Indians in Residences and the British view of their employees, cf. Michael H. Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India: Resident and Residency System 1764-1858* (Delhi, 1991).

able to find teaching positions in the British sponsored institutions, such as the short-lived Calcutta Madrasah founded by Hastings. Maulawi Madan served in Calcutta Madrasah, but he was set aside when the administration of college got disturbed, yet another person Maulawi Muhiuddin from the semi-urban areas (*Qasbat*) of Bengal was serving there.¹⁰⁵ There were few lucky ones who could enter into highly specialised branch of administration of the East India Company such as the judiciary. Maulana Najm al Din Ali Khan (1744-1814) was appointed *Qazi ul Quzzat*. But the latter instead of enjoying power of a judge and actual dispensation of justice was more a juris-consult. He prepared law-manuals and digest providing explanations and existing interpretations of various aspects of Muslim Law. Najm al Din was more an expositor and advisor on Muslim law to facilitate the decision making process by the British authorities.¹⁰⁶ It was not only law manuals, he also compiled small digests on subject like difference between a lunar and solar calendar.¹⁰⁷ It was in these circumstances that Murtaza exclaimed: "At present under the British government (*sarkar i saheban i angrez*) the people of noble birth (*marduman i nujab*) were not promoted above the rank of *munshi*. It was only, after having acquired some awareness of the high quality learning and piety of the latter, that the Englishmen treated them as friends and companions."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 206a.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 206, and *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 106b, where Najm al Din is reported to have sought clarification on various aspects of the Muslim jurisprudence.

¹⁰⁷ Najam al Din Ali Khan Saqib Kakorawi belonged to the family of *Qazis* of Kakori and the profession almost became hereditary in the family. Cf. *Crisis of the Empire*, pp. 113-4. For a detailed history of the family, cf. Muhammad Hasan Abbasi, *Abbasiyan i Kakori* (Lucknow, 1945). Various treatises of Najm al Din Ali Khan survived in the Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh: on laws he wrote the *Tarjuma i Fatawa i Alamgiri* (Qutubuddin collection 38/16), the *Kitab al Hudud wa Qisas* (Subhan Allah collection 297/8/1), the *Taziat i Sharai wa masail i abwab i Fiqh* (Sulaiman Collection 86/21/1), the *Risala i Taziyat* (Sulaiman Collection 77/13/2); cf. also his treatise on payment of *zakat* in Indian currency, *Risala dar bayan i nisab zakat wa andazah ba hisab i Rupiyya Hindustan* (Subhan Allah coll. 297/813); he also wrote treatises on the solar and lunar calendars, the *Risala dar tahqiq i sana Shamsiya wa qamariaya* (Univ. Coll. 230), and on algebra, the *Risala dar ilm i jabr o muqabala* (Subhan Allah Collection).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Hadiqat al alam*, p. 4.

A large number of the displaced elite began to move towards Calcutta, the administrative capital of the East India Company. Calcutta seemed to have become almost a refuge for the displaced gentry, where people like Abu Talib spent almost a decade expecting a job, while others lived there as representatives (*wakil*) of regional courts. Both Abd al Latif and Tafazzul Husain served as *wakil* of the court of Hyderabad and Awadh respectively. It was at Calcutta that these elite were exposed to wider-world and cultivated extensive scholarly and diplomatic relations with eminent British officials. Calcutta was to remain the centre of attraction for the displaced elite, who had lost their positions in the regional courts and secured temporary jobs with the British officials. The number of such members of service families residing at Calcutta seemed to have become so enormous that Zulfiqar Ali Mast thought it worthwhile to devote a special *diwan* for those residing in Calcutta and Benares. Probably this was the best tribute on the situation.¹⁰⁹ The examples of displaced service elite in search of employment where they could use their skills, are so numerous that it is difficult to group them under any single category, such as "intermediaries" or "collaborators"; but, of course, all of them were "resource persons". For the British it was an alien and unfamiliar world, and, naturally, it was the members of the erstwhile bureaucracy who they relied upon to smooth their tasks. Though it would be an exaggeration to assert that the period witnessed the displacement of the ruling elite from positions of power and authority to political deprivation and economic insecurity, the unemployment seems to have been fairly wide spread among the service elites. Researches on pre-modern colonial societies have duly emphasised the indigenous component in European expansion: Indian society

¹⁰⁹ For the details of this *diwan*, cf. Sprenger, *Catalogue*, p. 165-72. For the *diwan*'s manuscript, cf. W. Petsch, *Verzeichniss der persischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1888), No. 665. This *diwan* includes the names of a number of scholars and poets, including Abu Talib, Mir Husain, Ghulam Husain and Maulvi Najm al Din. The *diwan* is entitled *Riyaz ul wifaq* ("Gardens of unanimity") and it was compiled in 1815, when the author was serving as the *darogha* of Benares. Cf. *Mirat al Ahwal*, f. 182a, reference to Zulfiqar Ali.

was not a static backdrop to the British exploits. There were indigenous social groups within the society who cooperated and collaborated with the imperial designs of the Company.¹¹⁰ However, in the context of the late eighteenth century, more researches are required to analyze the nature of collaboration between the British and the erstwhile bureaucratic class. A close examination of the roles played by the members of erstwhile service class goes far beyond a simplistic picture of unrelieved Mughal decline and unchecked British expansion. It is far beyond the purview of present enquiry to provide a comprehensive picture of political world of bureaucratic class and their relations with British and subsequent intermediation among them. It only suggest that such a process of "collaboration" and "intermediation" did occur.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*.

1 INDIAN PERCEPTION OF EUROPE'S POLITICAL EXPANSION

The question arises as to what kind of images about Europe existed in the minds of the Indian Muslim élite before the direct contact instigated by the British rule. The Mughal Empire had diplomatic relations with the Safwids of Persia, the Ottoman Sultans and the Uzbeks of Central Asia. Men of letters migrating from these countries had the first-hand information about the Ottoman empire's relations with Eastern European countries. However, the knowledge these people had was usually brief and related to main historical events, such as the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (1453), and the siege of Vienna (1529).¹

1.1 Early Images of Europe

A serious attempt was made to acquire knowledge about Western Europe, its societies and cultures, for the first time under the emperor Akbar. He commissioned Abdus Sattar to learn the European languages in order to translate the European works into Persian. Abdus Sattar was a pupil of Jerome Xavier (1549-1617) who taught him Portuguese and probably Latin. Within six months of receiving the assignment, both embarked upon translation work. The works which were translated are primarily of religious nature, mainly concerned with the Christian faith. In particular, there are works about the life

¹ Cf. Amin Ahmad Razi, *Haft Iqlim*, Elliott 158, ff. 603.

of Christ,² the lives of the Apostles,³ and the divinity of Jesus Christ.⁴ All these works are based on the Holy Scriptures (*Injil muqaddas*).⁵ However, parallel to Christianity, the translators rediscovered and presented the West's philosophical past. In 1603 Abdus Sattar compiled the *Samarat al falasafah*, again with the help of Jerome Xavier, a work also known as *Ahwal i farangistan*. This work is concerned with the history of the Roman empire (*Salatin i Rum*), with special reference to its rulers and wise-men (sayings of Greek and Roman philosophers are included), including the life of Christ. The work was based on the New Testament (*Injil*) and the *Kitab Sant asnin*. In the preliminary introduction to his *Samarat al falasafa*, Abdus Sattar postulated that two major factors had maintained an iron curtain between the lands of Europe and India: first, the immense geographical distance, and, second, the linguistic barrier. There was no expert who knew the two languages (*mutarajjim*: literally, "the translator").⁶

² The first work related to the life of Christ is entitled *Mirat al Quds* or *Dastan i Masih* (Bodl. Fraser MS. 256).

³ *Dastan i Ahwal i Hawariyyun* deals with the lives of the Apostles; it was compiled during 1605-7 (Bodl. Pers. MS. Laud Or. 173).

⁴ *Aina i Haqnuma* and its abridgement *Muntakab aina i Haqnuma* were written in 1609; cf. B.L. Persian MSS. Hart 5478 and Add. 23, 584, respectively.

⁵ Cf. the *Mirat al quds*, f. 199b, where it is clearly stated that the work was based upon the Holy Scriptures (*Injil*) and other books about the prophets (*digar kutub i paighambaran*); this work was finished at Agra in 1602.

⁶ There exist a number of manuscript copies of the *Samarat al falasafa* in the libraries of Europe and the Indian subcontinent; cf. B.L. Pers. MSS. Or. 5893. Here the references are made to the Aligarh collection: *Samarat al falasafa*, Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh, University Coll. *zamima* 28, ff. 1-2. Abdus Sattar remarked in the introduction to the *Samarat al falasafa* that he was commissioned by the emperor Akbar "to learn the European languages (*zaban i firangi*) in order to discover the secrets of those people (*millat*) and to know about their kings, as well as in order to write an account of the Greek philosophers and Roman sages (*hukma i Yunan zamin wa Latin*) into Persian. Abdus Sattar mentions that he learnt the European languages from Jerome Xavier (*Padri Zeronemo Shivar*), a prominent European scholar (*danayan i farang*) at the time Abdus Sattar was living at Akbar's court. He acquired the necessary skills to read and translate these works, but could not converse in any European language. Thus, he used the following method of translation: Father Jerome Xavier translated orally and dictated the meaning to Abdus, who then wrote it down into Persian; cf. the preface to the *Samarat al Falasafa*, ff. 2-3a.

Perhaps, it is no incident that the Mughal élite began to evince some interest in things from Europe during the seventeenth century, as some knowledge would have disseminated through Persian translations. Danishmand Khan, a Mughal bureaucrat of Shahjahan and Aurengzeb learnt astronomy, geography and anatomy from Francois Bernier, who was under his employment. Bernier introduced the Mughal noble to the modern European scientific discoveries, such as Harvey's theory of blood circulation.⁷ Also according to Bernier, Aurengzeb said to his teacher Mulla Jiwan Amethawi (d. 1717) (author of *Nurul Anwar*, a work on Muslim jurisprudence) that his youth had been wasted in learning outmoded philosophy instead of a subject like "the rise and fall of a state, more suitable for a prince's education". Bernier reports that the emperor criticized the Muslim system's of education pedantry and excessive preoccupation with linguistic refinement at the expense of more fruitful subjects. Moreover, the emperor is reported to have said, the system had a static rather than a dynamic character, for it failed to take into account any developments of the outside world, such as the rise of the nation-state in Europe at the time.⁸

During the same period, there are instances of Mughal elites who sought a more direct recourse to the sources of European knowledge. Muhammad Qubad Beg, a *Diwan* in Deccan, also under Aurengzeb, visited Europe (*Farangistan*) towards the closing of the seventeenth century or the early eighteenth century. Apart from being well-versed in Islamic education (*ulum i Islamia*), Qubad Beg acquired some knowledge of Vedantic

⁷ Danishmand Khan is reported to have been familiar with the work of such French philosophers as Pierre Gassendi, Descartes and William Harvey (theory of blood circulation); these were translated for him by Bernier. There is no direct evidence of Danishmand's interest in European discoveries from contemporary Persian sources, though a late eighteenth century biographer, Shahnawaz Khan, wrote that in the later years of his life Danishmand was interested in the European sciences (*ilm ahl i farnag*). For a biographical notice of Danishmand Khan, cf. Mulla Shifai Yezdi, entitled Danishmand Khan Shahnawaz Khan Samsam ud Daulah, *Maasir ul Umara*, 3 Vols. ed. Maulvi Abdur Rahim and Ashraf Ali, Bib. Ind. Calcutta 1888-95 (vol. II, pp. 30-32).

⁸ Cf. F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire A.D 1656-1668*, Eng. tr. A. Constable (1891); second ed. revised by V.A. Smith (London, 1914), pp. 155-61.

philosophy (*funun i bed hindi*). In Europe, he acquired Greek and Latin sciences (*Ulum letani wa Yunani*). Evidently, he would have learnt about the Latin and Greek sciences during his sojourn in Europe, and presumably he spent sufficiently long periods in some European countries.⁹ (Some knowledge of European technical advances, however, existed as early as the late sixteenth century.¹⁰)

At the same time, another image of Europe developed, a negative one. It concerned the Portuguese, who were the first Europeans to reach India towards the end of the fifteenth century, with the result that in the sixteenth century, all the sea-routes connecting India with the rest of the world were dominated by them.¹¹ The earliest known reaction to the Portuguese domination of the Southern seas came from Shaikh Zain al Din Ma'abari of Malabar (d. 1583), who would have been an eye-witness to the activities of the Portuguese in the coastal regions, where the effect of their arrival and subsequent expansion would have been more closely felt by the local population. Shaikh Zain al Din, writing in 1580, perceived them as a form of divine-punishment for the Muslims. He observed:

I would have it understood that the Muslims of Malabar formerly lived in great comfort and tranquillity, in consequences of their abstaining from exercising any oppression towards the country; as well as from the consideration which they invariably evinced for the ancient usages of population of Malabar and from unrestricted intercourse of kindness which they preserved for them. Subsequently, however, they were guilty of ingratitude towards God, forgetting the blessings that they enjoyed going astray and becoming divided into schism. On this account, therefore, did God bring down upon them the people of Europe, the Farank, Christians by

⁹ Cf. *Khulasat al Afkar*, ff. 347a. Abu Talib provided the above information as part of the biography of a contemporary scholar-administrator, Mirza Muhammad Bakhsh Ashob. Qubad Beg was the latter's maternal grandfather and served as Diwan in Deccan towards the end of Aurengzeb's reign. The family originally came from Badakhshan in Central Asia (the Turks of the Barlas tribe), settled in Hindustan, an abode of peace (*Darul aman*) during the reign of Akbar. For details of Qubad's work, cf. the chapter "Scientific Perceptions" in this essay.

¹⁰ Cf. A.J. Qaisar, *The Indian Response to European Technology and Culture, A.D. 1498-1707* (Delhi, 1982).

¹¹ For an excellent treatment of this aspect, cf. M.N. Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century* (University of California Press, 1976), esp. ch. 1.

religion, who began to oppress the Muslims and to bring ruin amongst them; being guilty of actions the most diabolical and infamous such indeed as are beyond the power of description.¹²

The author of the *Tuhfat al Mujahidin* noted that, although their primary motive was trade in ginger and pepper, the Portugese engaged in the forcible conversion of the local population to Christianity and other such destructive activities, leading to the misery and destitution of the local people. They destroyed the main mosque (*Jam Masjid*) of Calicut in 1509, and demolished another one in Cochin in order to erect a church in its place.¹³ The destructive activities of the Portuguese brought them into direct confrontation with the Zamorin of Calicut, ruler of Gujarat and the Ottomans. But the combined forces of these powers could not prevent Portuguese domination.¹⁴ When every effort by these powers to check the Portuguese failed, their high-handedness on the local populace increased. In the first decade of the seventeenth century Ferishta wrote that the Portuguese became so powerful on sea routes that, during the reign of Emperor Akbar, they began to prevent and plunder ships going to the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina as well as for trading purposes. Private operators like Abdur Rahim Khan paid tax to obtain passes and ensure the safety and security of the passengers aboard their ships.

¹² Zain al Din ibn Abd al Aziz Ma'abari was a grandson of Zayn al Din Abu Yahya (d. 1521) who founded a school and a hospice at Ponani in Deccan, famous for attracting scholars from far and wide, including the East Indies. The grandfather's works were well-known in Egypt (where they were published in the nineteenth century), and one of these, *Hidaya al azkiyya*, received commentaries both in Hijaz and Java. His commentaries on Shafite law also gained recognition in Egypt and the East Indies; cf. Zubaid Ahmad M.G., *The Contribution of Indo-Pakistan to Arabic Literature from ancient times to 1857* (reprint, Lahore, 1968), p. 185. The grandson, in turn, became renowned as the author of *Tuhfat al-mujahidin*, a historical account of the struggle against the Portuguese (1498-1581), dedicated to Ali Adil Shah I (1558-80). It begins with an account of Malabar, a history of the advent of Muslims in Malabar, continues with an account of the spread of Islam in the region and the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498; then it describes their subsequent clashes with the Samuri chiefs and their alliances and counter-alliances with the potentates of Deccan up to 1581. Zain al Din's *Tuhfat al Mujahidin* is the first known work which presents a picture of reaction to the Portuguese arrival in the Indian Ocean. There exists an Arabic edition as well as English translations of this work. Cf. Shaikh Zain al Din Ma'abari, *Tuhfat al-mujahidin*, ed. Hakim Sayyid Shams ullah Qadri, Historical Society of Hyderabad, Historical Text Series No.3 (N.D.). For a literal English translation of the Arabic text, cf. J. Rowlandson, *Tuhfat al-mujahideen fi bad ahwal al Burtukaliyyun*, ed. and tr. (London, 1833), esp., for the above passage, pp.103-7. Hereafter the references will be made to the English translation.

¹³ Cf. *Tuhfat al-mujahidin*, pp. 82-3, 93.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-7.

Akbar laid an embargo on all his ships sailing either to Red Sea or to the Persian Gulf, because to enter into an agreement (*qaul*) with Portuguese (*farangiyan*) was regarded below dignity, on the other hand, to let the ships sail without protection was equally detrimental to the interest of trade, and the loss of lives. It was in these highly-strained circumstances that Jahangir allowed another European nation the English (*Firangyan i Inglisi*) who were at constant war and conflict with the Portuguese, to build their factories in Surat. The English were a different nation with their own king, and their basic tenet of faith was that they consider Jesus a human being and a Prophet, and they believed in oneness of the Supreme God. At present, the English were without any power or authority, therefore, they were showing friendliness and cordiality with the Muslims, on the other hand, they had great animosity with the Portuguese.¹⁵

Fear, resentment and contempt continued to be echoed about the Portuguese presence in India. They were perceived as an undesirable element, a menace who consistently injured the religious sentiments of the native population.

Probably as a result of this disappointing experience, the knowledge of Europe does not seem to have advanced significantly until the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Writing in 1730, Muhammad Shafi Warid (b. 1676-7), a writer and historian of Muhammad Shah's reign, displays some awareness of the presence of Europeans in the Indian Ocean, their settlements in the coastal regions of India, China, Japan (*Cheen wa Khata*), Java, Sumatra and Indonesia, and Ceylon. He specifically mentions the Portuguese living in the coastal regions of India, but he imagines that they also considered themselves as a subject-population (*rayyat*) of the emperor of India, especially as any active contact with their own country had long ceased.¹⁶ The author could imagine a legendary city in Portugal which was full of all kinds of strange and wondrous things (*ajajib al gharaib*), but it has one most strange cave, wherein lived *genii*. In this cave people go in groups of six and seven to learn the art of magic (*fan*

¹⁵ Cf. Muhammad Hindushah Astarbadi Ferishta, *Tairkh i Ferishta*, 2 Vols. (Lucknow, 1865), pp. 368-73. Ferishta's account was written in 1606-10, almost three decades after *Tuhfat al mujahidin*, of which he produced a summarized narrative. But he also updated it, by taking into account the subsequent European settlements in the Indian Ocean. The same part of the *Tairkh i Ferishta*, which forms the ninth chapter of the work and relates to the Portuguese arrival in the Indian Ocean, was translated into English by Jonathan Scott and published by Shrewsbury in 1794. Anderson also published the same narrative in *The Asiatic Miscellany*, Vol.II (Calcutta). For an English translation of the entire text, cf. J. Briggs, *History of the Rise of Mahomme. dan Power in India in the year 1612*, 4 Vols. (1829, reprinted 1981), Vol. 4, pp. 305-11.

¹⁶ For an account of the European expansion in the above countries, cf. Muhammad Shafi Warid, *Ajaib al Buldan*, Bodl. Pers. MS. Ouseley 213, ff. 3a-22a; for the above comment on the Portuguese, f. 24.

i sahar wa jadu), and they perform all kind of miracles till the time it is finally closed and the Portuguese are defeated from the king of Maghrib.¹⁷ In spite such imaginary notions, the author had some idea of the Portuguese expertise in ship-building and navigation. But, for Shafi, the Portuguese technical superiority had not changed the balance of power in their favour. As he explains, the Portuguese possessed high expertise in the art of gun-manufacturing and musket (*ilm i tufang andazi*), and they were quite unmatched at sea, although no encounter to test their skill occurred for a long time. But the Portuguese were extremely vulnerable in any engagement on land. One hundred Muslims called *Malabar*is were considered equal to ten thousand Portuguese on land.¹⁸

Concerning the rest of the Europe, Shafi displays complete lack of awareness of any modern developments. As he mentions, almost the whole of Europe (*farangistan*) was governed by sixteen magnificent kings: nine out of these were known as *qaral*, while seven were called *farangi*.¹⁹ All of these rulers, according to Shafi, owed allegiance to the Pope (*Papa*), who exercised authority over them in his capacity as the representative of Jesus Christ (*Naib i Hazrat Isa*). These kings were under his complete control. He had the right to appoint them as well as to dismiss them. Thus, almost after centuries of Reformation, Shafi thought that the religious authority of the Pope was also a source of his political power. The kings of Europe were under such complete subordination (*ghulam zar kharid*) from the Papal authority, that, even if the Pope wished to install a common man (*awamunnas*) on the throne, the kings would not raise their voice nor think of revolt (*inharaf*); in fact any disobedience to the Pope was simply

¹⁷ For the legendary cave, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 25.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* f. 25b.

¹⁹ Cf. *Ajaib al buldan*, ff. 28b.

out of the question. Shafi also had some knowledge of the Roman Emperor, whose seat of residence was close to the Pope. In pomp and glory, the Holy Roman Emperor was regarded equal to the Chinese emperor (*badshah i Chin wa khata*). All the rulers of Europe, with the exception of the Hungarian one, paid tribute (*baj wa kharaj*) to the Holy Roman emperor. (Some memories of the Ottoman-Europe relations were present here.) The Portuguese were known as fisher-men among other peoples of Europe because of their engagement with the fish trade. The entire people of Europe were called Nestorian (*Nasturi*), explained Shafi: Nestorian and *Nasara* were the same. The precious metal of silver that circulated throughout the world was supposed to come from Italy. Muslims however, wrote the author, did not go to Italy, but the precious metals of gold and silver reached them through the merchants. Besides, the author recites some stories of how the Portuguese entertained the rulers of the Deccan kingdoms with various exotic items, in order to strengthen their positions. At present, regrets the author, all of these islands were under their control, which formed part of India. Besides, the author recalls that other part of Europe, Vienna and Hungary, once were conquered by the Ottomans. Hungary was unique, in the sense that it was there that the muskets and the gun (*tufang*) were invented in 880 A.H. (1475-6 A.D.).

Shafi Warid was a member of the intelligentsia and an important contemporary chronicler. His work *Mirat i Waridat*²⁰ deals with the political and socio-economic conditions of India during the first three decades of the eighteenth century, but his knowledge of Europe was fairly insubstantial. Thus, knowledge about Europe does not seem to have advanced any significantly during those early years.

Murtaza Husain, writing in the 1780's, heavily relies on medieval sources: he reproduces information about the Ottoman Sultan's relations with the Christian Europe

²⁰ Or *Tarikh i Ghaghtai*, Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh MS. and I.O.L. 3881.

and a detailed list of the early Christian rulers of Constantinople from the *Haft Iqlim* of Amin Ahmad Razi. His description of Constantinople, the capital of the Ottomans, its magnificent monuments, the mosques and their architecture, all is based on the *Haft Iqlim*.²¹ Similarly, Murtaza's perception of Russia did not change significantly and he profusely quotes from the *Haft Iqlim* as well as referring to the medieval classic *Sikandarnama* as his source of information on the Russian society. Yet, Murtaza cautiously includes Jonathan Scott's criticism of Muslim historiography about Russia being inaccurate and outdated.²² More significantly, Murtaza informed Scott that there existed "wonders of creation" (*ajajib al gharaib al makhluqat*) literature in India, such as the *Haft Tilism* and "The seven Magic of the city of Babul" (about Europe in India). To entertain his employer's mind Murtaza himself produced accounts of such imaginary perceptions and mysterious characters of Europe as existed in India.²³ But he added that these tales mixed with the "wonders of creation" (*Ajaib al makhluqat*) were totally unacceptable for any sensible and enquiring mind.²⁴

There was one country on the continent of Europe which was better known to Muslim writers: al-Andalus. The Muslim conquest of Spain, its conquest by the Umayyad commander Tariq bin Ziyad, the subsequent ruling dynasties (the Almohad and the Almoravid), the rise of independent kingdoms (*muluk ut tawaif*), the party kings or "kings of factions", all formed part of the Muslim historical consciousness.²⁵ Similarly Salah al Din's (1169-93) success against the Christian states in Palestine and

²¹ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 482-7.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 480-6, for Russia.

²³ *Ibid*, pp. 489-94 and 694-6, for a detailed narrative of the imaginary and the legendary cities of Europe located in the sixth and seventh climate.

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 500.

²⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 493-500. The *Samarat al falasafa* also contained a history of Spain (*Iqlim i andalus*) based on "authentic Islamic sources".

on the Syrian coast at the end of the eleventh century continued to be recorded as a significant historical event in Muslim-Christian relations. Murtaza regretted that similar attempts by the Mamluks of Egypt to expel the Portuguese (*Farangiyan*) from Malabar could not succeed.²⁶

To conclude, it was primarily the Portuguese who were known, on account of their forceful presence. Some memories of Ottoman relations with the Eastern Europe kept lingering. A new relationship was to be established in the second half of the eighteenth century when it was the Western and not the Eastern Europe that became the subject of discourse. How this balance changed in favour of Western Europe will be studied in the following section.

1.2 The Eighteenth Century Perspective

To understand how and why a part of the world which was so little known until the early decades of the eighteenth century became the subject of discourse of the Indian Muslim educated élite, requires a detailed examination of the political background during those years.

As the eighteenth century progressed, colonial rivalries among European nations became more intense and the pattern of European colonialism became more clear. All the three declining great Muslim empires (the Mughals, the Ottomans and the Persians), were threatened by the burgeoning Western hegemony. The phase when the industrialized countries of Europe passed from the simple extraction of raw material from non-industrial countries, as they had been doing for over a century in South America, to using the same countries as pawns of a strict power game, had begun.

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 200-2. Murtaza discussed these historical relations of Christians and Muslims with Jonathan Scott, who supplemented the latter's knowledge of Islamic historical literature with a European's perceptions of these land-marks.

Furthermore, the colonies were to become increasingly the purchasers of the finished products made from their own raw material. Less powerful countries would eventually be wrapped up in images of themselves created by Western occupants. In this competition for the colonies, it was not India alone which was subjected to the British domination. Other countries too were undergoing a similar experience. Moreover, it was not only Britain which was exercising political and commercial influence on India. Other countries of Europe also had imperial designs in other Islamo-Asian countries. France occupied Egypt in 1800, followed by the Anglo-French rivalries in that region, and Russia had aggressive designs against the Ottomans and Persians. Other European nations, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French, contested Britain for the trade monopoly of India and eventually for political supremacy.

The growing European expansionism in the Islamic world became a concern of its intelligentsia. Writing in 1785, Itisam expressed concern over the Russian aggression against the Ottoman empire and regretted the loss of an Ottoman province, Crimea, to the Russians. He interpreted this as an expression of Russia's growing military strength. But he saw the Ottomans' defeat in conventional terms: they were defeated because of their ministers' (*wazir*) treachery. At last the treaty was concluded and the Russians could not wholly threaten the empire.²⁷

Other events which were taking place on the continent of Europe were beginning, directly as well as indirectly, to influence the political life of the Eastern world. Such a remote happening like the American War of Independence had indirect repercussions on the contemporary Indian political scenario because it renewed on-going hostilities among the European countries, the British, the French and the Dutch. The British

²⁷ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 102b-103b. Probably Itisam was alluding to the treaty of Kuchuk Kaynarji (1774). Similarly, Murtaza was informed by Jonathan Scott about the Russian empress' encroachments on Turkey; cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 487.

Governor-General Warren Hastings received orders from England to declare war against the Dutch and to seize their factories and forts. Consequently, the British attacked the Dutch and destroyed their factories at Patna and Hugli.²⁸ Another revolution of Europe, the French Revolution (1789) had more direct repercussions on the non-Western world. Abu Talib provides a succinct description of the French Revolution,²⁹ but he also analyzes the post-Revolutionary conditions on the continent. In fact, he concerns himself more with the Napoleonic wars that accompanied the Revolution than the Revolution itself. He describes various alliance and counter-alliance among the European nations³⁰ and, more significantly perhaps, visualises the consequences of the French Revolution in global rather than purely European terms. Abu Talib offers a subtle political analysis of the international context of the wars and notes that as a close neighbour of France, and perhaps her greatest rival, Britain could not isolate herself from the influence of the revolution. Even other major European powers like Spain, Germany and Holland, joined

²⁸ Cf. *Siyar*, pp. 959-61.

²⁹ For the details of the actual course of the Revolution, cf. *Masir i talibi*, ff. 161a-162b. Abu Talib described the French Revolution as a revolt (*balwa*) of the peoples of France (*ahl i franse, riaya*) against the tyranny of the king and the lethargic nobility (*umara i ghafilin*). The people of France sought to overthrow the existing regime in favour of a form of government similar to that of their neighbour, Britain, where the royal power had already been much reduced. But after their initial success, the rebels demanded the establishment of a republic (*Republik*). All the land assignments (*jagir*) and salaries of the princes and nobility were confiscated by the rebels except the payment to the regular bureaucracy, the latter being appointed and dismissed with the choice of the common populace (*riaya*). One of the results of the Revolution (*inqalab*), according to Abu Talib, was that the power fell into the hands of the people. Those organised the republic and its laws (*qanun*), whereas those who enjoyed these privileges in the past were now powerless. Abu Talib did not explicitly sympathised with either side, but his appreciation of the British political system when superimposed on the desire of the people of France shows his inclination towards the revolutionaries. His use of political symbols like *Inqalab* or *Ahl i Balwa* and the descriptions he offers of the king and the nobles, the outcome republic (*Ahl i Shura*), as well as his literal descriptions of post-revolutionary France, leading to the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte, the Anglo-French rivalry for colonial supremacy and the trade monopolies in the Eastern world, all suggest a political interpretation of the event. But the ideological component of the Revolution, its slogan of "fraternity, equality and liberty" could not find any equivalent in the dictionary of the author.

³⁰ For an account of the naval wars between France and England and the wars of coalition, cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 162b-166a.

the wars.³¹ He presents the British conservative opinion manifested in the concern to contain the effects of the French contagion, and emphasises that Britain, its ministers and Parliament, all were concerned how to face a nation in arms. France could not directly invade Britain, but exercised indirect influence by sending force to Ireland, in order to help the Irish who were often in revolt against the king of Britain.³² When the Prussians and the Russians found other powers deeply engaged in war against France, they invaded the kingdom of Poland, a vast country governed by nobles, and partitioned it among themselves. Abu Talib describes the partition of Poland as an act of aggrandizement, the first of its kind, by the powerful against the weak, contrary to the European code of conduct with regard to the internal matters of Europe.³³ Poland's division was followed by the partition of Hanover, original homeland of the British monarchs, between Prussia, Russia and Germany.³⁴ The overall consequences of the conflict were in favour of Britain, which emerged to a position of unrivalled economic and political supremacy by eliminating its potential rivals in India, Asia and Africa. The ultimate terms of the treaty of 1803 were in favour of the British commercial and strategic interests, and the balance of power had clearly tilted in favour of Britain. Thus, Britain emerged as a predominant force in Europe.³⁵

Soon, Anglo-French rivalry engulfed countries outside Europe, such as Syria and Egypt. In 1798, French forces under Napoleon invaded Egypt, then a province of the Ottoman empire. Latif opined that the root cause behind France's designs to occupy

³¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 162b-169a.

³² Abu Talib and Latif both attempted a biography of Napoleon, who was appreciated for his strategic acumen and ability to lead. Cf. *ibid.*, ff. 162b, and *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 126b.

³³ Cf. *Masir i talibi*, ff. 162b-163a.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, ff.163.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 161b-169a.

Egypt, one of the flourishing countries of Islam, the mother of the countries (*ummul bilad i Misr*), was Egypt's prosperity. Egypt, of course, had also commercial significance. Alexandria the port-city was situated on the mouth of the Mediterranean Sea which connected Europe and Africa, and Suez connected to the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. It was thus natural that the Europeans were planning to cut a canal to link the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean and facilitate communication with India. The French would enter India through that proposed short route and would fight against the British, and thus they would bring India under their possession. Alexandria had thus become a critical station on the route to India. What had dissuaded Europeans so far from embarking upon the project was the fear that if they cut-off a large chunk of land-mass between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea (*bahr i muhit*), probably the balance of water and land-mass would be lost, and if not the entire globe, the neighbouring countries of Africa Maghrib, Yemen, Jeddah and few cities of Sudan would submerge into water.³⁶ Abu Talib wrote that the Ottoman Sultan sought help from the British to eliminate the French from Egypt. The British sided with the Ottomans on the pretext that geographically:

Turkey was also a European country, and as such, there existed traditional ties with the Ottomans to assist the latter in times of distress. At the same time safety and security of India was a matter of grave importance to us. In turn, the French counter-argued that entire India (Hindustan) was seeking help from us. If you would forego your claims for India we would also evacuate Egypt, and would leave it in the possessions of the Ottoman Sultan. In fact, we had forcibly occupied Egypt to free India from your control.³⁷

According to Latif, the British helped the Ottomans against the French because they wanted to secure their possessions in India against the perceived French threat. But the Egyptians themselves sided with the French forces and offered strong resistance against

³⁶ Cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, ff. 122. Latif could not see the actual construction of Suez canal and its consequences on global politics.

³⁷ Latif added that there was not a single power in India who had the capability to expel the British from India. Tipu, who opposed them, was an exception; and, anyway, the British had totally crushed his power. Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 121b-122a.

the combined forces of the British and the Ottomans. The reason for this attitude of the Egyptians was that the French had won their heart by leaving the nobility in possession of their estates, and helping the peasants in the agricultural work.³⁸

Abu Talib also understood that by occupying Egypt the French wanted to secure a direct passage to India. Eventually, they wanted to bring the Indian states of Deccan and Bengal under their authority. But the British were confident of their own naval strength and thought that Napoleon's plan was a difficult one to be materialized.³⁹ Napoleon, on the other hand was in negotiations with Tipu Sultan of Mysore, in order to win his cooperation against the British in India. The British, however, intercepted Tipu's secret negotiations with Napoleon.⁴⁰ Due to this perceived threat of a French invasion in India, the British entered into an alliance with the Ottomans and in 1801 their joint armies succeeded in exterminating the French from Egypt. This success was achieved mainly with British military power. Otherwise, this encounter exposed the weakness and lack of energy of the Ottomans to the European world, as the Ottoman armies still relied on old methods (*dasturat i qadim*).⁴¹

It was not only Britain and France that had acquired great military potential. There was another power which eventually encroached upon Iran and the Ottoman empire, Russia (*arusia*). Itisam and Latif note that Russia's rise to power was a recent

³⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 123; on Napoleon's Syrian campaign, ff. 126b-127a. Latif himself had a negative view of the French: he abhorred the murder of the king and the queen and other blood-lettings that followed the Revolution and regarded France as a country given to war and aggrandizement. It was not possible to conclude any lasting treaty with them, and they never kept the terms of treaty. Their promises were like figures drawn on water. His negative attitude stemmed from his perception of the role of the French in the court of Nizam, in Hyderabad. In his capacity as *wakil* of this state, he, along with his cousin Mir Alam, was invariably a party to the British cause in the Hyderabad court; cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, ff. 126-127.

³⁹ Cf. *Masir i talibi*, ff. 164a.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 166.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 168a.

phenomenon, for, as described in the *Sikandarnama*, it was basically a rough and backward country. It was one of its kings, Peter the Great, a contemporary of Nadir Shah, who went to England in order to receive training in the methods of modern warfare. Not only did Peter the Great travel widely in Europe and learnt the art of shipbuilding himself, he also sent his people to receive training in modern methods of warfare. Upon his return from his travels, he organised his country's political system, though still a monarchy like Iran, and named his capital Petersburg after his own name. His reforms turned Russia into one of the most powerful nations in Europe, one that other European nations clearly envied. Geographically, it was the largest European country, encompassing in its boundaries Asia as well as Europe. Yet, its population did not correspond to its size, although it included the land of the Tatars. Due to excessively cold weather prevailing in some parts, the population was very thinly dispersed. Latif exclaims "all powerful and strong Almighty God" (*Subhan al qadir wal muqtadir*) for Russia, which comprised one fourth of the inhabited globe and had a population of a four crores, while, as he sarcastically remarks, China, which was "only" one fifth of the inhabited quarters of the Globe, contained thirty five crores of population out of one hundred thousand estimated for the whole.⁴² Latif thought that if other European kings had not exercised countervailing force, the Russians would have seized entire dominions of the Ottomans, including Istanbul. (In fact, Russia's policy and attitude towards others was not without a religious bias.⁴³) Latif regretted that Iran's turmoil had left it without any active foreign policy. He described the Persian monarch Agha Muhammad Khan

⁴² Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 182a.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, ff. 183a. This was probably an allusion to Russian attempts to protect the Christian subjects of the Ottoman empire and to safeguard the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Qajar's unsuccessful expedition against Georgia,⁴⁴ and regretted that Iran was a mismanaged country. He saw the defeat of the Iranians in terms of a weakly administered state which could not face a powerful country because of its mismanagement and lack of discipline.⁴⁵ At the same time, Latif recalled the heroic tradition of the Iranians in facing other powers that threatened its sovereignty. He wrote that, "I heard from an intelligent Englishman that one who could rule Iran could rule the entire world."⁴⁶ Ahmad also took account of the increasing European diplomatic activity in Iran. The British diplomatic and strategic interest in Iran arose from the perceived French threat in India. Due to Iran's strategic significance, the French emissaries went to Iran in 1796. They wanted to secure a free passage of French troops to enter in India and to enlist military help from Iran. When the British came to know about this French manipulations in Iran, they saw this as a possible danger to the safety of their possessions in India and sent John Malcolm, an experienced man, with an embassy to Iran along with gifts. John Malcolm's mission resulted in an Anglo-Persian treaty, directed against possible French penetration of Iran and India. This probably Ahmad did not know, for otherwise we cannot explain why he felt relieved that Iran was beyond the European diplomacy.⁴⁷

At this juncture Latif recalls the Christian-Muslim relations in the classical Islamic past. He comments that the Christians had always been very curious to explore other people's internal matters and especially of the Muslims. Their attitude towards the Muslims had been the same from the rise of Islam. (Under the Caliph Umar bin Khattab

⁴⁴ For the details of the diplomatic exchanges between the Russian monarch and Muhammad Shah Qajar over the question of Georgia, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 183-184, and *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 119-120a.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 182a-85a; also *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 118b-120a.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 184b.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 117b.

an agreement (*ahadnama*) was signed between the Christians and the Muslims, one of the articles of which said that the Christians would not enquire into the internal matters of the Muslims, neither they would record anything about them.⁴⁸⁾

Abd al Latif concludes that, in fact, the political inter-relations of European nations were based on sound principles of state-craft and diplomacy. In Europe, no nation could transgress territorial sovereignty and integrity of other nations. If any of these nations violated existing code of conduct, other European countries were to side with the nation encroached upon. This was to prevent any single state emerging powerful. This did not imply that they did not wage wars against each other. In case of war and aggression they tried to harm each other by destroying the armed strength of the enemy and by blocking the commercial interest of each other. Such a war was only within the reach of the stronger powers only. In case a powerful nation encroached upon a weaker nation, and the strength as well as weakness could be judged on the basis of each country's arsenal (*top khana*) and firearms (*tufang*), others would prevent it from the aggrandizers hostile intentions. This was to prevent any single nation becoming able to emerge as the most powerful nation, disturb the balance and thus, in future overpower others. The indirect help to the weaker nation was meant to safeguard one's own interest. But the European diplomatic policy with regard to the countries outside Europe was different. In the non-European countries they followed a policy of war and open aggrandizement and colonization (*taskhir*). The on-going Anglo-French rivalry for occupation of Egypt and Syria, were the obvious examples of manifestations of European diplomacy. France captured Egypt because of the neglect and apathy of the Ottomans. Similarly, the British occupation of India was an example of European diplomatic policy in the non-European world. The British had occupied (*taskhir*) India because it had no powerful master to

⁴⁸ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 137.

protect it.⁴⁹ It was India which was the central concern of all these writers. Let us, therefore, turn to see how the growing British ascendancy was perceived.

The pioneers of Europe's political expansion were the Portuguese. They showed the way to other Europeans in Asia who moved beyond expansion to domination. Yet, in spite of their subversive activities, their presence was never regarded as a major threat. They were considered a nuisance rather than a menace. But as has been pointed out, earlier memories of the Portuguese as the first Europeans who arrived in India kept on lingering. Itisam recalls that it was almost two hundred years ago before his time, during the reign of emperor Akbar, that the Portuguese arrived in the islands of Malabar, Madras and Ceylon. At that time the Portuguese monarch enjoyed a predominant position among European nations, somewhat similar as was enjoyed by the British monarch at present. The Portuguese embarked upon the long distance sea voyages after immense improvements in the ship-building industry and the navigational techniques. The discovery of the route via the Cape (*Kaf*), called by the Europeans the Cape of Good Hope, was situated in the extreme of Ethiopia. The news of this discovery was celebrated in Europe (*farang*) as the ultimate fulfilment of a long cherished desire, hence its name the Cape of Good Hope. Detailed manuals (*dastur al amal*) with maps and charts showing the exact route to the Cape were prepared and distributed throughout Europe. The motives of the Portuguese in searching out the new route to India was mainly commercial. Indian commodities such as silk, cotton, textile and opium were in great demand in Europe. They fetched very high prices in the markets yielded immense profits to the European merchants.⁵⁰ However, the Portuguese were also involved in subversive activities: they began to torture the local people. They destroyed the mosques

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 121-121a. Ahmad also expressed a similar opinion; cf. *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 116a.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 148.

and constructed churches in their place. They forcibly converted the local population to Christianity and, generally, reduced the people to misery, poverty and destitution. They killed the pilgrims going to the Holy cities of Mecca and Medina. It was recorded in the royal chronicles that the people of Europe were raising tumult in the coastal regions of India.

The Portuguese expansion and superiority was short-lived. As Itisam al Din puts it, they were overtaken by divine retribution on account of the atrocities and brutalities they committed against the natives. Recurring earthquakes had wrecked their capital in Portugal resulting in much loss of life and property. Their country's prestige was in decline in comparison to other European countries. Their sovereignty was under constant threat from the more powerful Germans and Spaniards. But the geo-politics of the region led Britain to prevent any military action against the Portuguese, perhaps to maintain the power balance.⁵¹ Moreover, the Portuguese came under eclipse as a result of the arrival of the English, Dutch and Danes. The descendants of the Portuguese who survived belonged to low social category and accepted sundry jobs under the British. They employed themselves in handicrafts and as writers (*nawisandan*) with the Company. But the latter did not accord them any special treatment. They let them live in coastal regions of India like any other subject of India. In fact, the English reckoned them no better than an Indian (*Hindustani*).⁵²

1.3 Why the British came to India

The primary object of the British in the beginning, like the Portuguese, was the development of their trade. Emperor Jahangir's permission to the Company led to the

⁵¹ For an account of the Portuguese arrival and settlement in India, cf. *Shigarfnama* ff. 14b-22a.

⁵² Cf. *Siyar*, pp. 960ff. For a similar opinion, cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 180b.

establishment of a factory at Surat as their first settlement. All of the writers deemed it imperative to know the structure and constitution of the English Company, which, at the time, was defined as a purely mercantile organization.

Etymologically, the word Company (*kampany*) means a group of two or more persons. But technically the term stood for a group of people united for a common purpose, profit or other. It was a purely commercial organisation of a large body of merchants who accumulated capital to trade with India and obtained a charter from the king in return for a fixed amount to be given to the exchequer. The procurement of their right of trade excluded other merchants from trading with the specified countries. This organisation consisted of a large body of shareholders, the actual owners, who appointed twenty-four men amongst them as their directors to carry out the workings of the Company. The Board of Directors was headed by another superior called Chairman, appointed from the directors for one year. The term of the directors was six years, and one fourth of the total members retired every second year.⁵³

More than the structure and the organisation, it was the relationship of the Company with the British King which occupied the attention of almost all of contemporary writers. All of them, Itisam al Din, Abu Talib, Abd al Latif and Ahmad bin Muhammad were of the opinion that the British monarch had no direct political control over the Company or its activities in India. The Company was not a representative body of the British King.⁵⁴ So, although India had been conquered and subjugated by the Company and the latter paid a fixed amount in the form of tribute (*nazrana*) to the King, this tribute was merely a return of the favour done to them! After all, it was the letter of King James I which enabled the merchants to seek the

⁵³ For the organization of the East India Company, cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 136b-137a; also *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 147, *Shigarfnama* ff. 147, and *Mirat al ahwal* ff. 136b.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 147, and *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 136b.

aforementioned permission from Jahangir. Nevertheless, the Company and its merchants were British national; as such, they had to remain under the overall supervision of their home government. Therefore, when in the second half of 18th century, the Company's merchants combined business with interference in Indian political affairs, the fact came under discussion in the British Parliament. As a result, the Parliament devised an indirect instrument to control the Company's political activities. This was placed under the overall supervision and direction of the Board of Control, constituted by the British government, to check the corruption and political excesses of the Company's servants in Bengal, in case they turned out to be detrimental to the prestige of the English nation (*qaum i English*).⁵⁵ Apart from the Board of Control, the Parliament, too, had the right to question the affairs of the Company which deemed unjust. The Company's activities and the role played by Clive in Carnatic, the deposition of its governor from his position and Wellesely's conduct in Awadh affairs were severely questioned by both the Houses of the Parliament.⁵⁶

Itisam al Din provided his own version of the circumstances which led to the establishment of the Board of Control. This is also an example of how traditional mode of discourse and conventional phrases were used to portray complexities of contemporary British politics while the writer was in Britain. "There had been a controversy", wrote Itisam, "among the Royal Ministers and officials (*mutasaddis*) of the Company regarding the latter's right over Bengal. Both parties had their own viewpoints. The ministers stressed on the point that the Company was a commercial organisation (*mahajanpesha*) therefore it should not have any concern over the matters

⁵⁵ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 136-137. Abu Talib considered the Board of Control a separate ministry and nominated its President, called the minister for Indian affairs (*wazir amurat i Hind*), the seventh important minister in the hierarchy of the cabinet.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 137a.

of the government. It was the people of Britain who conquered the province of Bengal and, hence, the state of Bengal was to pass on to the Crown. But the Company's officials pressed their claims indicating the expenses they incurred in this occupation. Therefore, they claimed the right to run profit and loss basis and pay the Crown a fixed amount (*malguzari*). Itisam further continued: "This controversy was resolved by the king of England by leaving out the claims on Bengal. To him, Bengal was granted to the Company by Emperor Shah Alam as *altamgha* which was a form of charity (*khairat*). If the king accepted it, it would have been below the royal dignity. Since it was tantamount to indirect acceptance of the Mughal suzerainty. But the protagonists succeeded in increasing the amount of taxes to be paid to the royal exchequer". To Itisam, the letter of Emperor Shah Alam which he was to present to King George III, could have been of much use to the ministers which was intentionally suppressed by Clive. Otherwise, the situation might have turned in favour of the royal ministers.⁵⁷ Itisam added: "Some wise-men postulated that after some time the province of Bengal would pass under the supervision of the royal officials from the Company".⁵⁸

The Company's servants were drawn from diverse social backgrounds, descendant of old nobles; some originated from modest social background, and on account of their personal virtues, capabilities and education, rose to eminence. Socially, the Company's officials were considered to be on lower social status than the officials of the King of England. It was quite clear because after all the Company was only a commercial body, a mercantile concern (*mahajanpesha*), not a political authority and, therefore, its servants stood in lower ladders than the nobility (*umra*) of the King and the landed aristocracy (*zamindar*) of England. Abu Talib wrote that even the Directors of the Company were

⁵⁷ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 11a-12a. For details of Itisam's mission to King George III, cf. ch. II.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 12a.

not given any importance by the President of the Board of Control, as the latter thought that they were the traders (*tujjar*) and commoners (*riaya*), whereas he was from the royal nobility (*umra i padshah*).⁵⁹ At any rate, the Company's services were regarded immensely lucrative and keenly sought by the English. For the young British, it became an all consuming passion to seek a career under the Company. There were reasons why the Company's employment was extremely attractive; first, they were well-paid and permanent, career being open to talent. Secondly, under the rules, it was not possible to dismiss any employee from his job, which was applicable right from the lower rank of a writer (*nawisandan*) to the highest position of Governor. Moreover, after retirement, pensions were paid to all the servants of the Company. Even if an employee was charged with corruption and embezzlement or amassing wealth by fraudulent means, he was summarily dismissed still, such person could pursue his case in the courts of England where, if the charge of bribery was not proved, the Company was liable to pay the arrears of his pension.⁶⁰

One question that agitated the mind of the writers was the fact that the Company which established itself as a purely trading concern in the first decade, within a century and a half, it could transform itself into a territorial power. Because, like many other Europeans the English, too, had come to India predominantly as traders. What forces political, economic and social helped to bring about so mighty a transformation. They sought to explore the background that enabled the Company to gain military and political power within a period of fifty years. In the early decades of the eighteenth century Company's position was that of purely mercantile concern in the public

⁵⁹ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 137. For a similar opinion, cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 147, and *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 136b.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 148a.

perception.⁶¹ Within a century and half, how the merchants became rulers of almost half of India.⁶² Clive intervened in the succession dispute in the Carnatic state, later, Bengal, Mysore and Awadh were brought under Company's political sway. Its triumph over Nawab Nazim of Bengal Sirajuddaula (1756) and subsequent victory at the battle of Buxar (1766) led to the acquisition of Diwani i.e., right of revenue administration over the rich territories of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. This greatly increased its power and prestige. After Clive's success in the internal politics of Carnatic, the English eliminated their strongest rival, the French. With the political success in India, not only the value of Company's shares doubled from one thousand pounds to two thousand, but the number of shareholders also swelled. Our sources took note of the Company's past first to explain the reasons of its success, secondly, to contrast its present powerful position with its earlier insignificant start. The foremost question was why the Company was permitted to trade in India? Thus, Itisam opined that while Akbar was averse to grant any concession to Europeans, it was during the reign of Jahangir that the Europeans requested in extremely submissive tone to allow them to trade with India, and to build factories (*Kothi*). The Europeans emulated the Mughal emperors and aristocracy with rare and wonderful curiosities of Europe. Jahangir permitted the English to trade and to construct their factory at Surat taking into account the helplessness of the European merchants, and also for the benefit of the common people of India and for the prosperity of the country to stimulate the trade, and to procure many items of Europe which were not easily available in India. Itisam clarified that the permission was granted to build houses for trade (*makanhai tijarat*) and not the kind of forts they had constructed now. The emperors issued farmans for similar effect to the provincial governors of Bengal and

⁶¹ Cf. *Siyar*, pp. 633ff.

⁶² Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 17a.

the other provinces. But after the death of Aurangzeb the administration of the empire fell into mismanagement and the emperor Muhammad Shah neglected his responsibilities, the court under him became a place of the sensual pleasures, the nobility sunk into lethargy and inertia, they neglected its religious duties. The provincial governors became independent on all matters of state either financial or related to the state (*mali wa mulki*). In this situation the Europeans began to form alliances with the *Nazim* and the *Faujdars*.⁶³ While Abd al Latif and Ahmad opined that since the emperor Shah Abbas of Persia allowed the English to build their factories in Bandar Abbas in Persia to eradicate the Portuguese and the Dutch. As both of these Europeans came to have a strong hold in some of the ports of Persia. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb also allowed the English (*Inglishia*) to construct their settlements in Calcutta as a counter-measure against the Portuguese, to eliminate the Portuguese from Indian soil.⁶⁴ But in Persia the British could not gain political ascendancy; Latif asserted that the Iranians did not allow any outside power to dominate them especially a non-Muslim. He recalled the heroic past of Iran to challenge the power of those who called upon its sovereignty.⁶⁵ It was only temporarily that Afghans occupied Iran. On the other hand, in India, the people of Bengal, "the most uncivilized people on earth" (*hasrat al arz*), sought closeness to the English.⁶⁶ While others posited that Job Charnock helped Aurengzeb with provisions for the army during the latter's campaigns in Deccan, therefore as a favour he granted a farman the royal order to Job Charnock to build factory in Bengal and to carry on the duty free trade in return for a *peshkash* of three

⁶³ *Ibid.*, ff. 17-8.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 180b.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 136a-137a.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 137a, and *Mirat al ahwal*, f. 137a.

thousand rupees payable to the *Bakhshi* of the port. Establishment of the English factory immensely stimulated the trade in Bengal. But their attitude began to change with the declining central authority. To the majority of our writers, the change of attitude from humble merchants to open hostility lay in the complex political condition of India which developed with the weakening of the central authority. The contemporaries traced the weakening of the imperial authority from the reign of Farrukhsiyar expressed in such terms and phrases like *Saltanat sust gasht* and *zaif ul saltanat* i.e., the state became ineffective.⁶⁷ It was at this crucial point of political crises that the merchant groups intervened siding with the group which promised the most liberal rewards and greatest concessions.⁶⁸ At this stage, the Company began to combine their business with territorial expansion. First they established their hold over Bengal, from their bases in Calcutta they pushed themselves into the heart of India. According to Latif following their success in Bengal they began to extend their influence by using their diplomacy in other parts of India. Various methods were employed by the English to achieve this objective to takeover the regional powers, Carnatic, Hyderabad and Mysore in the Deccan, Bengal and Awadh in North. According to Abd al Latif, their strategy was first to construct forts which, to deceive the common people, they called it trading posts/factories (*bait ut tujjar*). Under the disguise of trading posts, they collected arms and ammunition in it of the latest make.⁶⁹ When^ever they planned to annex a particular state they began to explore all possible channels of information about indigenous affairs of a state. For the above purposes, they employed services of intelligent natives who acted as their agents and collaborators. Then they appointed an agent (*wakil*) who was

⁶⁷ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 133.

⁶⁸ For a similar view, cf. K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance: a survey of the vasco Da Gama epoch of Asian History 1498-1945* (London, 1955), esp. p. 97.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 137b.

stationed at the court of the regional ruler. Abd al Latif further revealed that the English never occupied any native state suddenly but by degrees; first, they sent messages of friendship, accompanied with European novelties as gifts through this agent who requested, in a very submissive and humble tone for a grant of land to construct a factory. Gradually they equipped the factory with arms and ammunitions. This representative regularly informed his superiors in Calcutta about the internal affairs of that particular state. The agent watched for a suitable opportunity to interfere in the internal matters of native states. Such occasions arrived to their advantage in numerous cases when there occurred dispute over succession. In such times of internal disputes and the court intrigues, they sided with a candidate from whom they could extract most. The agent called the forces from Calcutta.⁷⁰ With the passage of time, they went on to extract greater and valuable concessions, and cash, to maintain the army which protected the chief, and also a part of territory when that chief was unable to turn in ready cash.⁷¹ The case of Bengal was cited as evidence of such diplomatic intrigue. Plassey was not considered a military victory but a political intrigue in which disloyal and deceitful nobles led by Mir Jafar conspired with the British against Sirajuddaula. It was a transaction in which the collaborators of Bengal led by the merchant banker Jagat Seth sold the Nawab to the Company. Even Mir Jafar was deposed and in his place they seated his son in law Mir Qasim. It was by combination of various diplomatic skills that the British had been successful in India. Similar diplomatic techniques were employed in case of Mysore against Tipu Sultan, in Awadh against Shujauddaula, and his successors, and in Hyderabad. On the defeated Indian chief they usually fixed an allowance. In case the enemy died in the battle-field, even then they paid an allowance

⁷⁰ For a detailed exposure of the Company's army and its methods of organisation and training, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 167a-176b.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 138a-139b.

to his dependents. Now there was not a single power in India which could check the British domination or unite the petty chiefs under one umbrella. Tipu the Sultan of Mysore attempted to expel the British with the French cooperation but failed disastrously. The Company isolated Indian chiefs one by one to bring them under their sway.⁷²

The analysis goes further. Apart from the above methods, Company's success was based on efficient management of its finances. When from the 16th century onwards Europe witnessed its overseas expansion with the help of improved navigation and shipping on an unprecedented scale; the Europeans had evolved certain control mechanism and devices. European 'philosophers' developed financial institutions to regulate overseas trade which earned Europe wealth from colonies. These devices were the institution of interest (*sud*) use of certificates (*satificate*) currency notes (*not*) and insurance (*beema*) of life as well as property.⁷³

1.4 The East India Company: An Assessment of its Administration

How these elites looked at the methods of administration of the Company and its impact on Indian socio-economic life. The provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa were the first which passed into the British hands, these were also the first regions which felt the impact of alien rule. The earliest known criticism of the Company's administration came from the pen of Ghulam Husain, who himself was an actor and observer of this transitory phase.⁷⁴ According to Ghulam Husain, the prevailing political chaos and

⁷² For the case of Bengal, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 138a, and *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 137b-140b.

⁷³ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 148a-150b. Latif added that in this respect the Europeans criticised Muslims for being bound up with moral scruples (for not charging an interest as they did). The Hindu traders were using these methods, especially the insurance, for their merchandise.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Siyar*, pp. 834-43. The portion relating to the impact of Company was translated and published in the *Asiatic Annual Register for the year 1802* (London, 1803), Miscellaneous Tract, pp. 83-111.

disorder was not Company's contribution, its roots could be traced in the decaying administrative structure of the Mughal empire itself. Company's rule only accentuated affair. The decline of the various civil institutions which were the pillars of the former regime was traced from early decades of the eighteenth century, when empire's institutions of civil administration began to crumble down. It became clearly manifest first in the revenue administration, when revenue farming became prevalent which deprived the military elite of their income. As a corollary to this, the revenue farmers and their lease takers began to oppress the peasants to extract the maximum. Gradually, all other civil institutions including the judicial offices were auctioned to the highest bidders. This deplorable state of Indian society and economy coincided with the British ascendancy over India and Company's mismanagement worked as catalyst in the existing situation.⁷⁵ To criticise the existing regime first Ghulam portrayed an idealised picture of Mughal administration wherein according to him, rules and regulations were framed with the consent of the leading members of both the communities, Muslims and Hindus. He described various Mughal administrative institution and respective jurisdiction and duties of their officials, and mode of payment, which were the pillars of administration under the Mughal government, with rigour and clarity. Side by side he pointed out the reasons and roots of the decay of these institutions. The ideal presentation was perhaps not so much to highlight the achievements of the Mughals as to exhort the foreign masters to deal with the public grievances with care and impartiality, and to establish peace and security in their newly acquired territories like it was in the previous regime.⁷⁶ Major criticism of the Company's rule, in Ghulam Husain's assessment were the following. There was lack of mutual confidence and

⁷⁵ Cf. *Siyar*, pp. 826-8.

⁷⁶ For an idealised portrayal of the Mughal administration, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 825-34.

cordiality between the ruler and the ruled. The reason for the absence of mutual interaction was the dissimilarity between the Indian manners and customs and those of the British. The British were completely ignorant of the laws and civil institutions of India. Added to this, they displayed racial superiority and looked down upon Indians. The lack of communication and absence of a common language further complicated the issue.⁷⁷

Ghulam Husain thought that British scholarship about India also made negative contribution because they made no attempt to obtain accurate information regarding India and whatever little knowledge they had acquired was based on the writings of British themselves, apparently pieces of scholarship but lacked accuracy. British ignorance was most obvious in the land revenue administration. They looked at Indian society from European eyes. They allowed the *zamindars* unrestricted freedom similar to the landed aristocracy in England. Even the revenue farmers were given free hand against peasantry. Thus, they introduced commercial approach in the land revenue system of India. They could not understand that Indian economy had been basically an agricultural ^{economy} based on the produce of land out of which total expenses were defrayed. The civil servants and military, all were paid from the same source. The British by farming out the revenue had put the peasantry into the hands of those who tried to squeeze the maximum from them, thereby weakening the very basis of Indian economy. The office of *qazi*, *Sadr us sudur*, *muhtasib* and *darogha* were also leased out to the highest bidders. These officers during the Mughal period received salaries from the government, under Company's rule those who occupied these offices exploited common people to realise the amount they paid to purchase their office. The office of *qazi* became saleable, likewise other offices, too. Those who purchased these offices

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 834-43.

oppressed the common people in the form of cesses. The office of *waqa i nawis* was abolished hence any oppression committed on weaker sections of society were not reported. There was a complete lack of morality: bribery became a common practice. Another problem examined by Ghulam Husain was the nature of the English rule. It was emphasized that the Mughal regime was not alien since the latter had accepted India as their home-land but the Company and its domination symbolised foreign ascendancy over Indian people. The British remained outsiders in their feelings of racial superiority and arrogance towards Indians. Added to that the Company was neither a ruling authority nor a sovereign independent power but a purely commercial organisation whose system of administration was based on profit and loss. Further, there was no indigenous body in India to whom the Company's servants were accountable. "Since the conquest of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, this country did not have single individual sovereign ruler, rather the English people collectively were its masters. Company was not an individual but an impersonal body of the merchants. Its employees were transferred almost every year, which was an obstacle in the smooth running of administration."⁷⁸ He complained that officers were brought from England who obviously had no previous knowledge of Indian customs and usages, and before they could get enough experience and exposure, they were transferred and a new person was put in his place. Even the directors were not permanent body and changed at regular intervals. It was pointed that almost six persons were appointed within a period of twenty years as governors. They could not enforce any policy of the government without the consent of the council consisting of four persons. No one appointed was certain of

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Ibid., pp. 834.

his stay for long nor was he vested with full powers. Therefore, these officials could not develop any interest in the welfare of the subject population.⁷⁹

The Company's administration of justice, too, came under severe criticism. British law was not criticised for its secular character but it was its application which was thought to be unsuitable in Indian conditions. It was cumbersome, lengthy and expensive. It was enormously expensive since the judges were paid by the parties involved instead of being paid from public funds as was the case in Britain. Therefore, cases were intentionally prolonged. Ahmad bin Muhammad thought that punishment in the form of fines were ruinous for both the lower as well the upper class. It was degrading for the prestige of higher strata (*ashraf*) because a number of intermediaries with the consent of lawyers accused them wrongly, and unjust accusers grew rich on such proceedings. It was pointed out that British law was incomprehensible to the people because they were unaccustomed with it.⁸⁰ The British judicial system also discriminated against the native population as they could not lodge complaints against the British except in the court of the King which involved exorbitant charges. The English were treated as privileged human beings. The complaint was that even the charges of corruption and embezzlement against officials of the Company were usually decided by the British law courts in England.⁸¹ Ghulam Husain further analyses the factors which led to this plight in the Indian society. Company's administrative policies had resulted in systematic impoverishment of various social classes of India from the upper strata to the petty artisans and workers. "English government engrosses the whole commerce of the country, and the native inhabitants have been thereby deprived of many

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 838-9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 842-3.

⁸¹ Cf. *Mirat al ahwal*, f. 135b.

of those advantages which they formerly enjoyed". The Company's trade was harmful for the economic prosperity of the country because it constituted one sided drain of wealth from India to Britain. First, the nature of trade underwent complete transformation. The company embarked upon territorial expansion and political control, its merchants brought gold and silver in exchange for Indian merchandise. There was abundant circulation of money which promoted economic prosperity. But, now, after their territorial acquisitions, Company's servants amassed huge amount by various questionable means while serving in India. They also carried private trade, and the profits were sent to their home country. Secondly, Company's officials had monopolised trade even in such staple commodities in which earlier Indians had equal privilege. Yet another aspect of the Company's administrative policies that occupied Ghulam Husain's attention was unemployment. There were numerous causes for this. First, country's civil institutions had disintegrated like those of the revenue and judiciary which had provided the educated classes with jobs. Secondly, land grants such as *jagir* and *altamgha* which were enjoyed by the royal princes and *mansabdars* and the military elite; and lands given for religious and charitable purposes and *waqf* granted for the maintenance of religious and educational institutions were resumed and discontinued. Consequently, a number of artisans who were employed by the aristocracy were left without reasonable means of survival. In essence, the Indian ruling classes were deposed and revenue which they appropriated were transferred to the Company. The cities and the towns which depended on the supply of articles of consumption and services to the old ruling class and their household courtiers and retainers rapidly declined. Again, artisan's products were not needed by the Company for consumption in England. Since the latter was

gradually moving towards industrialisation. Thus, unemployment and de-industrialisation became all pervasive.⁸²

Ghulam Husain Khan provided most perceptive as well as comprehensive criticism of Company's administration, and working of various departments as well as the far reaching impact of these administrative policies on Indian economy and society. The negative consequences of British domination discussed so far were touched upon by other writers as well, but Ghulam Husain's original contribution lay in his comprehensive assessment of the economic impact of British rule in India. Such themes like de-industrialisation; heavy taxation, drainage of resources, which were debated during the late nineteenth century had already appeared in Ghulam Husain's work. Many of the effects of Company's rule which he elaborated like drain of wealth ruin of Indian industries were taken up in late nineteenth century. Ghulam Husain Khan's criticism of the Company's administration and the consequent impact on Indian society was extremely severe. Ghulam Husain's indictment on Company's rule is most severe due to the reason that his main concern was Bengal, he was referring to the effects of dual administration in that province.

Nevertheless, later writers like Abd al Latif and Ahmad bin Muhammad took account of the revenue reforms of Warren Hastings and Cornwallis. Abd al Latif wrote that proper management was established for revenue collection. The intermediate officials conducted business according to the rules and regulations laid down by the government. They did not realise more than what was assessed. Secondly, the British did not practice *ijara* system that is farming out of revenue to intermediaries as practised among the Muslim countries of Iran and Turkey. Thirdly, separate officials were appointed in each district to check any accesses committed on the peasantry by the

revenue collectors. He also thought that the British treatment towards the upper classes and the aristocracy was benevolent and respectful, as the charitable grants (*suyurghal*) of the Muslim religious divines and Hindus were not appropriated.⁸³

The preceding analysis indicates that these intellectuals had a negative image of Company's rule. There were obvious reasons for their critical attitude towards Company and its administration. First, these writers descended from bureaucratic backgrounds. Many of them were still attached to the Mughals in some way, but they had lost their jobs, and there seemed no possibility of any avenue being opened up in the crippled machinery of Empire. Thus, they were a part of an inexorable process when avenues of employment were almost closed. They were employed by the later as writers, interpreters and collaborators. This was such a rule which had deprived them of livelihood by participating in the disintegration of Mughal Empire and its successive regime without providing any alternative. Being collaborators, they were in a position to perceive and observe the Company and its methods. By now they were almost disillusioned with the Company and any prospects of employment with it. On the other hand, they came to realize that Britain was dynamic because it was ruled by a well regulated government. Britain governed by law presented a complete contrast to political anarchy and chaos that prevailed in India. Consequently, their indictment of Company's rule was sharp and penetrating. Equally their perceptions of other aspects of the new society were also not without criticism. Before exploring their appreciation and criticism of the West, it seems imperative to have a close look at their life stories and experience.

⁸³ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 152a-153b.

2 THE OBSERVERS

An attempt to trace the perception of Western culture by the Indian educated élite at the turn of the eighteenth century has drawn a number of people of diverse social backgrounds within the ambit of this study. Nonetheless, there are some basic similarities within this heterogeneous group. All of them were members of the erstwhile bureaucracy of the Mughal empire and its successor states. They belonged to the privileged social classes — the upper strata, the aristocracy and the middle income groups. A common cultural idiom, a common style of life and conformity to common religious convictions welded them together out of a disparate world. They were people who tended to monopolise a set of ideals and material privileges. They were well-versed in the Islamic learning, being the products of a highly personalised system of education, which is also the hall-mark of their writings about the West. All of them were Persian speaking; the Mughal empire employed Persian, both for administration and as the polite language of the court. Persian was also the language of scholarship, belles-letters and of polite social intercourse. One thing was common to all of them: they were gentlemen scholars who pursued knowledge as a vocation in addition to their political careers. All of them showed eagerness to enter public services. All of them had similar attitudes and ideas about the state: they were explicit about the necessity of a ruling group for a civilised and orderly existence. They had deep seated notions of respect for political authority: their notions of ideal society was of one, where the ruler was to be plainly obeyed. The royal person was of prime importance in their vision of an ideal state.

Some of them had visited Europe and therefore, had a direct exposure of the West, such as Itisam al Din, Muhammad Husain and Abu Talib. Itisam by profession was a *Munshi* (scribe and interpreter of official correspondence, as well as teacher of Persian) and a writer. Muhammad Husain and Abu Talib both had served with the regional states. Abu Talib was a district level official, an *amil*, who first served in Murshidabad and later on in Awadh. Itisam visited Britain in 1767-9, when, following the treaty of Allah^abad (1765), he came with a letter of the Mughal emperor Shah Alam for King George III. The emperor was seeking the British monarch's assistance to restore peace in India and to reinstate the Mughal emperor on his hereditary throne of Hindustan. Muhammad Husain's visit to Europe was motivated by his desire to acquaint himself with the modern sciences of Europe in 1775-6, while Abu Talib similarly came to Britain at the turn of the eighteenth century to satisfy his own intellectual curiosity about the West, a curiosity which he came to develop during his ten years of unemployment in Calcutta. Others, like Murtaza Husain Bilgrami and Ghulam Husain Khan, were observing the growth of the British power on Indian soil itself; they were born in the third decade of the eighteenth century and served the Mughal empire. Later on, search for employment brought them into contact with the British. Abd al Latif and Ahmad bin Muhammad both were born in Persia and came to India in search of employment. Abd al Latif succeeded in obtaining the high diplomatic office of *Wakil* (representative) of the Hyderabad state to the East India Company. Subsequently he was posted at Calcutta, where his position brought him in close and constant contact with the high-placed British officials. However, Ahmad's efforts to enter the service in one of the regional states were not successful. He ended-up earning his living by teaching at one of the local Colleges (*madrasa*) at Azimabad Patna.

2.1 *Itisam al Din*

The earliest known records of Indian perceptions of the Western civilization came from two Muslim writers, born and brought up in Bengal: Itisam al-Din and Ismail. Both of these writers had somewhat similar social and professional background. They were *Qasbah* based Muslim service gentry whose ancestors would have served in the local administrative positions. Both were brought up in the semi-urban areas of the Bengal province: Itisam hailed from *Qasbah* Panchnor of the Nadia district in the family of Shaikh Taj al Din, while Ismail belonged to Ganjkalna in the district of Burdwan. Literary productions and professional concerns suggest that the families of Itisam as well as of Ismail had a fairly established tradition of gentility and learning.¹ The financial bases of both their families seem to have been eroded, following the land-revenue settlements in Bengal after the British occupation of the province. Both were in search of livelihood which brought them into contact with the British, first in India, and subsequently in Britain.²

¹ Not much is known about their families, except what the authors themselves say in their works. It has not been possible to corroborate their accounts from other contemporary records. Itisam's biography, for example, is based on his *Shigarf namah i wilayat*. Of this work, there are various copies extant in manuscript form; for details, cf. C.A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, Vol I, Part 2 (London, 1953), pp. 1142-4. An abridged Urdu and English translation of the manuscript was published in 1827: *Shigarf namah i Velaet, or Excellent intelligence concerning Europe* (being the travels of Mirza Itesa modeen in Great Britain and France), translated from the original manuscripts into Hindoostanee, with an English version and notes by J.E Alexander and Munshi Shamsheer Khan (London, 1827). For this essay, I have used the manuscript lodged in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. No. 1854, Caps. Or. A.8. (what has been referred to as *Shigarfnama*). For a small biographical sketch of the author, cf. C.E. Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography* (London, 1906), pp. 217-8 (hereafter Buckland, *Dictionary*). This sketch is based on *Shigarfnama*. For another small biographical sketch of Itisam, cf. Garcin de Tassy, *Histoire de la Litterature hindouie et hindoustanie* (Paris, 1870), pp. 109-10.

² Munshi Ismail seems to have been even less known than Itisam. The only source of information on his life is in his own history, *Tarikh i Jadid*. The only known manuscript is in the personal collection of Dr. Simon Digby No. 107 (formerly Sir Thomas Phillips Collection, No. 18225). For a summarised English translation of the contents of this manuscript, cf. Simon Digby, *Changing Horizons of Thought in Eighteenth Century Muslim India* (Unpublished), read at the University of Pennsylvania, 1971. For Munshi Ismail, cf. Simon Digby, "An Eighteenth Century Narrative of a Journey from Bengal to England: Munshi Ismail's New History", in Christopher Shackle (ed.), *Urdu and Muslim South Asia Studies, in Honour of Ralph Russell* (London, 1989), pp. 49-65. Ismail's *Tarikh i Jadid* was compiled immediately upon his return to Calcutta in November 1773, after having spent almost two years on travel. Itisam compiled *Shigarfnama* in 1785.

In the preliminary remark to his work, Itisam conceded that for most part of his life (before and after his visit to England), he worked as an employee of the British in India. Presumably having received primary education at his home-town in the local *maktab* and *madrshah*, he moved to Murshidabad, the capital of Nawabs of Bengal. There, he received training and guidance from Shaikh Salimullah³ and Mirza Muhammad Qasim, a *munshi* and *mir munshi* respectively in the government of Mir Jafar. Having completed his apprenticeship, Itisam entered the service of the Murshidabad state, with the recommendation of his teachers (the two *munshis*) from whom he received training in the profession of *munshigiri*. Thus, Itisam began his career in the government of Mir Jafar. Later on he served Mir Qasim, when the latter occupied the *masnad* of Bengal with British assistance. As the British hold on the Nizamat grew and the British officials began to occupy key administrative positions in its administration, Itisam had to seek client-patron relations with the British. He joined the service of Major York and participated with him in a campaign against a local chieftain called Asad Zaman Khan, the Raja of Birbhum. He accompanied Major York to Azimabad and Calcutta in search of employment, but without any success. There were already eight *munshis* serving in the *munshi khana* of the Company at Calcutta.⁴ Seeing no prospects at Calcutta, Itisam travelled further to Azimabad Patna with a letter of recommendation for Major Adam from his former employer. Here, too, he faced disappointment, which he ascribed to the machination of another *munshi* in the service of Major Adam. Finally, he succeeded in entering the service of a British official, a certain Strachey who was paymaster of the army (*bakhshi i lashkar*). Then, Itisam

³ Shaikh Salimullah was the author of the *Tarikh i Bangala*.

⁴ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 5a. Itisam gives the name of eight members of the service elite who were employed on a similar basis in the British Residency at Murshidabad.

fought against Mir Qasim along with the British and visited Rajmahal and Midnapur. Meanwhile, he served as revenue collector (*tehsildar*) of the *Pargana* Qutubpur for one year with another British official. With the death of Strachey, whose memories Itisam always cherished as a kind patron, he found another patron in the person of Major Carnac. In the army of Carnac, he fought against the combined forces of the Mughal emperors Shujaudaula and Mir Qasim in the battle of Buxar and subsequently against the Marathas and Shujaudaula as part of Major Carnac's contingent. He describes extensively the circumstances which led to the grant of *Diwani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and claims for himself to have written the text of the Treaty of Allahabad along with another *munshi*, Muhammad Muiz, on behalf of George Vansittart.⁵ The motivation behind Itisam's journey to Britain was to present the case of the Mughal emperor before the British monarch George III. According to Itisam, following Clive's success in the battle of Buxar and the subsequent Treaty of Allahabad and the grant of the *Diwani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to Company, Shah Alam requested Clive and Major Carnac to help him in suppressing the widely prevalent anarchy and disorder by providing military assistance. When Clive expressed his inability to comply with the emperor's request without the King's permission, the ministers of Shah Alam decided to send a direct representation to George III. A letter was drafted in Calcutta by Muniruddaula and Shitab Rai, the royal ministers, without informing the Council at Calcutta. In the letter they requested the King to (a) order temporary stationing of the British army (*fauj i angrezi*) under the command of a British official to protect the emperor against his numerous enemies, (b) reinstall the Emperor on his ancestral throne of Hindustan (*Saltanat i Hindustan*) and to help him bring the country under well-regulated

⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 2a-4a; for the terms of the treaty, as reproduced by the author, cf. ff. 6a-7a.

government.⁶ A *munshi* was required to be sent on this mission to facilitate communication, and Itisam was entrusted for the task. A sum of four thousand rupees was sanctioned from the royal exchequer for his travelling expenses, along with a promise for future promotions and rewards.⁷

Itisam's account begins with the failure of his mission. This whole affair obviously would have been detrimental to the Company's designs therefore, while Clive and Swinton diplomatically agreed to convey the message to the British monarch George III, they manipulated the whole thing in such a way that it came to nothing in Britain. Itisam was informed aboard the ship by Swinton that the emperor's letter was held back by Clive since items to be presented as gifts (*nazrana*) to King George III were still in Benares. Itisam was assured that the following year the letter, along with the gifts, would be presented to the King.⁸ He wrote that when Clive came to England in order to pay his respect to His Majesty, he presented the gifts to the Queen in his own name and he, therefore, obtained an abundant share of royal favour. Neither he nor Swinton mentioned either Shah Alam's letter or the gifts. To Itisam's dismay and disappointment, Mughal Emperor Shah Alam's message remained concealed.⁹

⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 7b-8b. A copy of the letter is available in the collection of the Royal Asiatic Society, London, No. 134. The letter stated: "Considering the sincerity of friendship and nobility of heart of my brother in England, I feel confident that he would despatch a force of five or six thousand English troops to be stationed near me at Allahbad, so that, with Nawab Sabet Jung and General Carnac they may escort this supplicant of God to his capital, Shahjahanbad, and place him on the throne of Hindustan, to which he is the rightful heir. The kind and generosity that my brother would thus be showing would thus be recorded for ever on the pages of time; every city and country in the world would gratefully remember the King of England, who helped Shah Alam, King of Hindustan regain his ancestral throne. As a proof of my absolute trust in their friendship and also as a reward of their services on me, I have granted the Diwani of Subahs of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the Company, and this, I feel sure, would please my brother in England." For an abridged translation of the above letter, cf. A.B.M. Habibullah, "Shah Alam's Letter to George III", *Indian Historical Records Commission*, (16) 1939, pp. 97-8.

⁷ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 9a.

⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 9a-10a.

⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 10. Shah Alam's two other letters addressed to George III and Lord North, complaining against the non-payment of *Peshkash* by the Company, are preserved in the *Miftah i Khazain* (a collection of letters of Munshi Sambhu Lal). Cf. *Miftah i Khazain*, "A Collection of letters of Munshi Sambhulal", (continued...)

Itisam embarked on his voyage to England on 10th January 1767, and returned to Bengal in 1769 after an absence of two years and nine months. He sailed on a French ship in the company of Swinton. The ship called at Mauritius, the Cape of Good Hope and Ascension Island. It came to Port at Nantz and Itisam travelled across France. His short stay in France enabled him to compare the two countries, their socio-cultural life, educational system, and the differences between the Catholics and the Anglicans. After coming to London, he lived in the University town of Oxford for about six months where he was introduced to Thomas Hunt (1696-1774), the Regius Professor of Hebrew language at Oxford, who showed Itisam some fine manuscripts of Persian such as *Kalila wa Dimna*. At Oxford Itisam helped William Jones in his Persian studies.¹⁰ He also spent some time in Edinburgh at Swinton's house, a fact which perhaps led to his close attention to and explanation of the differences among the Scottish, the Irish and the English. He did not record any details about his return journey, but, according to his own statement, he arrived in Calcutta on October/November 1769. He finished his major work in 1785, but his detailed narrative suggests that he must have kept notes of his stay in England. Upon his return from England Itisam spent his entire life in the service of the British. He re-entered the Company's service a few years after his return to India, in 1775, and negotiated with the Marathas on its behalf.¹¹ Beyond 1785, when his travelogue was finished,^{we} could not trace our author in the contemporary records.

⁹(...continued)

B.L. Or. 1750, ff. 7-21. One of the letters has been translated by Hasan Askari, "A Newly Discovered Letter of Shah Alam to George III", *Indian Historical Records Commission*, (20) 1941, pp. 47-9. The letter is strongly critical of the policies of the Company and its administration in the occupied provinces. It complains against the breakdown of administrative apparatus in Bengal and the prevalent lawlessness. It states that "These people, [the British] being proud of their skills in artillery warfare say that it is human action which counts and not the will of the Province. They do not realize all that has happened to this country. How powerful was the imperial house, what has become of it and what can it become again?"

¹⁰ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 85b; also in this essay the chapter on "Education and Orientalism".

¹¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 7a-7b.

When Itisam visited Europe he was already in his 40's, with a certain amount of intellectual maturity and outlook. He was a man of orthodox temperament and deep religious conviction, a man who carefully observed religious sanctions in his day to day life. Even the slightest digression from the bounds of *Shariat* was unacceptable to him. His consciousness of religious obligations included daily prayers five times, eating only the permitted foods (*halal*, i.e., animals slaughtered according to the Islamic ritual), and would not consume European medicine as it invariably contained wine. He did not fulfil his host's desire for free-intermixing and dining with him on non-*halal* meat. Anything non-Islam¹² was not acceptable to Itisam. His social relations with Swinton progressively deteriorated. He turned down an offer to prolong his stay in Britain in order to teach Persian to those Britons who wished to join the Company's services in India, although the terms suggested to him included his being able to (a) have a second wife in Britain, and (b) remit a part of his earnings for the maintenance of his family in India.

Itisam did not have any inclination to learn English while in England, a fact he reflected on with regret upon his return to India every time he was enquired by his compatriots. His time in England was spent in reading historical literature available in Persian. His major concern was invariably with the lower orders of society, the deprived, the peasants, the migrants. In France, it was the French peasantry, in the Dutch colonies of the Cape of Good Hope and in Mauritius it was the Indian labourers working on the Dutch Plantations, and in Scotland the Highlanders were the objects of his attention. In the British historical past he saw a class- struggle between the upper classes and the underprivileged social groups in which the latter emerged successful. Had Itisam visited Europe after the French Revolution he would have openly sympathised with the people of France.¹²

¹² *Ibid.*, ff. 122a-125b.

One may ask how Itisam defined his own social position in the society he came from, and his identity, if any. Interestingly, in an intensely debated arguments and counter-arguments; with Captain Swinton, Itisam sought to articulate his identity. He wrote that Swinton ascribed his strict adherence, unyielding conservatism and orthodoxy to lack of aristocratic social origins. According to Itisam, Swinton remarked: "The Muslim upper classes paid little attention to religious sanctions at personal level. They did not care for religious prohibitions against wine-drinking and therefore, frequently dined and mixed with the British in India".¹³ Therefore to Swinton, the underlying reason of Itisam's unyielding conservatism was his typically Bengali origins. Itisam wrote that Swinton further alleged: "You [Itisam] were a Bengali, and the Bengalis were notorious for their idiotism and stupidity in comparison to other Indians (*Hindustanis*)".¹⁴ Itisam repudiated Swinton's above allegation by invoking high Islamic ideals of human excellence. Itisam argued that in Islam gentle poverty was better than possession of wealth without any virtue. He reiterated that not the possession of worldly wealth, but having the virtue of piety was essential for noble character. Therefore, the nobility was not derived from ancestry. In fact, Itisam asserted that the true *Sharafat* consisted for all Muslims in following the comprehensive system of ideal morality as laid down by the Holy *Qur'an* and the Prophet's Traditions. He quoted examples from the Islamic past to prove the dignity of poverty and virtuous life. According to Itisam, "True nobility (*Sharafat wa najabat*) consisted in acquiring knowledge, in leading an upright life in obeying the laws (*Shariat*) and in striving to please God and his Prophet".¹⁵ Itisam regretted that Swinton was not convinced as in

¹³ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 187.

¹⁴ For the above discussion with Swinton, cf. *ibid.*, f. 187a.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 187a.

the latter's society the poor were looked down with contempt while the rich were regarded illustrious. At the same time, Itisam sought to assert his pure Sayyid lineage to the Prophet. According to Itisam, the Sayyid were always entitled for power and authority, but they chose to devote their lives to piety and learning. They had traditionally been awarded *jagirs* and *madad i maash* by all ruling powers, the Safavids, Mughals and Ottoman Sultans. At a later stage, when the descendants of Sayyids continued to increase steadily over the centuries, they were given paid employment by the ruling powers. Even then Sayyids maintained high ideals of Islamic morality.¹⁶ It is difficult to justify Itisam's above claims as no records of his family lineage are traceable. It is also not possible to ascertain whether he belonged to those Muslims who came from Islamic lands or was from amongst the indigenous converts. However, his remarks reveal that regional or Indian identity was not part of his *Weltanschauung*, even though he did show some longing to return back to his homeland, Bengal. His identity was certainly Islamic.

Shigarfnama is the first attempt to comprehend and assimilate the western ideas within the framework of indigenous traditions. When Itisam visited Europe, the decline of the Mughal state was a reality and it had made a deep impression on his mind. He lamented the decline of monarchy and consequent rise of various powers. In order to diagnose the cause of the weakening of the body-politic of the empire, he attempted to comprehend the various sources of strength in British polity. This, in turn, led him to explore the British historical past, and he came to view the whole of Europe with a strong historical perspective. His diagnosis of contemporary Indian society, the decline of the Mughal Empire, the rise of numerous independent powers (*muluk ut tawaif*), the wide-prevalent inertia and lethargy among the nobility and aristocracy, was informed by

¹⁶ For the above discussion and an eloquent exposition of the Islamic identity, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 187a-189b.

his understanding of the sources of the British polity and institutions, bound by constitution and law-abiding citizenry.

2.2 *Murtaza Husain Bilgrami*

There were some scholar-administrators who did not have an opportunity to observe the various manifestations of Western civilization in person by visiting Europe, but were witnessing the growth of British power on Indian soil. Their experiences and perceptions were primarily concerned with political aspects — mainly the expansion of British power in India. These writers were not only perceivers of the process of British political ascendancy, but were themselves participants and actors of these events during the second half of the eighteenth century. In this and the next section, we shall examine two of these writers. We start with Murtaza Husain.

Murtaza Husain Bilgrami (1719-1795) descended from the Usmani Shaikhzadas of Bilgram. The Usmanis traced their origins from the Caliph Hazrat Usman and claimed to have settled in Bilgram in the first quarter of the eleventh century when the town was conquered by Qazi Muhammad Yusuf al Usmani al Madani al Kazruni in 1018 A.D. for Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna. He was the first *Qazi* of Pargana Bilgram and since then the office of *Qazi* remained with the Usmanis until the last quarter of the eighteenth century.¹⁷ Murtaza was born in the second decade of the eighteenth century in Peshawar, when the frontiers of the Mughal empire were still intact and Murtaza's father Shaikh Ilahyar (d. 1730) was serving in the province of Kabul — the outpost of

¹⁷ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 156, where Murtaza traces his genealogy and claims to the office of *Qazi* of Bilgram from the eleventh century by citing historical works. The last mentioned *Qazi* was Ahmadullah, who compiled a history of the *Qazis* of the town Bilgram, entitled *Al musajjalat fi Tarikh al quzzat* (Department of History Library, Aligarh. MS. No. 87). For a brief biographical sketch of Mutaza, cf. Buckland, *Dictionary*, pp. 309.

the empire — with Mirza Muhammad Rafi, better known under his title Sarbuland Khan, the governor of the *Suba* during the reign of Farrukh Siyar.¹⁸

Shaikh Illahyar joined the Mughal state service through Prince Muhammad Azim ush-Shan sometime during the last years of Aurengzeb's reign. He was attached to Sarbuland Khan at the *sarkar* of the Prince to look after the latter's *jagir* in Sahenda in Bundelkhand. Later, in the reign of Farrukh Siyar, during the tenure of Sarbuland Khan's governorship of Allahbad, Ilahyar is reported to have held the *faujdari* of *sarkar* Arail and Harhar.¹⁹ Ilahyar served in various provinces; Bengal, Kabul, Multan, Allahabad and Gujarat with Sarbuland Khan as paymaster (*Bakhshi*) of army. On account of his loyal services rendered in the cause of the empire, Illahyar was generously rewarded by Farrukh Siyar and Muhammad Shah. The latter raised his *zat* rank to six thousand, with a high sounding title of Mubarizuddaula Shaikhul mulk i Hind Pahalwan Rustam Zaman Khan, Shaikh Illahyar Bahadur Jung.²⁰ Illahyar is reported to have died fighting against the Marathas in Gujarat.²¹

Murtaza was appointed in his father's position by Sarbuland Khan at the age of twelve, in return for the loyal services that Ilahyar rendered to the empire. Murtaza himself developed such close ties with Sarbuland Khan that he is said to have left a will to his family to serve his superior. He was given the position of *Bakhshigiri* of the *Risala* of his late father.²² Later on, Murtaza accompanied Sarbuland Khan to Delhi where he was honoured with a rank of two thousand and the title of Khan and popularly

¹⁸ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 365-6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 649-50.

²⁰ Cf. *Sharaif i Usmani*, ff. 255-7.

²¹ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 640-1.

²² *Op. cit.* According to the author of *Sharaif i Usmani*, Murtaza was given the post *Bakhshigiri wa harawali*, i.e. duty of heading the van and contingent, in the army of Sarbuland Khan.

came to be known as Ilahyar sani, i.e. Ilahyar II. Murtaza was assigned the *mahals* of Sheoran, Sakrur and Sikandra as his pay, the same areas which were earlier held by Raja Jai Singh on *ijarah*.²³ He served Surbuland Khan at various places like Agra (Akbarabad) and Allahbad until Surbuland's death. Murtaza saw his career stretching over half a century in the service of the empire, from the reign of Muhammad Shah to Shah Alam,²⁴ with various potentates, including the Nawabs of Awadh, Sadat Khan, and the latter's successors Safdar Jang, and Shujauddaula,²⁵ with the latter's *naib* Nawal Rai, Mir Qasim, the then *Nazim* of Bengal Ali Quli Khan Daghistani, Ahmad Khan Banghash nawab of Farrukhabad. With almost all of these rulers, Murtaza was employed for military services. Then, he joined the services of Safdar Jung in response to the latter's *parwana* with a contingent of two hundred *sawars* and *piyadas*. While serving in Awadh he participated in a campaign against Bangash Nawab Ahmad Khan, Marathas and Surajmal, Jat *zamindar* of Bharatpur. In Bengal, Mir Qasim bestowed upon Murtaza the office of *Bakhshigiri*, in the army of Asadullah Khan, who was in charge of the fort of Rohtas. Later, when Raja Kamgar Khan, a local chieftain, occupied the position of in-charge of Rohtas fort, Murtaza continued to serve with Kamgar Khan.²⁶ Upon Mir Qasim's disposition by the British Murtaza followed his master to exile in the Rohilla territories of Bareilly and Anwla. Later on he participated in the battle of Buxar with the army of Mir Qasim.²⁷

²³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 671.

²⁴ Cf. the Preface to *Hadiqat al aqalim*.

²⁵ For the life of Murtaza, cf. *Sharaif i Usmani*, pp. 268-70. The author of *Sharaif* also served in Awadh with Murtaza.

²⁶ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 661.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 612. Murtaza also compiled an account of the battle, called *Loh i Mahfuz*, but this work does not seem to have survived; further reference to *Loh i Mahfuz* on pp. 652 and 679.

Following Mir Qasim's disastrous defeat and the disbandment of his army, Murtaza returned to his home-town Bilgram, where he spent his time in reading and writing. He remained unemployed for almost a decade, when in 1776 he was introduced through Rajab Ali, a native of Barha, to Captain Jonathan Scott (1754-1829), the Persian secretary of Warren Hastings. Scott appointed him as one of his *munshi* (*zumrah i munshiyān*). True to his service gentry lineage and keeping in with the tradition of loyalty to one's superior as inherited from his father, Murtaza sought to cultivate close social ties with his British patron. Murtaza carefully provided a Persian transliteration for Jonathan Scott's name ("Allahbakhsh", i.e. "bestowed by God") and clarified that 'Scott' was the title of his superior's clan.²⁸ Murtaza found his employer to have a scholarly outlook and deep interest in Islamic learning, Arabic, Persian and history.²⁹ On the recommendation of Scott, Murtaza served other British officials, such as Major Paim in his campaign against the Raja of Benares,³⁰ and the Maratha chief of Gwalior fort in Malwa, where, apart from participating in the battle, he contributed to the British officials' Scott and Colonel Camac local knowledge.³¹ He was translator (*tarjuma nawis*) for Paim during his conflict with Raja Chait Singh, when the British sought to depose the Raja. Murtaza attempted to convince the Raja to reconcile with the British authorities. In fact, Murtaza was more of a scholarly colleague than a military assistant, satisfying his master's urge to gain knowledge of indigenous customs and traditions, geo-political, geographical and ecological conditions of various parts of India. Discussions on the above themes between Murtaza and Scott were often oral and

²⁸ For a brief biographical sketch of Jonathan Scott, cf. Buckland, *Dictionary*, p. 379.

²⁹ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 3.

³⁰ For the role of Murtaza in Benares affair, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 676-9.

³¹ For the participation in the Malwa campaign, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 627-9.

occasionally through written communication.³² The topics of interest between the two were fairly wide in scope, ranging from issues such as why the Indian cities of Ahmedabad and Lucknow were not as prosperous as London,³³ to the nature of Christian scriptures.³⁴ Scott often updated Murtaza's knowledge of the wider-world and discussed with him such diverse issues as the Ottoman-Russian relations,³⁵ the Muslim expulsion from Spain,³⁶ the Christian unity against Saladin,³⁷ to the geography of Mysore and the spread of Islam in Malabar.³⁸ Sometimes, Murtaza was commissioned by Scott to inscribe various Persian manuscripts of medieval historio-geographical nature, such as *Subh i Sadiq*.³⁹

Murtaza compiled the *Hadiqat al aqalim*, a geographical-biographical work in 1781, when he had already been in the service of Scott for some time had reached an advanced age. He was writing with an eye on the future of his posterity: "Should it pass before the eyes of British officials he might get pension in his old age and his descendants will be treated with favour by the government of Company."⁴⁰ A first draft of the work was submitted for perusal to Maulawi Darwish Ali of Jaunpur, Colonel

³² *Ibid.*, p. 652.

³³ For details, cf. in this essay the chapter on "Social Perceptions".

³⁴ Cf. in this essay the chapter on "Religion".

³⁵ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim.*, p. 487.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 500.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 609-10.

³⁹ The *Subh i Sadiq* is a comprehensive historical, biographical and geographical work compiled by Sadiq Isfahani in 1638 and dedicated to Jahangir. The copy inscribed by Murtaza in 1783 at Allahbad for Scott is preserved in the Bodleian, Ouseley 342; for Murtaza's statement as scribe of the work, cf. ff. 258b.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 3.

Polier and Scott.⁴¹ On Scott's advice Murtaza included a small portrait of Europe, presented to him as a token of friendship between a European (*farangi*) and a Muslim (*Musalman*). The *Hadiqat al aqalim* ("Garden of Seven Climes") is strongly embedded in Ptolemaic geographical concepts.⁴² It was closely modelled on an earlier geographical-biographical work, the *Haft Iqlim* ("Seven Climes") of Amin Ahmed Razi.⁴³ Although Murtaza Husain modelled his historical encyclopedia on Amin Ahmad's work, he also utilised other available geographical literature, such as the *Ajaib al makhluqat*, the *Masalik ul mamalik*, the *Rauzatus Safa*, the *Ajaib al Buldan*, the *Majma ul ansab*, the *Subh i Sadiq* etc. Yet, what distinguished Murtaza's work from that of his predecessors was the inclusion of western Europe and America in the oikoumenic configuration. For Europe, Murtaza simply included the treatise written by Scott. For India, his inspiration seemed to have come from *Ain i Akbari*. The division of India in its administrative units, as laid down by *Ain*, updated with information from the later work *Khulasat al Afkar*, shows Murtaza's deep interest in India's fauna and flora and its ancient past, a past which principally determined his reconstruction of Indian history. The *Hadiqat al Aqalim* has a strong local flavour, providing folk-lore and folk-tales of various towns and villages on India. It contains rich descriptions of India's provinces, towns and villages, their geographical characteristics, social customs, racial origins, dress, language, popular beliefs of people, historical monuments and places of working. Murtaza's experience of various parts of India enabled him to attempt such details. It

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 504; for the treatise of Scott, cf. pp. 504-33. This treatise was compiled by Jonathan Scott and the same was presented to Murtaza by Scott.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 550-2; the author added a supplement in 1787 describing the Ptolemaic world-view and explained the conceptual framework of his work in terms of the *Jughrafiya* of Ptolemy.

⁴³ Cf. *Haft Iqlim*, Bodl. Elliott 158.

is reasonable to assume that this interest was further stimulated by Jonathan Scott's interest in similar issues and Murtaza's effort to provide Scott with such knowledge.

Murtaza was a deeply religious man with inclination towards mysticism. He discussed various religious matters with a Sufi Shah Munam at Patna. Their discussions included enquiries about the time between death and resurrection (*Tariq i barzakh*).⁴⁴ He was in intimate intellectual contact with scholars of the Firangi Mahal like Abdun Nabi and Maulawi Nizamuddin.⁴⁵ Unlike his father, Murtaza's martial qualities came second to the might of the pen, although he practised archery at Bilgram as a pastime when unemployed. Ghulam Hasan, a town-fellow of Murtaza, admired him for his sound knowledge of history, interest in poetry and medicine.⁴⁶

Murtaza's vision, outlook and mental attitudes were shaped by his long experience of service in the empire. To him, the decline of the empire represented an all-round ruin. He compared the cities of Shahjahanbad, Akbarabad and Allahabad with his prior knowledge of them. He had strong nostalgia for the Mughal past and recalled ostentatious ceremonies of Muhammad Shah's reign, when various *mansabdars* stood in hierarchy to receive their *mansabs* and awards, himself being one of them in the young age of twelve and in the company of his patron Sarbuland Khan. For Murtaza, the old city of Delhi stood no comparison with its present state, which was nothing but heaps of images and relics of past. He recalled the royal ceremonies and display of pageantry which were hosted to receive an envoy of Nadir Shah in the capital city and regretted that the same Shahjahanbad, the capital city which displayed such a grandeur until the time of Muhammad Shah, now lay in utter ruin. However, he also thought that

⁴⁴ For the discussion with Shah Munam, cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 659.

⁴⁵ For the meetings with scholars of *Farangi Mahall*, cf. *ibid.*, p. 155. Also Francis Robinson's article on "Farangi Mahall" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Supplement, Fascicules 5-6 (Brill, 1982), pp. 292-4.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Sharaif i Usmani*, ff. 268-70.

it was because of this luxurious life-style and the display of pomp and ceremonies that the empire now lay in ruin and its capital was depopulated and spoiled. Murtaza reports that the reigning emperor was inclined towards mysticism and was engaged in hair-splitting discussions.⁴⁷ The Mughal past had left deep impression on his memories and consequently most parts of the *Hadiqat al aqalim* consist of reflections and retrospection on this past. Recurrent yearnings for the Mughal glory make Murtaza an antiquarian *laudator temporis acti*. Time and again Murtaza recalls historical anecdotes of the Mughal period, such as how the Hindus of Allahabad still imagined Akbar a reincarnation of a Hindu saint.⁴⁸ Murtaza could still recall that the boundaries of the Mughal Empire stretched out into four climes: its major parts into the second and third climate; in the first Ceylon and in the fourth Kabul; Kashmir originally belonged to Turkestan but since Akbar's conquest it also formed part of the Mughal empire.⁴⁹ Murtaza knew that Kabul had been conquered by Ahmad Shah Abdali; yet, he could recall that the emperor bore the high cost of maintaining an army in the Kabul province,⁵⁰ in order to safeguard the empire from attacks from Iran and Turkey, and that it was a gateway of India, but in economic terms it yielded nothing.⁵¹

At times, the *Hadiqat al aqalim* has a biographical touch, as when Murtaza writes about his family, his marriages, his daughters and sons. He records their date of birth and the names of his sons, like Ghaziuddun "Kambakhsh" (the title added by Scott⁵²).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 665-6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 367. Murtaza discussed the situation of Kabul with a Turkish merchant called Yusuf Beg whom he met in Agra.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁵² For the author's family life under Bilgram, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 152-61.

He also says that he wore cotton produced at Surat,⁵³ and that he used perfume produced in the perfumeries of Ghazipur.⁵⁴ For Murtaza, the process of dissolution of the empire represented vicissitudes of time (*nairangi i zamana*), almost a revolution (*inqalab*). But he acknowledges that the foundations of empire were already fragile: its provincial governors unable to collect revenues for the maintenance of the army began tendering resignation, various local potentates such as Marathas, Jat and Zamindars raised heads in revolt, and the arrival of the British only hastened the process. He closely follows the process of British expansion and simultaneous subordination of indigenous powers in different parts of India over the sub-continent. In spite of his meticulous attention to detail, the analysis of the process is more descriptive and devoid of perception of its consequences. In fact, Murtaza's overall concern remains scholarly and literary and the *Hadiqat al aqalim* remains more an encyclopedia of knowledge with some concern of the wider-world.

It was another contemporary author, writing in similar political atmosphere and social milieu, who concerned himself with the political history of the period and provided a closely argued critique of reasons of British conquest and its impact on various sections of society.

2.3 Ghulam Husain Khan Tabatabai

Ghulam Husain Khan Tabatabai (1719-1806) was born and brought up in an aristocratic family of Iranian origin, who, like innumerable other Iranis, had come to India and served the Mughal Empire for generations. He was born in 1727 at Shahjahanbad, where his father Mir Hidayat Ali was in the service of the Mughal state.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 641-2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 678.

Mir Hidayat Ali first served as the *faujdar* of Bareilly,⁵⁵ then as the *naib nazim* of Azimabad and finally rose to the highest position of *Bakhshi i mamalik* under Shah Alam. It was the time when the empire had already become weak, falling prey to factionalism among its high ruling elite, and the dissensions among the nobility were growing unabated. It was in such circumstances of uncertainty that the bureaucracy began losing confidence in the strength of the state and even more in the monarchy itself. The more manipulative and powerful ruling élite secured high offices from the sovereign figurehead, such as that of the provincial *nazim* and *diwan*, and left the capital city for safer places, where they build their bases. These regional elites attracted hosts of supporters and loyalists, who, having realized that there existed no possibility in the crippled machinery of the empire, eagerly took advantage of such patronage. In this political scenario at Delhi, Ghulam Husain being five years old, his family sold their ancestral house in 1732 and left the capital city Shahjahanabad for Murshidabad. There, they joined Aliwardi Khan, a relation of Ghulam from his grandmother's side,⁵⁶ who was the *nazim* of Azimabad Patna at that time. Ghulam Husain's father Sayyid Hidayat Ali prospered under the patronage of Aliwardi Khan, eventually becoming *naib* (deputy) of the province of Azimabad and acquiring extensive landed estates. In 1745, the father lost his post and returned to Delhi with his family. But he succeeded in entering the imperial service again and was appointed as *faujdar* of Bareilly. Later, he was ejected from there in 1747 by Ali Mohammad Khan Rohilla, founder of the Rohilla power.⁵⁷ Hidayat Ali Khan rose to the highest position in the empire and became *Bakhshi al*

⁵⁵ Cf. *Siyar*, pp. 866-9.

⁵⁶ Ghulam Husain's grandmother was paternal grandmother of Aliwardi Khan.

⁵⁷ For details, cf. *Siyar* pp. 866-9.

mamalik of the emperor Shah Alam and eventually played a conspicuous role in the contemporary events in his capacity as the highest minister of the empire.

Ghulam Husain left Delhi in 1745 for Patna, presumably to settle there, and he married a daughter of his maternal uncle Abd al Ali Khan. There was already extensive family property which Hidayat Ali Khan secured for his sons in the form of state grant (*altamgha*), as well as by direct purchase of more landed property and houses.⁵⁸ There, in 1745, Ghulam took active part in the defense of the city against Mustafa Khan's attack, in the army of Haibat Jang, but without any official appointment.⁵⁹ Very soon, however, in 1745, Ghulam Husain Khan succeeded in entering the service of Saeed Ahmad Khan Saulat Jang, the son in law of Aliwardi Khan. Saeed was serving at the Monghyr district in Bihar, but later was transferred to the position of the *faujdar* of Purnea, an office which he held for seven years until his death in 1754. Ghulam moved with him and was assigned a generous land grant situated in Pargana Sirpur which yielded huge income.⁶⁰ On the death of his patron Ghulam continued to serve his successor and son Shaukat Jang, but with strong feelings of dislike. In 1756, Shaukat Jang rebelled against Sirajuddaula in the battle of Shaukat Jang, but he was defeated and killed. Ghulam Husain, fearing reprisal at the hands of the victor, fled to Benares where he sought refuge along with his other family members, living there already persecuted by Siraj al Daula who suspected them for their loyalty and fidelity. As the successor to the *masnad* of Bengal after Aliwardi Khan, Ghulam was also regarded an instigator of the Shaukat jang.⁶¹ Meanwhile, a revolution (*inqalab*) had taken place in Bengal

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 948.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 536.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 602.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 651.

following the British conquest of the region in 1757. Siraj al Daula was defeated and Mir Jafar Khan, brother in law of Aliwardi Khan, "having been transferred from his bed-chamber half asleep to the *masnad* of Bengal became governor of the province".⁶² Mir Jafar, according to the author himself, had been an old acquaintance of his father, and a childhood friend of his younger brother Naqi Ali Khan.

Ghulam Husain along with his family left for Azimabad with high expectations for power and positions under the new ruler. But quite contrary to their expectations, Mir Jafar too suspected the family and sent orders through the local governor (*nazim*) Ram Narain. However, through the intercession of Kazim Ali, elder brother of Mir Jafar, they were allowed to stay. Through Ram Narain's intercession Ghulam succeeded in salvaging some of his landed property which was located near the district of Monghyr and was almost hereditary in the family until it was confiscated by Siraj al Daula upon the banishment of the family by the latter.⁶³ Subsequently, he involved himself in the politics of Bengal and along with an interest in the developments in Delhi, where his father occupied the influential position of *Mir Bakhshi*. His subsequent role as an intermediary between the various contending groups is a very dubious one — siding now with Mir Qasim and now with the British and trying to gain favour from both sides. The reason behind his enormous calculations was to seek employment with either party and secure his landed possessions which were mainly situated in the regions of Bengal and Bihar. As the time went on, he clearly visualized that there was no chance of employment and his prime concern became the acquisition of more landed possessions. He sided with those whom he considered would protect it from any encroachment. Although he succeeded in getting his ancestral lands restored from Mir

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 642.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 649.

Jafar, he felt insecure amidst the changing political circumstances. It was this inner insecurity which led him to cultivate close ties with local British officials working at the Patna factory, namely Amyatt and Fullarton. Having returned to Patna using the British influence he was able to secure a small allowance from the local potentate Ram Narain for a brief time before he could get possessions of his *jagirs*. In 1759, when Prince Ali Gohar attacked Bengal to bring it under effective control, in the retinue of the Prince was Ghulam's father along with other Mughal grandees. Ghulam threwⁱⁿ his lot with the invaders, but at the same time negotiated a treaty on behalf of the imperial camp (though secretly, as the letter was drafted by him) with the local potentate Ram Narain who was supported by Mir Jafar and as well as Clive.⁶⁴ As the expedition failed, Ghulam Husain incurred the displeasure of Ram Narain and at the same time caused rupture in his relations with the British officials. For the second time Ghulam had to leave Patna and again sought refuge at Benares. During his several months of exile at Benares he had discussions with Shaikh Ali Hazin. Later on, he sought the pardon of Ram Narain and was allowed to live in Patna. Again he sought closeness with the British officials of the Patna factory for his personal safety and security.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, Mir Jafar was being deposed as ruler of Bengal and Mir Qasim took his place in 1760. In 1761, Ghulam succeeded in getting his *jagir* in Monghyr, which in the political unstable situation had again been confiscated by Mir Jafar. This yielded him six hundred thousand *dams* and had been in possession of his family for a long time.⁶⁶

From this time on, Ghulam Husain worked towards promoting the interest of the Company and its officials by regularly providing them with information he could gather

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 670-1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 675-6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

from any quarter, especially from the court of Mir Qasim. At the same time, he continued to humour Mir Qasim, as the *jagirs* were situated in the region which formed part of Mir Qasim's *nizamat* and he threatened to actually resume it, with a promise for compensation elsewhere.⁶⁷ Consequently, Ghulam Husain cultivated friendly relations with ^{the} Nawab, left Azimabad and went to Monghyr, the temporarily capital of Mir Qasim, in 1761. Mir Qasim presented Ghulam with a cash gift of five thousand rupees and also ordered the payment of the arrears of his salary with a view to retain Ghulam's allegiance, largely owing to his intimate contact with the British. Mir Qasim, however, always entertained strong suspicions of his loyalty,⁶⁸ suspicions which were not ill-founded, as the author himself narrates graphically how he passed every information of Mir Qasim's activities and plans to the British officials before Mir Qasim was finally deposed. In 1763 he accompanied Mir Qasim's forces against the British. Mir Qasim, having been defeated, fled and took shelter at Benares. Ghulam Husain sought shelter in the same city where he already found security twice earlier.⁶⁹ There he engaged in discourses with Shaikh Ali Hazin. Later in 1763-4, he fought in the battle of Buxar in the army of Shah Alam, Shujaudaula and Mir Qasim. After the final defeat of the indigenous powers which culminated in the establishment of the British political supremacy in the region, first in Bengal and Bihar and Orissa through the treaty of Allahabad, subsequently in Awadh and finally in Delhi, Ghulam Husain claimed for himself to have proposed and actually secured the treaty after the defeat of Shah Alam and Shujaudaula.⁷⁰ In 1764, Major Hector Munro, the British military official, on

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 709.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 718.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 746.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 749-51.

hearing that Shujauddaula was negotiating with Shahmal, the *qiladar* of fort of Rohtas, to surrender the same fort to the British, contacted Ghulam Husain through Fullarton, in order to secure the fort for the British. Ghulam Husain approached Shahmal the fort commander (*qiladar*) at Rohtas, claimed that Shahmal was under numerous obligations to his family, the fort itself was situated in close proximity to Ghulam's *jagirs* and ancestral lands and finally succeeded in negotiating with Shahmal the *qiladar* and Yaqub the head of the garrison in favour of the British. He impressed upon them the idea that the star of the British was ascendent and it was they who would ultimately prevail and, therefore, it was in the interest of Shahmal and his progeny to ally with the English instead of with Shujauddaula.⁷¹ Shahmal surrendered the fort when Colonel Goddard reached along with British forces as planned by Ghulam with the commander of the fort.⁷²

In 1765, on the recommendation of Fullarton, Ghulam was employed by Sage, an English official to assist in his duties at Benares. In 1765, Ghulam's father expired at Husainabad, a village founded by Hidayat Ali on his ancestral estates. The British government conferred the entire family property upon Ghulam Husain, him being the eldest son.⁷³ In 1774-5, Ghulam Husain became surety for a landlord with whom he was well-acquainted and paid the huge amount of fifty-eight thousand Rupees, an amount he raised by selling his personal possessions including gold and silver jewellery and borrowing the sum of thirty-one thousand rupees from a local banker (*mahajan*). He paid this amount to the revenue officials of *nizamat* of Bengal. Consequently, the revenue-free land-grant (*altamgha*) was surrendered to the local banker to pay-off the

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 758.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 776-7.

⁷³ *Op. cit.*

debt incurred. Because the *altamgha* was the major source of sustenance of the author's family, its surrender to the banker left the family without any means of maintenance.⁷⁴ It was in these financial distresses that Ghulam met General Goddard, when the latter came to take charge of the fort of Chunar situated on the bank of Ganges near the Benares region. Goddard fixed an amount of three hundred rupees per month for the maintenance of Ghulam's family.⁷⁵ Since the income from the area did not suffice for his personal maintenance, Goddard thought to join the court of Asafuddaula as the latter was planning to train his army on the European model. For this purpose, Goddard sent Ghulam to Lucknow in order to obtain permission from the Awadh government and, at the same time, get the approval of the English Resident for the said project. Ghulam spent fourteen months in Lucknow. The project was approved, but when the Resident John Bristow was succeeded by Middleton, Asafuddaula was obliged to abandon his scheme.⁷⁶

In 1778, like numerous displaced elites, Ghulam Husain left for Calcutta with Colonel Goddard. There, he tried to ingratiate Warren Hastings the then Governor-General. He met him three times and explained to him the reasons of his coming to Calcutta, but in vain. The British were so preoccupied with their personal affairs and ongoing wars with the indigenous powers, complained Ghulam Husain, that they had not time to look into the affairs of Indians. General Goddard, who was trying to seek approval for his own project, was obliged to leave Calcutta as commander of the armies which were to proceed from Lucknow and Allahabad against the Marathas in Deccan.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 948.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 949.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 949-52.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 805.

Consequently, in a state of utter despondency, Ghulam came back to Azimabad. He declined the job he was offered by Governor-General Hastings, the position of *Mir Munshi* to supervise all the affairs related to the department of correspondence (*Dar al Insha*). He also declined to act as envoy (*safir*) in the Deccan (presumably) in the court of the Maratha chief, on the excuse of "old age" and the responsibility towards his family.⁷⁸ In 1780, Ghulam again visited Calcutta in expectation of employment. He met Warren Hastings who was sympathetic and promised to fulfil his wish, but Ghulam apparently could never succeed in finding any regular employment.⁷⁹ During the journey he worked on the draft of the *Siyar al muta'akhkhirin*.⁸⁰ The exact year of his death is not known.⁸¹

Several other works are ascribed to him, but Ghulam's fame chiefly rests on his magnum opus *Siyar al muta akhkhirin*, i.e., "The history of the modern times".⁸² It is a comprehensive history of India from the death of Aurengzeb until 1781. It is a history written in the form of an autobiography, unrivalled in detail, with the author carefully

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 806-7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 813-6.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 813.

⁸¹ Ahmad bin Muhammad lived at Azimabad in 1809-10. Not only did he have close ties with Ghulam's family, living in the same city at the time, but he also used *Siyar* as a source for his own *Mirat al ahwal*, a history of Bengal and Bihar in previous decades. Ahmad bin Muhammad refers to Ghulam as already dead by this time. Cf. *Mirat al ahwal*, f. 110.

⁸² For the details of the manuscripts which had survived, as well as details on the numerous printed editions and translations in English and Urdu, cf. C.A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, Vol. I, Part 1 (London, 1939), pp.625-40. This book also contains a detailed annotated biography of Ghulam, based on the *Siyar* itself. Cf. also Elliott and Dowson, *The History of India*, vol. viii, pp. 194-7, Buckland, *Dictionary*, p. 165, and Abd al Hayy Lakhnawi, *Nuzhat al Khawatir* (Hyderabad, 1957), pp. 199-200. For a more recent biographical sketch of Ghulam, cf. Bazmee Ansari, "Ghulam Husain Khan Tabatabai", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Ed., Vol II (Brill, 1965), pp. 1091-2. A complete edition of the *Siyar* was published by Nawal Kishor Press at Lucknow in 1866 and 1897. In this essay, references are made to the Lucknow editions; both are similar in pagination.

describing each and every event minutely.⁸³ It was appreciated by Macaulay and was also utilised by James Mill in his history of India. To quote Elliot, "In fact the native side of the history of Ghulam Husain Khan's days as it appears in the works of English writers, rests almost entirely upon his authority".⁸⁴ It became the subject of William Jones' discourse who, speaking about the possibilities of a reconstruction of India's historical past, took account of the work with a note of admiration for its compiler: "As to the Mogul conquest with which modern Indian history begins, we have ample account of them in Persian, from Ali of Yezd and the translation in Turkish books composed even by some of the conquerors to Ghulam Husain whom many of us know personally and whose impartially deserves the highest applause".⁸⁵ Jones hypothesised that "though his unrewarded merit will give no encouragement to other contemporary historians, who to use his own phrase to myself, may like him consider plain truth as the beauty of historical composition".⁸⁶

In 1801, Ghulam was introduced to the British reading public with similar appreciation as bestowed upon the author by William Jones: "The public will naturally be curious to know the sentiments of an independent native of Hindustan endowed with a great share of penetration, sagacity, knowledge and spirit respecting our conquest of his country and the policy pursued by our government in Bengal previous to the year 1781".⁸⁷ The article was followed with a brief biography of the author derived from

⁸³ It was rendered into English by Mustafa, originally a French named Raymond who embraced Islam and resided many years in Calcutta from 1789. Cf. *A translation of the Seir Mutaqharin or view of modern times* by "Mota Manus", i.e. Haji Mustafa, 3 Vols. (Calcutta, 1789). This work was reprinted at Calcutta in 1902-3 in 4 Vols., then in 1926 and more recently at Delhi in 1980.

⁸⁴ Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, vol. viii, p. 198.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Works of Sir William Jones in Six Volumes*, Vol.I (London, 1807), pp. 148-9.

⁸⁶ *Op. cit.*

⁸⁷ Cf. *Asiatic Annual Register for the year 1801*, "Characters", pp. 28-32. The biographical sketch is translation of Siyar's pp. 948-51, albeit in condescend form.

Siyar al mutakhkhrin's English translation by Haji Mustafa. The next volume of the *Asiatic Annual Register* carried extensive portions of the *Siyar* related to the establishment of British political supremacy in Bengal and its impact on various strata of society, from peasants and artisans to the bureaucratic class. The editor explained to his readers that the author had treated the subject "with a freedom and spirit, and with a force, clearness and simplicity of style very unusual in an Asiatic writer and which justly entitle him to preeminence among Asiatic historians".⁸⁸ Ghulam's severe criticism of the Company's policies, his description of the break-down of the administration and the adverse effects of the dual administration, following the grant of *Diwani* by Shah Alam to Clive in 1765, were published in the *Asiatic Annual Register*.⁸⁹

It was ^{not} only the East India Company, its officials and their policies which became the subject-matter of Ghulam's critical acumen. The indigenous power elites, the rulers of Bengal, Sirajuddaula, Mir Jafar, Mir Qasim as well as Muhammad Reza Khan, all were personally known to him. He analyzed their regimes with similar critical approach. These regional power elites found dispassionate treatment from his pen. No doubt Ghulam had personal bias in his treatment of these subjects. Because his personal experience with them was not a happy one, he approached almost all of them, but with the same negative result and consequent disappointment. When he was writing the *Siyar*, his disillusion with the British were also over — hence the complete negative picture.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸⁹ For a detailed exposure of Ghulam Husain's view about the Company, cf. *Asiatic Annual Register for 1802*, the article entitled "A view of the Political State of Bengal in comprehending an examination of the English Government and policy in that country, previous to the year 1780", pp. 83-111. The article is by a Gholam Hossein Khan, a native of Hindustan, taken from his historical works *Seir Mutakharin*, i.e. "A view of Modern Times". The above English translation corresponds to *Siyar*'s Persian text, pp. 825-44.

Ghulam Husain was a perceptive genius endowed with an intellect capable to delve in serious issues. He was equally gifted with the power of pen. Letters drafted by him on behalf of any party concerned had the desired effects. His literary acumen drew praises from Warren Hastings who could distinguish Ghulam's writings. Ghulam's major preoccupation was with the high political issues. The *Siyar* is not a history of contemporary Bengal alone, but of the entire Indian subcontinent. When the author visited Calcutta, he came to know about the Anglo-Maratha conflicts and the wars with Hyder Ali, the ruler of Mysore state. There at Calcutta, he could catch the echoes of the American war of independence, its reasons, its course and implications of the Anglo-French rivalry for political supremacy in India. His is an account of the gradual expansion of British political power. The actual course of an otherwise complex phenomenon, alliances and counter-alliances among various contending groups, the intermediary role of various political elites are subjects treated in vivid detail.

In his entirely negative and harsh assessment of various actors in the contemporary political struggle there were perhaps only few exceptions: Fullarton, John Elliot and General Goddard stood for the author's highest applause, the last because he stood with him in a similar condition of utter financial insecurity and helplessness. To quote: "Amiruddaula General Goddard Bahadur Fateh Jang, had no equal among the entire English people, probably the best among entire mankind of these days, for all his acquaintances and probably for almost every Indian the best person".⁹⁰ Judging him by modern standards, Ghulam was a "collaborator" who sided with any party to ensure his survival. He invariably ended-up as a suspect in the eyes of every party he allied with. It is the story of those who were trying to survive amidst political upheavals before the

⁹⁰
Cf. *Siyar*, p. 949.

establishment of a new regime. The author left ample material to construct the fate of him and those who were like him.

2.4 Mir Muhammad Husain and Abu Talib

Mir Muhammad Husain ibn Abdul Azim Isfahani (d. 1790) and Abu Talib bin Muhammad Isfahani (1752-1806) can be placed within the similar spectrum of socio-intellectual experience in the eighteenth century India. As their names indicated, both were of Persian descent. Both their fathers migrated from Persia to India in the beginning of the eighteenth century, and were associated with the court of Awadh which attracted numerous scholars and administrators from Persia. Both had served in the regional courts of Lucknow and Murshidabad. Both seemed to have moved to Calcutta in search of job, when these regional courts of Murshidabad Awadh and Hyderabad came under growing British influence, and a large number of the displaced service gentry was left with little choice for employment.

Muhammad Husain's profound interest in sciences motivated him to visit Europe in order to acquaint himself with the modern developments in these subjects in the West. In the preface to his work Muhammad Husain observed: "I had great inclination for acquiring knowledge, specifically the philosophical learning (*ulum i hikmi*) which was sometimes known as the real sciences (*ulum i haqiqah*). The changes in religious beliefs did not have any direct bearing on these subjects".⁹¹ Muhammad Husain made it also clear that his stimulation to learn the European sciences came from his social intermixing with the British officials in Bengal:

⁹¹ For Mir Muhammad Husain's travelogue, cf. Storey, *Persian Literature*, p. 1144, and Mir Muhammad Husain Isfahani, *Risalah i ahwal i mulk i Farang u Hindustan*. The latter manuscript originally belonged to the Mulla Firoz Library Collection, but it now forms part of the K.R. Cama Oriental Research Library, Bombay, MS. No. R. IV-51. The references in this essay will be made to this manuscript. For the above remark, cf. ff. 1.

During my long social interaction and discourses, meetings and conversations I discovered about new thought (*aqwal i jadidah*) and fresh discoveries (*tahqiqat i taza*), about celestial mechanics, heavenly bodies, the nature of terrestrial globe, and life on earth, discoveries of innumerable, hitherto unknown islands in the southern quarter of the globe, New World of America. Therefore, I attempted to elaborate upon some of these, such as the nature of the fixed stars (*harkat i sawabit*) and of the planets, the nature and shape of the planets etc. At first sight, this knowledge might cause immense amount of bewilderment, especially to those who were steeped in Greek traditions of philosophy (*falasafa i yunani*) and Greek cosmology (*hayyat i aflak*) the rules of which were embodied in the *Almajest* (*Kitab i almajesti*) [...] Since the mysteries and principles of the new sciences were not yet diffused in India, consequently, to satisfy mental curiosity, I undertook a trip to the countries of Europe (*bilad i farang*) in order to enjoy direct access to the mines of ideas and knowledge.⁹²

He undertook this trip in 1775. the whole journey lasted for more than two years, including a year's sojourn in England, during which time he also visited France. On the return journey he stayed in Jeddah and Egypt. He claimed for himself a great amount of fame in Alexandria "as famous as Joseph".⁹³ Muhammad Husain stayed in London for the most part of his sojourn where he socialised with scholars and scientists, as he himself claimed. He accompanied a British official named Elliot. His visit to Europe was motivated by his wish^{to} acquaint himself with Western scientific advances in the domain of astronomy and anatomy. In the words of Ghulam Husain the author of *Siyar*:

His intention was to acquire knowledge, to see the world, and to enquire into those discoveries which the learned of those parts had made in the sciences of astronomy, in the choice of simple medicine and in the art of compound ones, in the qualities of plants and the functions of heavenly bodies.⁹⁴

It seems that Mir Husain acquired reasonable knowledge of the English language, enabling him to translate books from English into Persian. Upon his return, he proposed a project of translating European scientific works into Persian for the dissemination of scientific knowledge among Indian literate sections. But his enthusiastic intellectual call

⁹² Cf. *Risalah*, ff. 1-2b.

⁹³ "Like Joseph, I was famous in that city": cf. *Khulasat al Afkar*, f. 340a, where the verse from Mir Husain's *Masnawi Saqinama* is cited.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Siyar*, p. 798.

could not evince any response from notables of the city, as people's mind were preoccupied with Hastings trial affair in 1778.⁹⁵

The other contemporary writers, namely Abd al Latif and Abu Talib also described him as a person with considerable aptitude for the exact and pure sciences. Abd al Latif comments that Muhammad Husain was a man of intellect and scientific temper, who had special devotion for rational subjects (*aqaliyat*). He excelled in Arabic sciences (*ilm i arabiyyat*) and the subtleties of the Persian language (*daqaiq i zaban i farsi*), the science of medicine (*fan i tibb*), the mathematical sciences (*ulum i riyazi*), the natural sciences (*tabi'i*) and metaphysics. According to Abd al Latif, he was famous among the contemporaries for his extra-ordinary capacity in the art of argumentation, disputation and eloquent speeches.⁹⁶ But Mir Husain's non-conformist approach in religious matters was unacceptable to Latif who wrote:

He did not identify himself with any one religious school or belief; some times he declared himself a *Shia*, sometimes prided as philosopher (*hakim*) and at the other identified with the *mutakallimun* theology.⁹⁷

In fact Mir Husain's liberal attitudes in religious matters was an anathema for Abd al Latif who explained the reasons for Mir Husain's attitude as "self-conceitedness and an outcome of mental pervertedness".⁹⁸ Latif remarked that Mir Husain's religious eccentricism amounted to absurdities. His heterodoxy and unconventionalism verged on heresy and he spread false belief (*fasaid i aqaid*). Therefore, people kept away from

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 798. The above explanation is given by Ghulam Husain, who deeply regretted the failure of Mir Husain's mission.

⁹⁶ For the brief life-sketch of Mir Husain, cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 204. Also, *Khulasat al Afkar*, ff. 340a-342a, where the author provides specimens of Mir Husain's *Diwan* and *Saqi nama* and reports that Mir Husain had a *Diwan* of six hundred verses in varied forms of poetry — *masnawi*, *ghazal*, and *qasidah* — and one *masnawi*, entitled *Saqinama*.

⁹⁷ For the above comments on Mir Husain, cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 204.

⁹⁸ *Op. cit.*

him.⁹⁹ But, for Abu Talib, he was a man of lofty disposition (*azad tab*) an Aristotle of Islam (*Arastu i Islam*).¹⁰⁰

Upon his return from Europe, Mir Husain lived in Calcutta where he moved in the scholarly circles with men like Abu Talib, Abd al Latif and Tafazzul Husain. In Calcutta he socialised with British scholars and the administrators and also collaborated in the translation of the *Hidayah*, the well-known book of the Muslim jurisprudence, from Arabic into Persian.¹⁰¹ Mir Husain's contribution to the cause of the Asiatic Society's researches was acknowledged by William Jones in "the sixth discourse on the Persians".¹⁰² Towards his last days he moved from Calcutta to Lucknow his home town. He died on his way to Benares.¹⁰³

Muhammad Husain's major interest was astronomy, human anatomy and physiology, but it was mainly an exposition of Newtonian physics that the author sought to provide to his curious readers. His travelogue is written in both Arabic and Persian, and the language employed is clear, precise and persuasive, but the travelogue is regrettably brief. If the author did not have an aptitude for elaborate writing, he possessed another talent: eloquent speech and power of articulation and rhetoric,

⁹⁹ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 204.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Khulasat al Afkar*, f. 340a.

¹⁰¹ This project was initiated upon the desires of Warren Hastings, the Governor-General in 1776. The three other scholars who participated in the translation were Ghulam Yahya Khan, Mulla Taj al Din, and Mulla Shariatullah. Cf. *Hidayah i Farsi* and, for more details, M.A. Hukk, H. Ethe and E. Robertson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscript in the Edinburgh University Library* (Hertford, 1925), pp. 150-3.

¹⁰² According to Jones, Mir Husain introduced *Dabistan i Mazahib*, "the School of Religions", to William Jones: "A fortunate discovery, for which I was first indebted to Mir Muhammad Husain, one of the most intelligent *Muselmans* in India, has at once dissipated the cloud, and cast a gleam of light on the primeval history of *Iran* and the human race, of which I had long despaired and which could hardly have dawned from any other quarter". Cf. Lord Teignmouth, *The works of Wiliam Jones with the life of the author*, 13 volumes, Vol. III. p. 110.

¹⁰³ According to Zulfiqar Ali Mast, the author of *Riyaz ul wifq*, Mir Muhammad Husain of Lucknow died in 1205 near Benares and left a *Saqinama* and a *Diwan* of about 6000 verses. He had no *Takhallus*. Cf. Sprenger, *A Catalogue*, p. 167.

command of words and language. He seemed to have popularised the above subject through his learned verbal discourses. The fact that a large number of different versions of his travelogue had survived in far-flung cities of India, further reinforces such a conclusion.¹⁰⁴ All of these treatises, brochures found in the libraries of Indian cities such as Hyderabad, Bombay, Patna, Rampur and Aligarh were compiled on request of friends. Muhammad Husain did not write about Europe extensively, it seems his powers of oratory were stronger than his literary acumen. Nevertheless, it is to him that we owe first intellectual portrait of Europe. He sought to project modern scientific developments of Europe tracing their origins to the Age of Discovery.

Muhammad Husain remains a unique case, whose visit to Europe was motivated purely by the wish for intellectual pursuits. He certainly contributed to the growing interest in the West among his numerous fellow scholars, of whom Abu Talib was closest to him. It is Abu Talib who provided us with a graphic picture of the West.

Abu Talib ibn Muhammad Isfahani was born in 1752 at Lucknow, when the city had become the cultural centre of north India under the Nawab-Wazirs of Awadh. His father Haji Muhammad Beg Khan was an Isfahani by birth and Azerbaijani Turk by descent. Like numerous Iranis, Muhammad Beg Khan came to India following Nadir Shah's invasion of Persia. He became a close associate of Safdar Jang and continued to rise in the official hierarchy until the death of his patron. Jang's successor suspected him

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There exist numerous manuscripts of Mir Husain's travelogue in the libraries of the Indian subcontinent. Upon his return, he was sent a written request by a friend to unfold the experiences of his journey and present the fresh ideas (*arai jadidah*) that he would have acquired. To satisfy that friend's inquisitiveness, the author consequently compiled a treatise in Arabic. Later on, when he moved to Hyderabad (Deccan), on the request of some other friends, he translated the treatise into Persian, "so that more people would be benefitted from its perusal"; cf. *Risalah*, ff. 3. The Arabic version of the *Risalah* is preserved in the Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, *Arabia Ulum*, No. 33. This version also contains a Persian translation, *Risalah Hayyat Jadid Angrezi*, University Collection, No.18/1, *Farsiya Ulum*. These manuscripts belonged to Farid ud Din Ahmad, grand-father of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who presumably was the enquirer Mir Husain referred to as the "intellectual friend". Another treatise compiled by the author, entitled *Risalah Khalij ul Maghrib mashhur bi haiati-alam*, is in the State Central Library of Hyderabad. This treatise, in turn, was compiled on the request of Maulawi Abdul Qadir.

of an alliance with Muhammad Quli Khan against the claims of Shujauddaula, successor of Safdar Jung; consequently Muhammad Beg Khan went to Murshidabad and entered the service of the rulers of Bengal.

Young Abu Talib lived in Lucknow, where he was educated by distinguished scholars. The majority of them came from Iran, as the city was a centre of men of letters from all parts of India as well as from Iran. The expenses incurred for the education of Abu Talib were paid by Shujauddaula on account of old familial ties with his father. In 1766, Abu Talib left for Murshidabad to join his father, who was serving Muzaffar Jung *naib* of Bengal. There, Abu Talib married in the Nawabi family.¹⁰⁵ Upon the accession of Asafuddaula in 1775, Abu Talib returned to Awadh and was appointed by Mukhtaruddaula, *naib* of Awadh, as revenue officer, *amaldar*,¹⁰⁶ of Etawah and the adjoining districts. Within few years, Abu Talib had to face dismissal from his position due to the death of his patron Mukhtaruddaula, who was succeeded by a new *naib*, Haider Beg Khan. He remained out of employment for one year. Apart from the fact of factionalism at the court of Awadh, of which Abu Talib complained, it was precisely the time when the British control of the state administration had become stronger.¹⁰⁷ The Resident exercised unlimited power and authority over the resources of the Awadh state. Colonel Alexander Hannay was assigned revenue management of Gorakhpur and Abu Talib served him as assistant for three years, when his superior was

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 4b-5a.

¹⁰⁶ For the meaning of the term *amil*, cf. H.H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms and of useful words occurring in official documents relating to the administration of the Government of British India* (London, 1855); hereafter, *A Glossary*.

¹⁰⁷ Abu Talib recorded his experiences of working with Colonel Hannay in his *Tafzih al Ghafilin*. For the Persian edition of this work, cf. Abid Reza Bedar, *Tafzih al Ghafilin* (Rampur, 1965). This work was earlier translated by W. Hoey, *History of Asaf ud Daula Nawab Wazir of Oude*, a translation of *Tafzih ul Ghafilin: A contemporary record of events connected with his administration*, compiled by Abu Talib, an official of the day, translation from the original Persian by W. Hoey (Allahabad, 1885; reprinted in Lucknow, 1971).

dismissed on charges of corruption and mismanagement. Abu Talib also lost his job and lived for one year without any employment. Later on, he was deputed by Nathaniel Middleton the British Resident at Lucknow to suppress the rebellion of Raja Balbhadar Singh, a local chieftain. In 1787, Abu Talib was forced to leave Lucknow, when his maintenance allowance of six thousand rupees per year — which he was receiving in spite of having lost his official position — was stopped by Haider Beg Khan, the deputy of *nawab*. Abu Talib left for Calcutta to appeal to Cornwallis, the Governor General. At Calcutta, Abu Talib sought in vain to regain his position with the assistance of Cornwallis and John Shore. He thus spent almost a decade in unemployment.

Abu Talib's account of his life is characterised by a feeling of insecurity, despondency and disappointment, a result of the constant unemployment and consequent financial insecurity. It was in this state of utter poverty (*afat i ghurbat*) and unemployment (*bekar*) that he undertook the compilation of his first literary piece, the *Khulasat al Afkar*,¹⁰⁸ on the advice of Mir Muhammad Husain, though he had been collecting material for the compilation of such a work for over twenty years.¹⁰⁹ In 1789 he edited a well-known poetical collection of Hafiz and, at the same time, prepared an abridged edition of the *Tazkira Ali Quli Khan*.¹¹⁰ In Calcutta, Abu Talib was known for his poetic taste; he could recite verses of Khaqani and Anwari *extempore*. Abd al Latif considered him a *littérateur*, an incomparable critic with an understanding of the subtleties of language, and a good historian.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ For the circumstances leading to the compilation of *Khulasat al Afkar*., cf. *Masir i Talibi*, pp. 8-9; also *Khulasat al Afkar*, f. 357a and ff. 2a-3a.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Khulasat al afkar*, f. 2b.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Mirza Abu Talib Khan (ed.), *Diwan i Hafiz Shirazi*, The work of Hafiz, with an account of his life and writings (Calcutta, 1771).

¹¹¹ Cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, ff. 204b-205.

It was during his stay at Calcutta that he devoted his full mental energies in the cultivation of art and literature and most of his works, with the exception of *Masir i Talibi*, were compiled during the last decade of the eighteenth century. During that time Abu Talib was advised to undertake a trip to England by Richard Johnson, an "old friend who had knowledge of Persian and Hindustani (*Farsi wa Hindi*) to dispel his gloom and despondency".¹¹² He left Bengal aboard a Danish Vessel in February 1799, via the Cape of Good Hope and St. Helena. He disembarked at Cork in Ireland and then travelled to Dublin. After a short stay in the Irish capital, he reached London where he lived most of the time. From London he visited Windsor, Oxford and several great country-houses, notably Blenheim, Stowe and Sezincourt, in the company of his English friends who entertained him socially and provided financial support. It was not only the English notables who entertained him extensively, Abu Talib managed to get Royal favour and noted carefully in his travelogue:

During my stay in England, I frequently attended the drawing room of both the King and the Queen and in every instance, both these illustrious persons did me the honour of addressing me; and although I constantly had a gentleman with me as an interpreter (*tarjuman*), they condescendingly commanded that I should answer them; and they were pleased to say that they perfectly comprehended my English.¹¹³

In England he socialised mainly with the British upper class, including Warren Hastings and those British who had served in India and whom Abu Talib knew personally. For instance, Captain Baker,¹¹⁴ whom Abu Talib got to know during the expedition against Ghulam Muhammad Rohilla, and Sir George Shee, who earlier served as paymaster (*bakhshi*) at Farrukhabad and was employed in the financial department of Ireland. Sir George Shee acted as an interpreter between Abu Talib and Lord Cornwallis,¹¹⁵

¹¹² Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 7a.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, ff. 64b-65a, 132a.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 33b-34a.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 55.

Colonel Wombell, who was *bakhshi* of Lucknow for several years,¹¹⁶ Charles Cockrell, who carried private trade in India and lived like an aristocrat,¹¹⁷ Richard Johnson, a merchant (*mahajan*) of London,¹¹⁸ John Macpherson, who served as Governor of Bengal and was then member of the Parliament and leading life as a noble,¹¹⁹ and Sir Charles Rouse Boughton who also resided in India and could reasonably understand Persian, to the effect that he was asked by the King to act as an interpreter.¹²⁰ Another person who officiated as interpreter between Abu Talib and the King was Colonel Symes, who resided in India and was ambassador at Pegu, and compiled a book on his experiences of the place.¹²¹ Abu Talib lived in England popularly known as "Persian Prince", a man of high social standing, dignity and distinction. His reception in British society is evident from his magnum-opus *Masir i Talibi* and also corroborated by the contemporary British literary journal which devoted special attention to the traveller, announced the routes of his homeward journey and his progress in learning English. It was recorded: "He has now acquired a significant knowledge of English to read it to his own satisfaction and make himself understood in conversation".¹²² Similarly, an obituary note to the author had this comment: "In future travellers were discouraged to undertake any journey to Europe in expectation of similar hospitality". Because "perhaps

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 55b.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 66b.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 101b-102a.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 79b.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 93b.

¹²¹ Abu Talib acknowledged generous financial help from Colonel Symes. Cf. *ibid.*, ff. 84.

¹²² Cf. *Asiatic Annual Register for the year 1801* (London, 1802), Miscellaneous Tracts, Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, p. 100.

there is no example of any traveller who has been received in England with equal distinction."¹²³

In England he met Sir William Ouseley, the devoted Persian scholar,¹²⁴ and on the return journey, in France he met the French Orientalist De Sacy and the German Orientalist Hammer-Purgstall. He presented them both with his poetical compositions. Subsequently, these were published in the scholars' periodicals.¹²⁵ This was the best present from a poet to his admiring hosts. In fact Abu Talib's earliest impressions of English society are in poetical form — he used *ghazal* and *masnawi*. London, its historical monuments, St. Paul's Church, the opera-houses, the roads, the market place, the industrial township, river Thames, the India House, various coffee houses and play-house, the beauty of the English ladies, all became subjects of the poet's composition. Similarly, the towns of Oxford and Cambridge as distinct seats of learning are described vividly in poetry.¹²⁶

Abu Talib returned to India via land-route. This journey took him to Paris, Lyons, Marseilles, Genoa, Leghorn, Malta and Istanbul. He passed through Anatolia and via Diarbekir and Mosul to Baghdad, where he visited the Shia sanctuaries at Karbala. Finally, he embarked from Basra for Bombay where he stayed with Jonathan Duncan,

¹²³ A translation of *Masir i talibi* was serialized from September 1807-February 1808 in the *Supplement to Calcutta Gazette*.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 93b.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 178.

¹²⁶ The only known extant manuscript of the above is preserved in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Cf. *Diwan i Talib*, Bodl. Pers. e.9, ff. 71b-123b. Some of these verses were included by Abu Talib in his *Masir*; some were translated by his pupil George Swinton and published as *Poems of Mirza Abu Talib Khan* (London, 1807). Another poetical composition in praise of London was *Masnawi Surur Afza*; its only manuscript is preserved in Edinburgh University Library, No. 324. This contains a portrait of Abu Talib which was engraved for a European magazine. The above manuscript was also copied by his pupil George Swinton.

Governor of the city.¹²⁷ He reached Calcutta by the sea-route in August 1803, and began the compilation of *Masir*, to instruct his countrymen of "each useful things of that kingdom (*har chiz i mufid i an mulk*) after careful scrutiny and ascertaining the truth". He desired to get his message across the Muslim world (*ahl i Islam*), who were unaware of the developments in the West, such as the model of educating the children (*tarbiyat i aulad*), the social living and the polite social manners (*adab i tamaddun*), the system of government (*riyasat i an mulk*), and the arts and sciences (*sanai wa badai*) which were often not contradictory (*mutbayin wa muta ariz*) to the laws of Islam (*Qawanin i Islam*). These developments, to his mind, were the reasons of prosperity of European nations.¹²⁸

He felt constrained in his efforts on account of complete lack of resources.¹²⁹ He wished to accompany his work with visual presentations, like drawings of various mechanical inventions (*ashkal i alat*) and industries (*imarat i sanai*), thus facilitating the understanding of his ideas.¹³⁰ He had some more reasons for frustration, mainly the wide-prevalent wrong customs among the Muslims throughout the Islamic world. The state of self-deception was further perpetuated by two underlying factors: those who were rich and affluent, on the one hand, lived with a feeling of complacency. The Muslim upper classes considered their own limited knowledge to be perfect and complete. The masses, on the other hand, the common people, lived in a state of insecurity and were so excessively preoccupied with the problems of livelihood that had

¹²⁷ For a description of Bombay, cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 249-250 and 247a-248b; for the hospitality of Governor Duncan, cf. 253b-254a.

¹²⁸ For the motives behind the compilation of *Masir i Talibi*, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 2-3b.

¹²⁹ On reaching Bombay, the author did not even have the essential amount for his maintenance; cf. *ibid.*, f. 255b.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, ff. 3b.

no leisure to acquire philosophical ideas and notions and to explore fresh experiences — an innate desire in every human heart.¹³¹ Abu Talib possessed an intellect capable of penetrating the realms of higher thought. His picture of British society was mainly of upper class during his sojourn in England. His *Masir i Talibi*, still remains one of the most comprehensive account of the West by an Indian Muslim.¹³²

2.5 Abd al Latif bin Abi Talib al Musawi al Shushtari

Abd al Latif bin Abi Talib al Musawi al Shushtari (1758-1806), another contemporary analyst, was born in Shushtar, a small town of Khuzistan in Persia. He belonged to a distinguished Sayyid family which had a well-rooted tradition of learning and

¹³¹ *ibid.*, ff. 2b-3a.

¹³² There exist innumerable copies of the *Masir i Talibi* in manuscript form, both in Indian as well as European libraries; most of these are similar in content. An English translation was soon brought out by Charles Stewart in two volumes in 1810; cf. Charles Stewart, *The Travels of Mirza Abu Talib Khan in Asia, Africa and Europe during the years 1799-1800, 1801, 1802 and 1803*, 2 Vols. (London, 1810); second edition with additions, 3 Vols. (London, 1814). The translator added a note: "[That] Orientals can and do write in every kind of style, and on every subject, can only be doubted by those who are ignorant of their language". Cf. vol. 1, pp. xi-xii. Stewart's English translation was soon followed by its French version: translation (from the English) (i) *Voyages de Mirza Abu Talib Khan....Suivis d'une refutation des idees qu'on a en Europe sur la liberte des femmes d'Asie; par le meme auteur. Le tout traduit du persan en anglais, par C. Stewart...et traduit del' anglais en francais par M.J.C.J* (Paris, 1811); (ii) *Voyages de Mirza Abou Taleb Khan ...trad. del' angalis en francais par Ch Malo* (Paris, 1819). The French translations were followed by Germans; cf. *Reise des Mirza Abu Taleb Khan durch Asien, Africa and Europa, in den Jahren 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802 und 1803. Nebst einer Widerlegung der Begriffe, welche man in Europa von der Freyheit der asiatischen Weiber hat. Aus dem Franzosischen* (Vienna, 1813). An abridged Persian edition was made by his sons; cf. *Masir i Talibi, Travels in Europe and Asia, by Mirza Abu Taleb Khan*, published and edited by his sons Mirza Hasein Ali and Mir Qudrat Ali (Calcutta, 1812). It was also abridged by David Macfarlane, *The Travels of Mirza Aboo Talib Khan, in the Persian Language*, abridged by David Macfarlane (Calcutta, 1827 and 1836). There exists an Urdu translation which, though it is only of some of its parts, it is very accurate: Mirza Ali Reza Mahzun Muradabadi, *Masir i Talibi* (Muradabad, 1904). The latest edition of *Masir i Talibi* was brought from Tehran: *Masir i Talibi ya Safarnamah i Mirza Abu Talib Khan*; this edition was prepared from the manuscript lodged in the B.L. No. Add. 8145-47. Other manuscripts, such as the ones in the Bodleian Library, Ouseley Add. 108, and the India Office, Ethe 2727 SOAS 42624 and Aligarh Muslim University Library Subhan Allah Collection *Siyahat fi farsi*, No. 910/1, are similar. In this essay references are made to the Persian manuscript lodged in the Bodleian Library.

scholarship. His ancestors had migrated from Jazair, a small town in Ottoman ruled Iraq to Iran during the early Safwid rule.¹³³

Abd al Latif's great-grand father Nimatullah Jazairi (d. 1701) settled in the town of Shushtar, where he was the congregational prayer leader (*Imamat i Juma wa Jamaat*), and served as a judge (*Qazi*), teacher and preacher. The office of juris-consult (*Shaikh al Islam*) almost became hereditary in the family, along with other related functions such as the judicial office (*Qazi*). Judges, prayer leaders and teaching were the family monopoly. The family was associated with the Saf^awid state in the propagation of faith and establishing *Sharia* in the region, i.e., to uphold the primacy of the law and *Shariat* in the region. Apart from holding professional religious offices, they wrote text and commentaries *inter alia*, supervised pious endowments, collected taxes. In turn for these services they enjoyed revenue-free grants of land, made to them by the Safwid rulers.¹³⁴

Abd al Latif commenced his studies at the age of five and completed his preliminary education in his home-town, Shushtar. He meticulously described various text-books he pursued for different subjects as well as places and teachers. His education included well known books and treatises on grammar and logic, such as the *Shafiya* and the *Kafiya* of Ibn Malik, and the *Shara i Chighmini*. He additionally read the Holy *Qur'an* and learned calligraphy. Abd al Latif claims for himself a studious disposition and to have acquired great intellectual sagacity for discussion and disputation (*mubahisa*

¹³³ A whole section of *Tuhfat al alam* is devoted to a description of the author's life in Iran, his education, and the circumstances that led to his migration to India; cf. ff. 81b-98a. There exist various copies of the above work: B.L. Add. 23, 533 and Bodleian Pers. MS. Elliot 382. (For details, cf. Storey, *Persian Literature*, pp. 1123-4.) The work was first published in Bombay (1843) and subsequently Hyderabad (1880, second ed.). Recently it was edited by Samad Muwaihhd and published in Tehran (1984). Almost all manuscripts and published editions are similar. In this essay references will be made to the manuscript in the Bodleian Library, with the exception of the supplement, for which references will be made to the Hyderabad edition.

¹³⁴ *Op. cit.* Latif provides us with a full family pedigree, including professions and achievements, from Nimatullah to his own times.

wa munazara) with the learned men who were celebrated for their knowledge of particular subjects. But he had an innate inclination towards rational subjects and his favourite studies were logic (*mantiq*), astronomy and astrology. For mathematics, he studied the *Khulasat al hisab*, for astronomy the *Sharah i Chighmini*, and the *Zij i Ulugh Begi*. Abdul Latif's interest in astronomy was aroused by his uncle Sayyid Abdullah who popularized these subjects, astronomy and astrology and drawing of astronomical tables (*ilm i nujum was istakhraj taqawin wa hayyat*) in the town. Similarly, Abd al Latif's interest in comparative religion was motivated by his scholar uncle Abdullah who associated with the scholars of Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, in order to learn about their faiths.¹³⁵ Despite the discouragement of his father, Sayyid Ali Talib, Latif enjoyed poetry and invariably sought the company of those who were known for their poetical taste. He often cited verses of the classical poet Rumi to strengthen his point of view. After he completed his education in his home town, Latif embarked upon a long series of travels in search of knowledge and scholarly contacts. Before reaching India he visited Dizful, Khurramabad, Laristan and Kirmanshah. At Kirmanshah, he attended the lectures of Muhammad Ali Bihbahani on Shia jurisprudence.¹³⁶ Latif was eventually sought by numerous desirous students, to whom he taught astronomy, astrology and some treatises on preparation of astronomical tables. He earned his livelihood by teaching these students, mostly sons of notables and nobles (*azam wa ayn*) of the city of Kirmanshah. Latif spent two years in Kufa and reached India via the Gulf cities, Bushire and Masqat to Calcutta in 1788-9 at the age of thirty, along with a

¹³⁵ For a biography of Sayyid Abdullah, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 49a-54.

¹³⁶ The text of Shia law which Latif read was *Musallam al usul*.

merchant Shaikh Muhammad Ali bin Shaikh Muhammad.¹³⁷ It was a time when entire Iran was passing through political turmoil following the death of Karim Khan Zand. Latif did not specify the reasons for his migration except the financial distress and the political turmoil of Iran. His home-town Shushtar had a severe draught leading to price-rise; labourers and peasants suffered terribly. There is a constant complaint in Latif's narrative, that "time has changed" or that "time was unfavourable", rendered in Persian phrases like *zaman kaj uftad, na hunjari i zamana*.¹³⁸ Besides, Latif's family had a long established tradition of service to the Mughal empire. His uncle, Sayyid Nimatullah, served under Muhammad Shah and assisted Raja Jai Singh in the compilation of *Zij i Muhammad Shahi*, and died at Peshawar. Abd al Latif's brother, Sayyid Jafar, was serving in the court of Awadh as a physician (*tabib*). His elder brother, Muhammad Shafi visited Murshidabad where he was welcomed by Muhammad Reza Khan, to raise funds for a canal construction in Iraq, but unable to succeed in his objective he returned to Iran. Latif's uncle Razi bin Muhammad had migrated to India where he sought close ties first with Abdul Mansur Khan. Later on he migrated to Hyderabad where he enjoyed the court-patronage of Nizamul Mulk Asaf Jah. Razi bin Muhammad had two sons, Sayyid Abul Qasim and Sayyid Zain al Abidin. The latter served in the regional state of Mysore, where he was deputed on various diplomatic missions by Tipu Sultan, while the former reached the high position of Chief Minister of the Hyderabad state and received the title of Mir Alam. As the Mughal patronage already began to decline from the reign of Muhammad Shah, one of Latif's cousins was

¹³⁷ Abd al Latif did not provide details of his trading concerns in India, except a small biography of his wealthy merchant-fellow and friend. Abu Talib notes that Latif made enormous profits by supplying brocaded silk *zari* of Bengal to merchants of Basra, but it was Shafi who was actually dealing in business of trade and supply. For Latif it was a means of subsistence. Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 250b-252b.

¹³⁸ *Tuhfat al alam.*, ff. 88b.

unable to find a job at the imperial court of Delhi and went back to Iran where he was appointed *Shaikh ul Islam* by the reigning sovereign Karim Khan Zand.

Upon reaching India Latif visited Murshidabad and married one of the daughters of his uncle Mir Muhammad Mehdi, who had come to India before Latif. For some time, Latif was engaged in trading activities at Calcutta.¹³⁹ Later on, through his cousin Mir Alam Latif, he received the high diplomatic office of *Wakil* to represent his state at Calcutta — the capital of the East India Company.¹⁴⁰ Mir Alam exercised considerable degree of influence in politics and internal matters of the Hyderabad state.¹⁴¹

In his capacity as *wakil* of the Hyderabad state, Latif spent almost one decade in Calcutta. His high position gave him direct access to well-placed British officials including the Governor-Generals. He was well informed of any changes in the Company's administration such as appointments and transfers of British officials. Latif perceived his role as "answering the British government when interrogated on the matters of concern and interest (*sawal wa jawab ba sarkar i Inglisya*)."¹⁴² Latif considered his job of *wakalat* as the worst curse of his life. In fact his attitude towards the state was characterized with certain ambivalence. On the one hand, he lamented the decline of the Safawids and the Mughals, recalling how these emperors had been the

¹³⁹ *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 250b-252.

¹⁴⁰ A well-established tradition in the Mughal empire was that its high-placed officials were often represented at court by their representatives. In continuation of this tradition, each of the regional rulers, the *Nawabs* of Awadh, the *Nizam* of Hyderabad, the Tipu Sultan and the Marathas had their respective *wakils* to represent them at the imperial court. From 1772 onwards the Company also started despatching as well as receiving *wakils* from the regional rulers. Mir Qasim, upon his accession as the Nawab-Nazim of Bengal, appointed Mirza Shamsuddin as his *wakil* to the court of Shah Alam. Cf. *Siyar*, pp. 697.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Latif's remarks on Mir Alam's relations with Lord Cornwallis, *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 200a. For the crucial role of Mir Alam in the internal matters of Hyderabad, cf. Mohibbul Hasan, *Tipu Sultan*, pp. 248, 251, 253, 254.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, ff. 200-201; Latif was issued a certificate *Sanad i Wakalat* to represent his state.

liberal patrons of scholars and *ulama*. The fact that the dynasty of Qutub Shahi, rulers of Golkunda, offered patronage to scholars from various parts of the world, such as Arab and Ajam, was still fresh on his mind. He regrets the decline of state patronage deeply and compares the situation of the Islamic world with Europe, noting that scholars like his uncle Sayyid Abdullah could flourish only in Europe, where extensive state patronage was available in the form of state grants. On the other hand, he shunned any proximity to the ruling group. Latif had a natural disinclination for diplomatic jobs, as they were not suited to his intellectual bent of mind. He therefore remained preoccupied with his literary and intellectual pursuits.¹⁴³ It was his office of *wakil* and his long residence in Calcutta that exposed him to the wider world and the various manifestations of British life. He could cultivate extensive contact with the British administrators and scholars, such as Sir William Jones, William Chambers, Ruben Burrows and Richard Johnson. For Latif, it was mainly the scholarship and learning of these British officials which invariably concerned him, he paid least attention to their administrative skills. It was his major concern to associate himself with scholars to further his own scholarly interest. He cultivated intimate relations with Tafazzul Husain and Abu Talib. With Tafazzul he spent hours in exchanging ideas and views (*muzakara*) at Calcutta. With Abu Talib he remained in regular correspondence while the latter visited England. It seems that Abu Talib's scholarly letters constituted one of the sources of knowledge about the European political system and other aspects of the British culture. Latif provided liberal financial help to Abu Talib in the latter's trip to Europe.¹⁴⁴

Latif came to India around the age of thirty when he would have already attained a certain degree of maturity in outlook and thought. His *Tuhfat al alam* bears the

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, ff. 201a.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 250-2 for Latif's biography.

testimony of its author's scholarly refinement and sophistication. The book is a narrative, written in autobiographical form, which indicates that the author was taking regular notes, evidently comments about British social life derived from close observation in Calcutta. Later on, a supplement was added on request of Ahmad bin Muhammad 1804-5 at Hyderabad. Latif's long stay in Calcutta and perceptive mind enabled him to present a clear picture of English domestic life in Calcutta, how ladies and gentlemen dressed and wore their hair, ate and regulated their life with watches.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, he could also write about British sponsored institutions such as the Calcutta Madrasah, the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the postal services, the Freemasonry and technical aspects to which he was exposed in Calcutta, such as the ship-building industry. His long diplomatic career put him in good stead to analyze the reasons of British political expansion in India and present an acute analysis of British diplomatic techniques and methods devised to take-over independent regional Indian states. He analysed the entire process with detachment and satirical humour. On the other hand, his deep admiration for Western progress in various fields was powerfully informed from his own understanding of the reasons for the decline of the Islamic states of Persia and India. The *Tuhfat al alam* was written in sober, factual and concise style. It was recognized as a piece of erudition and learning by the contemporaries.¹⁴⁶ It was utilised by Sir William Ouseley for a historical geography of Khuzistan — the province which gave birth to Latif. Ouseley appreciated Latif for his scholarly achievement "as a man of considerable learning, one who by learning had divested himself of the prejudices and enlarged his knowledge of the world."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Cf. in this essay the chapter on "Social Perceptions".

¹⁴⁶ For Abu Talib's comments on *Tuhfat al alam*, cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 250b.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Sir William Ouseley, *Travels in various countries of East, particularly in Persia in 1801, 1811 and 1812*, Vol. I (London, 1819), p. 148.

Latif's world-view was confined to scholarship. At the same time he was excessively conscious of the social background of all those with whom he intermixed. They were invariably scholars or administrators who belonged to aristocratic groups, the *ashraf ayn* and *Umara wa ayn*, i.e. the nobility and notables. Latif's consciousness for social origins extended to his British friends as well.¹⁴⁸ Masses of common and under-privileged people could never enter in his vision of the world. At personal level, Latif was a deeply religious man, but avoided casuistic interpretation about principles and practices of *Sharia* in day to day life. He seems to have paid little attention to ongoing debates and conflicts between the *Akhbaris*, the literal interpretationist and the more liberal minded *Usulism*, though in matters of expediency he consulted with the jurisconsult (*mujtahid*) and after self deliberation followed what was most appropriate. In cases of a clear difference he inclined towards the *Akhbari* school.¹⁴⁹ There was another friend and a younger contemporary of Latif who was concerned with such issues and it is now to him that we will turn.

2.6 Ahmad bin Muhammad Bihbahani

Ahmad bin Muhammad Bihbahani (b. 1777) belonged to a well-known family of religious scholars of Iran. Ahmad's grand-father Aqa Muhammad Baqir Bihbahani (1705-90) was founder of the Usuli School in Iran.¹⁵⁰ By origin and education a member of the Ulama class, Ahmad was born and brought up in Kirmanshah.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. in this essay the chapter on "Social Perceptions".

¹⁴⁹ For the position of *Akhbari* and *Usulism* in India, cf. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiism*.

¹⁵⁰ For a biographical sketch of Muhammad Baqir Bihbahani, cf. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiism*, pp. 32-3.

Ahmad's father Aqa Muhammad Ali (d. 1802 *circa*)¹⁵¹ was a teacher and a preacher. He served as the leader of congregation (*Imam*) as well as the Friday prayers (*Imamat i Juma*) in Kirmanshah, at a time when Kirmanshah became a centre of learning during Karim Khan Zand's rule and when peace was restored to the crisis-ridden Iran. Ahmad received education at his father's *madrshah*. He went through the usual course of instruction, read the Holy *Qur'an* and treatises on grammar and etymology at the age of eight. Later on he studied other subjects: mathematics, logic, rhetoric and scholastic theology (*kalam*), works on Shia law and jurisprudence, such as the *Sharah i Islam*, the *Zubdatul usul*, the *Musallam ul usul* and the *Jam i Abbasi*.¹⁵² (The last was composed by Shaikh Bahauddin Amuli (1548-1622).) He further explored these subjects with scholars known for teaching *manqulat*.

Having completed his education, Ahmad began to write, mainly on religious issues, at the age of fifteen. Before reaching India, he visited several cities of Iran and Iraq, like Kazma'n, Hillah, Najaf, Qum , Hamadan, Yazd and Tun, associating himself with scholars and occasionally taught. He left Mashhad for India in 1804 via Bandar i Abbas and Musqat and reached Bombay in 1805. There he was welcomed by Jonathan

¹⁵¹ For the life of Muhammad Ali, cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 89b. Latif attended the latter's lectures on Muslim law and jurisprudence and himself taught scientific subject in this seminary *en route* to India. Latif also reported that Muhammad Ali was engaged in writing tracts on law and jurisprudence.

¹⁵² The course of instruction in the *madrshah*'s of India and Iran was more or less similar; so were the relevant works read by both Shia and Sunnis; but books on law and jurisprudence read by Shia scholars were different than those read by the Sunnis. For Ahmad's education, cf. *Mirat al Ahwal*, ff. 33a-33b. This work was compiled during the author's stay at Azimabad Patna in 1808-10. (There exist numerous copies of this work: British library, Add. 27,052, India Office library D.P. 748 and Khudabakhsh Oriental Public Library (Patna), Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, University collection, No.182; all were consulted by me and were found similar in content. In this essay reference is made to the Aligarh Muslim University manuscript.) The entire work is written in the form of an autobiography. The author devotes a full chapter to his ancestors and their achievements. For his life and education, his travels in Iran before his arrival in India, cf. ff. 32b-48b. Before writing this work at Patna in 1808-10, the author had already written no less than fifteen other works. For details, cf. *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 111b-112a. All of these works are small treatises on religious issues. No trace of the author exists later than 1810.

Duncan, the governor of the city.¹⁵³ In the case of Ahmad his reasons for migration were similar to other Persians reaching India in the eighteenth century. He specifically mentioned financial distresses and search for better means of livelihood.¹⁵⁴ He complained of his finances and the high prices of essential commodities like rice and cooking oil at Bandar i Abbas.¹⁵⁵ Upon arrival in India he felt relieved and appreciated India's fauna and flora, quoting Amir Khusrau Dihlawi for India's prosperity.¹⁵⁶ Ahmad visited several regional capitals including Hyderabad, Faizabad, Lucknow, Dacca and Murshidabad. At Murshidabad, he got married. In all these places Ahmad was well-received and respected primarily because of his family reputation for religious scholarship. He was eagerly sought by the nobles and notables of the city for advice on various religious matters and for clarification on issues related to *Sharia*. This, in turn, led him to compile brochures and treatises in response to these queries. Although Ahmad seemed to have enjoyed a fair amount of social respectability, he failed to seek patronage with any of the regional rulers, either because he faced severe competition from the Indian *Ulama*, who were better acquainted with local protocols and, therefore, excluded their Iranian competitor,¹⁵⁷ or because there was already little place left in the crippled machinery of these states to accommodate a newly arrived scholar. According to Ahmad, he preferred Azimabad as a permanent place of residence, as its notables and upper-classes were more pious and God-fearing in comparison to Murshidabad, where people were completely deviated from religious virtues. In 1808,

¹⁵³ For his early life and travels in Iraq and Iran before reaching Bombay, cf. *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 32b-48b. For his meeting Jonathan Duncan, f. 63b.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 43a.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 47a & b.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 50b-51a.

¹⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*

Ahmad settled down at Azimabad, calling the town a paradise of India (*Jannat al Hind*). There he taught in the local madrasah of Saif Khan and led prayers, supported by the notables of the city. At Patna Ahmad enjoyed influence and respectability in upper-class social circles which consisted mainly of erstwhile Mughal nobility. At the same time, he was sought by the British officials working in the administration of Patna, among them being Hawkin, the judge of city (*sahab i adalat*), and Henry Douglas, the judge and magistrate (*sahab i adalat diwani wa faujdari*). Ahmad claimed that a special messenger (*harkara*) was appointed by the city administration to take care of his needs. He admired Hawkin's knowledge of Persian and Arabic and admired these officials for their concern with the social welfare of the people.¹⁵⁸ Apart from teaching, Ahmad was sought by scholars for his advice and comments on their literary compositions.¹⁵⁹

Ahmad was mainly sought by sons of notables for teaching religious subjects (*ulum i Sharai*), mainly books on Muslim law and jurisprudence and on the request of local notables led Friday congregational prayers in the mosque of Saif Khan (though reluctantly, as he was an *Akhbari*).¹⁶⁰ Muslim law, jurisprudence and theological discussions were all abiding concerns of Ahmad. At the same time, he had excessive professional consciousness which is exhibited from his concern to produce the text of *Ijaza*, permission to teach from well-known teachers with whom he studied that particular subject, as proof of ability to pursue the teaching profession. This concern either stemmed from a feeling of insecurity about future developments or his wish to lay claim to an educated background. He carefully enumerated his writings and various

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 105-106. For the Governor's orders to appoint a caretaker, f. 107.

¹⁵⁹ Syed Ahmad Ali Khan submitted "*Risala dar taqsim i aql wa maratib*" for Ahmad's comments. Cf. *ibid.*, f107b.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 109b-110a. Ahmad also had students from the Hindu community. He explicitly mentions his student Munshi Ram Chand, who studied *Akhlaq i nasiri*, a popular work on Ethics from Ahmad; cf. f. 81a.

compositions with dates and reasons of compilation, to strengthen his position as a teacher and probably also as a jurisconsult. By origin, education and inclination a member of the *ulama* class, Ahmad had more interest in subjects which fell within the domain of *manqulat*, or *ulum i Sharia* as the author himself put it.¹⁶¹ Occasionally he taught books on mathematics and ethics.

Nevertheless, Ahmad's major preoccupation was with the religious aspects of life from the stand-point of a preacher. Any deviation from the *Sharia* in society was vehemently criticised by him. It remained his overriding concern that nothing against the Islamic laws should be practised publicly or at personal level. He lamented the Muslim aristocracy's inclination towards poetry and openly censured the *Nawab* of Awadh for disregards towards the *Shariat*. His high-minded concern with the doctrinal issues is evident from his writings. Some of these were written in Kirmanshah, Najaf and Qum, during his travels. He wrote mainly in response to the queries addressed to him, and the treatises are titled accordingly: the *Jawab masail i Faizabad* ("Answer to the queries of Faizabad"), the *Risala Quwwat la yamut* which was concerned with the Muslim obligation to perform prayers and keeping fast, while the *Risala dar jawab i Murshidabad* was written in response to questions related to day-to-day observance of the *Sharia*, put forward by notables of Murshidabad. The *Tarikh nek wa bad ayyam* ("a history of good and bad days") was written on the request of Asafuddaula's mother, while the *Tanbih al ghafilin* ("admonition to negligent") was written in Lucknow to exhort Muslims for virtue. A clearly didactic tone is discernable in these works, the tone of a preacher, reformer and moralist.

¹⁶¹ For the names of his students and the books they were taught, cf. ff. 109b-110a. These were books on Shia law and jurisprudence, Sharai Islam and Zubdat ul usul Muallam ul usul, as well as his own writings on the subjects. The students mentioned are sons of erstwhile nobility. Following the decline of Delhi, a number of noble families shifted to Patna. The son of Ghulam Husain, author of *Siyar al Mutaakhkhrin*, is mentioned as one of the students; cf. *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 109b-110a. For the text of the nineteenth work by the author, cf. ff. 111b-112a; for the text of *ijaza*, cf. ff. 112a-113a.

The reasons for the compilation of the *Mirat al ahwal i jahan numa* were different, as is evident from the choice of the title. It was a "World Reflecting Mirror", therefore, wider in scope. It was to contain an account of the European systems of government, their military organisation, customs and traditions. The book's prime *raison d' être* was towards the East India Company's political and military domination of India, to "awake the neglectful" (*tambih*) and "to warn (*ibrat*)" the readers. Ahmad's discourses on socio-cultural life of Europe are primarily based on the textual information available to him in the *Masir i Talibi*, the *Tuhfat al alam* and the *Siyar al mutaakkhirin*, apart from occasional references to discussions about the British system of government with Sir John Shore, known as Lord Teignmouth, then Governor-General. Ahmad's major concern lay in the reasons of the British occupation of India, the process of subordination of regional states to the political ascendancy of the East India Company. The British conquest of India was an all consuming interest and recurrent theme of Ahmad's autobiography. His attitude toward the Company's domination was resentful and openly denounced its behaviour and attitude toward regional potentates, such as Asafuddaula and Tipu Sultan. At the same time, he criticized those whom he considered responsible for furthering the Company's cause in the Indian courts in unrestrained language. The Company's administration of justice and system of revenue realization were subjects of his strong disapproval and disapprobation.¹⁶²

Ahmad bin Muhammad and Abd al Latif's cases are unique among the writers we have dealt so far. Both descended from similar social backgrounds, their families were essentially religious elite, belonged to intermediate strata of society and occupied ecclesiastical offices in the Safvid Iran. Both were exposed to similar cultural milieu,

¹⁶² Cf. *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 141-148.

yet the two men were very different in outlook and perceptions. Such a difference is evident in their concerns from the beginning: Ahmad sought to emphasize Muslim religious law and jurisprudence in his studies, Latif showed greater inclination towards logic and sciences, i.e., what constituted the *maqulat* in the Muslim curriculum of education. For Ahmad, the *Sharia* was not only central to his *Weltanschauung*, he also thought and strove that it should be an over-arching ideology for society. Ahmad's concerns were more with society, this being explained from the fact that in Islam religion manifests itself not only in theology but in a divinely inspired law by which all civic affairs are ordered. Theoretically Islam does not permit any division of life into secular and religious, social and political affairs. Because of the extension of Muslim religious law to familial, commercial, educational and administrative concerns, the *Ulama* concerned themselves with every department of human activity from the minutest details of personal purification to the largest issues of politics. This underlying factor explains Ahmad's concern for the socio-cultural life of the West and its political hegemony over the Islamic world.

Both writers observed the irremediable decline of the empires. That of the Safvids in the land of their birth, Iran, and that of the Mughals in their adopted land, India. Both were exposed to a wider world and could view European expansion in a global perspective. To a great degree, their interest in European culture itself was motivated by a wish to understand the sources of its power and in turn to diagnose the weakness of the Islamic world. Both concerned themselves with the growing European hegemony on the Islamic East, the Russian aggression on Georgia, a Qajar-ruled province, the Anglo-French rivalry in Egypt, the British encroachments in the Ottoman empire's territories and the annexation of the Crimea in 1783, and, most important of all, the growing British economic and military power in India. Yet, interestingly enough, both perceived

the process of European geographical expansion in their own characteristic way. For Latif, it was an expression of growing strength of the European nations which emanated from their well-regulated government, military technology and over-all technical advances and scientific developments. Ahmad saw the entire process more in conventional terms and instead of a perceptive attitude it appeared as a reaction. He saw it the result of widely-prevalent moral degradation and resultant lethargy and negligence among the Muslim ruling elite, as the Europeans succeeded in reducing them to a state of subordination. Conversely speaking, it was an incapable ruling class and a degenerate nobility and aristocracy which could not withstand the onslaughts of a more dynamic and powerful West. We will analyze their views in greater detail in the following chapters. At the moment it is pertinent to establish what these writers meant by "Europe".

3 THE WORLD-VIEW

OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY WRITERS

References to Europe's history or geography do not appear in the Indo-Persian literature until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, when direct contact evolved. In the Islamic geographical tradition the entire inhabited globe had been divided into seven climes, called *Haft-Iqlim*, largely based on the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic concepts. Indian scholars continued to employ this system, with its celestial spheres and epicycles, sometimes using it in a variant form called *Haft Kishwar*. It was purely a geographical classification without any cultural and political implications. European countries were located in the seventh climate, but, except for Russia and occasionally Austria and Hungary, without the mention of any country. The entire emphasis remained on the Eastern hemisphere. (However, among the West European countries, Spain, called *Al andalus*, was well-known and its erstwhile Muslim dynasties were treated at length.¹ Greece and its philosophers equally found an eminent place, along with the ancient Indian philosophers and the learned men of Islam.²)

The Indo-Persian literary writings provide no parallel to the Ottoman geographer Katib Celebi and his cosmography, *Jahan numa*, nor to Piri Reis's delineation of the southern coast of America. The Indian scholarly world remained immune to European geographical discoveries, as well as to the changes in ancient geographical concepts and

¹ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 493-500.

² Cf. *Lubb us siyar u jahan numa*, ff. 393b-396a.

notions. Claudius Ptolemy's book on geography, known as *Jughrafiya*, and his work on Astronomy, known as *Almagest*, were still the leading academic sources for geographical concepts. The arrival and settlement of the Portuguese on the coastal regions of India remained a largely marginalised affair. From the early decades of the seventeenth century other European nations began to follow the Portuguese. The English established their factory at Surat, followed by the Dutch in Surat and Goa. By 1676 the French operated a factory at Pondichery. Small trading companies were founded by Denmark and Sweden and a Danish factory had existed on the south-east coast at Tranquebar since 1620. The Indian Ocean was buzzing with the European merchants, adventurers and travellers.³

Fragmentary information on contemporary Europe was available to the Mughal elites through the missionaries and travellers as well as the European envoys who visited the Mughal court. There are instances in European accounts of travellers being interrogated by the Mughal nobility and royalty about their countries, societies and their systems of government. Monsorrato was reported to have satisfied Akbar's curiosity as to the geographical relationship between Portugal and India with the help of an atlas. Atlases, globes and maps of Europe were being imported by the European traders into India. In fact, globes formed an important item of import to India to meet the growing demand for this item among the Mughal nobility. Nonetheless, the fact remains that no attempts were initiated to bring Europe's geography into the existing indigenous frameworks or even to indigenize the globes and maps. It is not our purpose here to explain the reason for the profound ignorance of the historical geography of Europe until the period of our enquiry, we are rather concerned with the question as to how it was

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The presence of Europeans in the Indian Ocean and Far-Eastern countries such as Java, Sumatra, Japan and China was noticed by a Mughal historian only in the early eighteenth century. Cf. *Ajaib al Buldan*, ff. 1a-5b.

perceived by the authors under study at the close of the eighteenth century following the establishment of a direct contact.

3.1 The Idea of Four Continents and the Rise of Europe

Muhammad Husain seems to have been the first among the writers under study who sought to delineate the place of Europe in the world.⁴ Murtaza Husain provided similar information, which he culled from a treatise by Jonathan Scott. This treatise described the geo-political configuration of all the four continents with exactitude. It dealt with the European countries, their circumference, territorial extent, capital cities, main agricultural and industrial products, population, mode of government, military strength and their colonial possessions in America.⁵ This treatise soon found its way among the elite circles. It set such a vogue that it continued to be produced by some of the curious writers until the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶ Abd al Latif and Ahmad bin Muhammad's accounts seem to have been largely derived from the earlier writings done by Muhammad Husain and Murtaza Husain.⁷ Itisam had his own discourses on the subject.⁸

Abd al Latif explained that the philosophers and learned men of Europe had divided the universe into four divisions (*qismat*), namely Europe (*Yurup*), Asia (*Ashya*),

⁴ Cf. Muhammad Husain, *Risalah*, ff. i-7b. The Arabic version as well as its Persian translation contained a similar picture of Europe. Cf. *Risalah ahwal i farang* (Arabic version), ff. 1-5a, and *Risalah hayyat i jadid i angrezi*, ff. 12a-14a.

⁵ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 503-23. For a similar detailed description, cf. *Mirat al ahwal i jahan numa*, ff. 113-122. Ahmad bin Muhammad seems to have based his account on that of Murtaza's, although he also seems to have perused Abd al Latif's account.

⁶ Abu Talib also reproduced this treatise of Jonathan Scott in his earlier work *Lubb us siyar u jahan numa*, ff. 393a-473. The author referred to it in his *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 161b.

⁷ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 118a-118b, and ff. 176ba-185a; also *Mirat al ahwal i jahan numa*, ff. 113b-132b.

⁸ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 101b-103b, and ff. 162b-168a.

Africa (*Ifriqia*) and America (*Amrika*), the last being the newly discovered continent, while the other three consisted of the known parts of the inhabited globe, *Haft Iqlim*. Abd al Latif sought to find the origins of the word *farang*. He opined that it came from the French, for, when France enjoyed predominance over other European countries, it had extensive contacts with Iran and Turkey, whose people may have coined the term to apply to the French. However, the word came to be applied to all Christians. With the passage of time, the Persian-speaking people replaced the sound 's' (*sin*) with 'k' (*gaf*) and the term became *farang* instead of *fransi*. Eventually it applied not only to people, but also their countries, although the Christians (*nasara*) themselves called their countries collectively Europe (*Yurap*).⁹ Abd al Latif further endeavoured to delineate with exactitude the place of Europe in a geo-political configuration along with the other three continents. He wrote that Europe covered all countries of *farang* (*mamalik i farang*), and a few cities of Turkey (*Rum*), such as Istanbul (*Istambol*). Geographically speaking, Europe was ice-bound with an immense ocean at the northern end, while towards the south it was surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea (*bahr i rum*) which separated it from Africa. On the eastern side, Europe's boundaries were contiguous with Asia, while on the western side it was surrounded by the ocean which lay between Europe and America.¹⁰ Muhammad Husain explained that all Europeans were Christians (*millat i nasara*) and the "People of the Book" (*ahl i kitab*). They spoke different languages, but it was Latin which was their common ancient language.¹¹

⁹ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff.118a. We are not sure about Abd al Latif's explanation, but the Arabic term *Afranj* was in use in medieval Persian writings and its Persianized form *Farang* was also used alongside. For instance, the compiler of the *Samarat al falasafa*, Abd al Sattar bin Qasim Lahori, used the term *farang* and, on a similar pattern, *danayan i farang* for the European scholars.

¹⁰ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 118a. For a similar geo-political delineation of the continent, cf. *Lubb us siyar u jahan numa*, ff. 393b.

¹¹ Cf. *Risalah*, ff. 4.

Itisam, too, noted that it was the languages of Germany and Italy that were sweet and sonorous and also studied by the British as a source of classical learning.¹²

All these authors considered it essential to include a brief portrait of the other three continents in their descriptions, in order to complete the geography of the known world. Asia included well-known countries, such as Turkey, India, Syria and China (*Chin wa Khata*), as well as a few parts of Russia. On its northern boundaries it was bounded by a large ice-bound sea. Towards the south by the Indian Ocean. In the east it had the Aegean Sea (*bahr i muhit*), while towards the west its boundaries were contiguous with Europe.¹³ Abd al Latif wrote that Africa was the epithet given collectively to the countries of Sudan, Egypt and the *Maghrib* (i.e., Morocco and Tunis), bounded by the Mediterranean Sea (*bahr i rum*) which separated it from Europe. Its eastern ends were surrounded by a vast sea (*bahr i muhit*), called the "Southern Seas", which separated it from America and Europe.¹⁴ Similarly, the geographical setting of America was delineated with precision and care. Itisam felt satisfied when he examined America on the map of the world and found it territorially only one part less than the seven climes, i.e., the known part of the world. Abu Talib sought to display his knowledge of expanding geographical horizons by actually attaching a map of the inhabited world to the synopsis of his world history.¹⁵ Latif explained that America constituted the southern quarter of the inhabited globe. On the eastern side, it had a vast ocean which separated it from Africa and Europe, while in the westerly side, it was

¹² Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 102.

¹³ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 118a.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 118a. For a brief outline of the countries in the African continent, cf. *Hadiqat al Aqalim*, pp. 514-6, and *Mirat al ahwal i jaha numa*, ff. 123-4.

¹⁵ Cf. *Lubb us siyar u jahan numa*, ff. 393.

separated from Asia with an ocean and again in the south it had a sea which was ice-bound.¹⁶

Our authors sought to view Europe in its historical perspective. They sought to explore the developments in the life of its people that gave Europe a separate geographical, political and social identity. They also attempted to comprehend the intellectual milieu within which these changes occurred. These writers realised that European developments were internally generated by an ineffable European spirit, *sui generis* the cause of Europe's expansion overseas and also the reason for its present predominance. At the same time, implicit in this discussion of the historical past of Europe was the idea that it was not important enough to become part of their discourse in earlier times, although unlike America, Europe was known to them. This perception of the gradual emergence of Europe to its present position of pre-eminence is evident in the case of Muhammad Husain and Itisam, who emphasised Europe's development in the sixteenth century. Abd al Latif and Mir Husain also hypothesised that the reasons for Europe's present eminence could be sought in the past, and alluded to the Middle Ages, the waning of feudalism, the rise of national monarchies, the Reformation and the Age of Discovery, although they did so without using any of these terms or any exact Persian equivalent, as they had none. Latif opined that for centuries Europe witnessed mal-administration, wars, and blood-letting, on account of religious differences, until there arose about a dozen or so national monarchies of large (*Saltanat i uzma*) and small sizes (*riyasat i sughra*) which still existed in a similar way.¹⁷

The sixteenth century was thought to be the seminal period which had changed the course of European history. Itisam saw a clear link between improvements in the

¹⁶ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 118b.

¹⁷ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff.120.

methods of navigation and the ship-building industry and the expansion of Europe. The ship-building industry was the first which underwent changes and improvement. Itisam carefully noted various European artifacts and skills which made oceanic travel possible. He wrote that the European built ships which were capable of long-distance voyages and improved nautical instruments, such as the mariner's compass, the quadrant, the astrolabes, the pilot-books, the portolani and the cross-staff for taking astral bearings and establishing latitude, as well as the chronometers. Among all these instruments he could identify only one by name, the mariner's compass. It was this instrument which Itisam reckoned, made the oceanic voyage possible.¹⁸ For 'compass' he could also provide a Persian equivalent, *qiblanuma*, since, as Itisam wrote, it was being used by the Muslims to fix the direction for their prayers towards *Kaba*.¹⁹ Latif, following Itisam, considered the compass a major technical instrument which he termed *qutubnuma*.²⁰ Itisam appreciated that royal patronage greatly encouraged the European explorers — an allusion to Henry the Navigator. The European kings themselves were interested in exploration of far-off lands and obtaining strange and rare articles of unknown countries.

Copernicus and Columbus were thought to be central figures by all our writers, seen as outstanding scientists and philosophers of Europe in the Age of the Renaissance. Columbus was thought to be a sailor, geographer and explorer as well as a scientist who laid down rules of mathematics and geometry. By employing new methods of seamanship and technical instruments like the compass, Columbus discovered the New World (*arz i jadid*), hitherto unknown. Copernicus' findings in astronomy had changed

¹⁸ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 22b-25b.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 22b-25b. Itisam provided a literal description of the compass and its making; cf. ff. 24a-25a.

²⁰ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff.146b.

the Ptolemaic world-view.²¹ Copernicus and Columbus were followed by successive generations of scientists.

Abd al Latif sought to draw a logical sequence in the over-all development of Europe. He wrote that from the sixteenth century onwards, Europe witnessed the emergence of philosophers (*hukama*) and scholars (*danishmandan*) who played a crucial role in the development of their countries. First of all, European scientists improved the ship-building techniques (*jahazsazi*) and along with this made changes in the art of navigation (*jahaz rani*). At the same time, the philosophers attempted to regulate their polities. They laid down rules and regulations for state-craft (*qawaid i saltanat*) and necessary rules and regulations to govern the socio-economic life (*maishat*) of their people, and planned their cities accordingly. In fact, Latif emphasised that the Europeans had so perfected the art of navigation and organised their polities in such a way that the Greek and Muslim scholars had nothing but praise and admiration for them. Later on, they occupied themselves with exploration and discoveries of far-off lands and occupied many of these islands which were inhabited by primitive tribes but had immense treasure troves.²²

Abd al Latif realised that, with the expansion of man's geographical horizons, the Classical Greek notions of the universe and ideas of cosmography had changed.²³ He specifically noted that the Europeans had measured the size of oceans, and according to their findings all oceans were one. Among all these oceans the Indian ocean was the largest of all, and it was the same ocean which flowed throughout the globe, acquiring a particular name according to the region it passed through, such as the Mediterranean

²¹ *Ibid.*, ff.146a-147a; also, *Lubb us siyar u jahan numa*, f. 393.

²² For the above remark, cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff.117b. For a description of the islands which are not mentioned by name, but described under four broad categories, cf. ff. 118b-120a.

²³ *Ibid.*, ff. 117.

(*bahr i rum*) and the Southern seas (*bahr i muhit*). Latif explained that Europeans had been able to reach all known parts of globe. They had determined the longitude and the latitude of the oceans with remarkable precision and accuracy. They repeatedly traversed the globe and reached up to the limit whether it was ice-bound or surrounded by land-mass. The explorers recorded the physical characteristics of these places and prepared maps and charts exhibiting routes and new regions. As for the hazards at sea, many sailors and explorers perished due to the excessively cold conditions and no trace of them could be found. But these mishaps did not deter them. Such courage to explore the boundaries of seas without fear was peculiar to the climate and environment of Europe and to the spirit of its people alone.²⁴

Muhammad Husain wrote that Islam, too, had made its own contributions to the development of European scientific thought. It was from Spain that once flourished the most magnificent and brilliant civilization of Islam, a civilization whose discourses deeply benefitted Europe. It had produced remarkable scholars and mystics, like Ibn al Arabi al Andalusi, as well as numerous scientists and astronomers. He noted that especially the Muslim scholars' works on geography and astronomy were utilised by the European scholars to build their own theories of a wider world. The lost Greek works were preserved by the Muslim scholars and were eventually translated by the European scholars in their own languages from Arabic. Though the Muslims had been expelled from Granada, their last territorial domain as they were already divided into numerous groups (*muluk ut tawaif*), immense literary treasures of the Muslim poets, scholars and theologians were retained and preserved in the libraries of Spain — a the legacy of the Muslim civilization.²⁵

²⁴ For European discoveries, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 115a-117b. Itisam expressed a similar opinion about the European art of navigation.

²⁵ Cf. *Risalah*, f. 7.

3.2 Europe as a Geographical Concept

Abu Talib explained with geographical clarity that northern Europe was surrounded by the Baltic sea (*bahr baltik*), encompassing four kingdoms (*saltanat*), namely, Russia, Prussia, Denmark and Swedan. These four were often united, and followed the Russian monarch. On the southern side, Europe was bounded with the Mediterranean Sea and this also encompassed four kingdoms: Spain, Portugal, Italy (*Rum Qadim*) and Switzerland. There, in the middle of the continent, lay the four other states: France, Germany (*Alman*) Poland, and Holland. The islands of the England and Ireland were situated on the westerly side of the continent. Apart from these, within the Holy Roman Empire (*Rum qadim*) and Germany there were ten or twelve smaller and weaker states. Since in Europe the powerful could not encroach upon the weak, such small states existed, side by side with the powerful monarchies.²⁶

Each author sought to describe some general features of the European countries. They were concerned with the basic information of a particular country, its circumference, territorial extent, capital, mode of government, military strength, the main agricultural and industrial products, and, above all, the extent of their colonial possessions in America.²⁷

Abd al Latif described the Holy Roman Emperor thus: the Emperor of Germany (*Alman*) occupied a position of honour and respect among all European kings. In his capacity as the representative of the Pope (*papa*), he regarded himself as king of the kings (*sultan al salatin*). He was represented in each state of Europe through his representative (*wakil*). The host country assigned separate land-grants (*suyurghal*) for the maintenance of these representatives of the Holy Roman Emperor in their kingdoms.

²⁶ Cf. *Masir i talibi*, f. 161; for graphic account of the Mediterrenean region, cf. f.181.

²⁷ These characteristics were produced by every writer in a stereotyped format.

The entire state of Germany comprised three hundred *karoh* (six hundred miles) in longitude and its latitude was two hundred *karoh* (four hundred miles). Its capital was known as Vienna, a well-populated and delightful city. Its citizens were distinguished for their intellect and wisdom. All monarchs of Europe paid special regard to the Holy Roman Emperor. In any assembly of the Kings of Europe he was given place of respect above all the other kings.²⁸

Latif viewed Hungary in a similar way writing that Hungary (*Angary*) was another state of Europe, covering a longitude of five hundred and fifty *karoh*, (three hundred miles), and with a latitude of seventy *karoh* (hundred and forty miles). Hungary, too, belonged to the Emperor of Germany as one of his princes ruled there. It maintained a standing army, one hundred thousand infantry and war-ships of reasonable number.²⁹

Abd al Latif wrote about Spain that it was one of the most extensive empires. Its sovereign was powerful among the other kings of Europe and it had traditionally been called *Ispaniola*. The system of government was monarchical, the king being the absolute sovereign of his realm. The state of Spain stretched in longitude about three hundred and fifty *karoh* and in latitude it was two hundred and fifty *karoh*. Its possessions in South America were enormous, as Spain's king was the first to have sponsored Columbus' voyage of New World. It maintained a standing army of around seven hundred cavalry-men and infantry, apart from the well-disciplined armed forces and war-ships in its American possessions. Moreover, Spain's economy had been

²⁸ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 179b-180a.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 180a.

enormously enriched by the silver and gold of America.³⁰ Muhammad Husain added that Spain in the past had wars with the rulers of the *Maghrib*.³¹

Muhammad Husain recalled the Islamic past of Spain, writing that it was conquered by Tariq bin Ziyad for the Umayyad Caliph, and the mountain standing on the Mediterranean still had marks of Tariq's victory as it bore the name of Gibraltar (*jabal tur*). *Al andalus* under the Muslim ruler became a centre of learning and witnessed the emergence of the glory of mystics and learned men. Gradually it was divided into petty states (*muluk ut tawaif*) and finally the Muslims were expelled from Granada and Spain retained its original status as a European country (*Afranjiyat, farang asli*). But the Muslim treasures of learning, their libraries and magnificent historical monuments — mosques and other places built by the Islamic rulers — were still standing there as relics of its past. Nonetheless not a single Muslim was left in that country.³²

Muhammad Husain and Latif both noted that the kingdom of Portugal (*Purtgal*), whose capital was Lisbon, was a powerful state during earlier times. They were the first who reached India and settled in the west coast. Aurengzeb allowed the British to settle in India as a counterweight to the Portuguese. At present their position was inferior in comparison to other countries of Europe, as the Spanish king was exercising sway over the country. A number of families of Portuguese origins had still survived in India, but they were insignificant, their presence hardly being felt more than that of an ordinary Indian.³³

³⁰ Cf. *Risalah*, and *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 180. Cf. also *Shigarfnama*, f. 102b. According to the author, the main reason of the Spanish power and affluence was the American possessions.

³¹ Cf. *Risalah hayyat jadid i angrezi*, f. 12a.

³² *Ibid.*, f. 7; also f. 12a.

³³ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 180b. For a similar remark, cf. *Risalah hayyat jadid angrezi*, f. 12a.

Denmark (*Denmar*) was small and it also had a small army, not more than three thousand cavalry and infantry, based on an assembly (*shura*). Yet, in spite of its feebleness, it had survived on the map of Europe. It had cordial relations with other monarchs of Europe which provided it with assistance in the spirit of brotherhood.³⁴

Abd al Latif noted Poland as a country with a unique political system — an allusion to the elected monarchy and the rule of the oligarchy of nobles. Its capital Warsaw was an extensive city, well-populated, flourishing and famous. The longitude of the country was one hundred and fifty *karoh*.³⁵ Its ruler was a justice-loving, polished and highly cultured man. The system of administration was such that the power was vested in the hands of twelve nobles. The king was bound with their advise in every state matter. If the opinion of these nobles was the same as that of the king, the decision was taken immediately to accomplish the given state affair. If the views of the nobles were contrary to those of the king, but same among themselves, their wishes were put into effect. Upon the death of the reigning king, every king of Europe sent their sons for the position of king of Poland. The nobles selected one of these princes as their king. The country maintained one hundred and seventy thousand infantry and cavalry.³⁶

Abd al Latif wrote that the kingdom of Holland (*Wullundez*) was the smallest of all in territorial terms, but had far surpassed other Europeans in prosperity, wealth and affluence. In Holland, each group and class, whether the upper strata or the commoners, all were engaged in trade and were proud of their mercantile profession. Its capital Amsterdam was a well-populated, well-inhabited, affluent and prosperous city. It was a well-planned city and the houses of its dwellers were built in a way that all looked

³⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 180b.

³⁵ 1 *karoh* = 2 miles.

³⁶ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 181a.

identical. The roads were clean and spacious, and each area had a canal constructed so that each trader could receive his ship and cargo near his residence. Similarly, beautiful plants were planted to increase the natural beauty of the city of Amsterdam. It was a city where people tended to forget their sorrows, as the Europeans popularly said about it. Since the country was situated on the sea-coast and in a geographical depression, sometimes suffered from sudden tides. The longitude of the country was seventy five *karoh*. The country was divided into seven parts. Every year, the populace of the country sent one representative (*wakil*) selected by them to their capital city, to look after the affairs of the state. No state business could be executed until unanimously approved by all the seven representatives. Each representative was appointed for one year only. They had a small army but more war-ships. Mir Husain concluded that at present, among all the nations of Europe, the prosperity, wealth and trade-power of the Dutch were exemplary.³⁷

The Papal state continued to be called the country of the Pope (*mulk i Khalif Papa*), who traditionally ruled the entire Europe in his capacity as representative of Jesus Christ until the time of Reformation when his authority was much reduced, though still in possession of Rome, the capital of Italy (*Italyun*).³⁸ Itisam al Din sought to clarify that Rome, which was at present the seat of Pope, had been the centre of power and other countries of Europe were its subsidiaries — an allusion to the Byzantine empire which came under Muslim rule during the Caliphate of Umar, the third Pious Caliph, with Constantinople as its capital. That part of the Byzantine empire was now

³⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 181b-182a. For a similar account of Holland, its rule by oligarchy and prosperous mercantile nobility, cf. *Shigarf nama*, f. 102, *Risalah*, f. 2 and *Risala hayyat i jadid angrezi*, f. 12b, where the writer provides an eye-witness account of Lisbon.

³⁸ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam* ff. 123b-124b. For a similar description, cf. *Risalah*, ff. 6a-7b.

called New Rome (*Rum i jadid*), while the rest across the Mediterranean remained as the seat of the Pope.³⁹

However, there were other countries like Russia, whose rise to power and predominance was a new phenomenon. Itisam wrote that Russia as depicted in the *Sikandarnama* was a backward and uncivilized country, but at present it had changed, following the reforms of Peter the great, a contemporary of Nadir Shah who sent his people for military training to Europe, especially to Britain. It was a vast country, comprising a fourth of the southern quarter. Tatars and Turks were also included in its sway. Although its population did not correspond to its territorial size because of excessively cold weather in certain parts, nonetheless, at present it had become one of the most strong countries of Europe.⁴⁰

France was a country, wrote Abd al Latif, that covered a territory of hundred *karoh* in longitude and two hundred and fifty *karoh* in latitude. It also occupied land of similar size in America. It possessed a strong army, infantry and cavalry. Its system of government was monarchical in character until its people rose against the oppressive ruler and lethargic nobility.⁴¹

Abu Talib explained with geographical clarity that the kingdom of England (*Inglistan*) comprised England, Scotland and Wales, the royal heir-apparent having the title of Prince of Wales. All the three together constituted Great Britain (*Bartaniya Buzurg*).⁴² Muhammad Husain noted that England (*Inglistan*) was called *Inglisya* by Arabic speaking people, but it was known as Great Britain (*Grate Britan*) by the

³⁹ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 101.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 182-185a, *Risalah*, f. 4a, and *Shigarfnama*, ff. 102b-103b. For an account of Russia, written by a Greek priest in Arabic in 1758, Cf. Loth, p. 211.

⁴¹ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, 126a-127a, and *Masir i Talibi*, ff.161b-169a.

⁴² Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 62.

Europeans themselves.⁴³ Latif wrote that England (*Inglistan*) comprised two islands (*jazira*), England (*Inglad*) and Ireland (*Ayarland*), called by the Muslims "large Britain" (*Bartaniya akbar*) and "small Britain" (*Bartaniya asghar*) respectively.⁴⁴

According to Latif, England, despite being smaller in terms of surface area and population, and its monarchy being less pompous in comparison to other Christian states, possessed a king reknown as just and nourisher of his subjects. Her people were distinguished for their organised socio-economic life and urbane living. In fact, British people occupied a position of intellectual preeminence, and the country witnessed the rise of philosophers and scientists since the tenth century of the Islamic era. These people perfected the art of navigation and prepared war-ships to defend their country from outside invasion. On the other hand, they embarked upon the discovery of new islands and far off lands.⁴⁵ Muhammad Husain, expressing a similar opinion, felt that the English far surpassed the other Europeans intellectually. They had an excessive inclination towards natural philosophy (*ilm i tabiyat*) and, at the same time, their navy was the most powerful in all Europe. In the art of navigation and ship-building no other Europeans could be compared with them.⁴⁶

The above was the picture when Europe became materially and intellectually identifiable in the mental landscape of a limited number of the Indian Persian-speaking elite. In general terms, they looked at Europe as a whole and viewed its developments

⁴³ Cf. *Risalah hayyat jadid*, f. 13b.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 129. The varied nomenclature of Britain seemed to have caused considerable amount of confusion among our authors. Latif thought that England was ruled by Muslims (Umayyads and Abbasids). Traces of Muslim occupation were thought to be present in the mediterranean coast, where a mountain was called *Jabal tur* and a fort was corrupted from *Gibirtal* to Gibraltar. This was Latif's confusion in reading Andalus, since "Jabal tur" literally meant "mount Saini", while he was referring to Gibraltar (*Jabal Tariq*) as "mountain Tariq", named after an Umayyad commander.

⁴⁵ For a brief, but evocative description of England and its capital city London, cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 129-30b.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Risalah*, f. 4.

as intertwined and interrelated. It was Britain which was the focal point of enquiry, yet it was thought essential to view Britain against the wider spectrum of other European countries. Britain, although a distinct geographical identity, was an integral part of a much wider political and cultural spectrum, namely Europe. Politically, too, British history could not be treated in isolation. Its historical developments were interrelated and intertwined with the entire continent of Europe as well as with the New World. But as the century moved on, following the establishment of the British rule, contact with Europe came to be identified as contact with the British. The Indian experience of European civilization was essentially an experience of British society and its culture.

3.3 *The Significance of America's Discovery*

The discovery of America seemed to have aroused immense interest among our writers. The first among them who dealt with this theme at length and provided great deal of information was Mumhammad Husain.⁴⁷ Secondly, Murtaza Husain was specifically advised by Jonathan Scott to include an account of America in his *Hadiqat al aqalim* as the first draft of the work was without any information concerning this continent.⁴⁸ Itisam, too, had his original discourses on the subject. This entire information found graphic expression from the pen of Latif. Ahmad bin Muhammad followed all these accounts, which were available to him, in his detailed narrative of the New World.⁴⁹ One of the obvious reasons why this theme attracted immense attention was its entirely

⁴⁷ Cf. *Risalah*, ff.7b-10a.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 516-23.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Mirat al ahwal i jahan numa*, ff. 124b-129a. The discovery of America also became a subject of versification. A certain Sayyid Abu Talib Tabatabai, composed rhymed verses about America and its physical characteristics; cf. *Riyaz ut taba masnawi dar nujum ahl farang wa iktashaf amrika*, Aligarh Muslim University, University collection, Farsiya Uloom, No.166, ff. 96b-108. The work seems to be a fragment from a larger collection by the author.

new dimension, different from the earlier traditional geographical perceptions. Earlier, during the Mughal period, we do not find any evidence of this knowledge except a passing reference by Abul Fazal who wrote that a "New World" (*alam i nau*) had been discovered.⁵⁰

Until the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Muhammad Ali, the author of *Burhan al futuh*, could not write anything more than the basic fact that a European named Columbus (*Qaulun i firangi*) had discovered a New World (*Yengi dunya*) around the middle of the ninth century of the Islamic Era (equivalent to around the middle of the fifteenth century of the Christian Era) and classified it among one of the strange historical events.⁵¹

All of these writers emphasised that the discovery of America was the result of Europe's desire to find a direct and unhampered trade route to India, since trade with these countries was in the hands of Venetian merchants who charged exorbitant prices for Indian commodities. Moreover, Europe was lured by India's wealth and fabulous riches. All our writers were concerned to provide a brief outline of America, its geo-political conditions, its regions and circumference, main geographical characteristics, physical features, agricultural and industrial products with special reference to tobacco, and, above all, its silver and gold-mines.⁵² All were interested in basic facts like the Spanish sponsorship of Columbus's voyage, the course of the voyage, Mexico, the defeat of its ruler Montezuma, the Spanish colonization (*taskhir*) of various parts of the newly discovered world, followed by the Portuguese, French and the Dutch and finally the

⁵⁰ Cf. Abul Fazal, *Ain i Akbari*, ed. Blochmann, vol. III (Calcutta, 1867-77), p. 26.

⁵¹ Cf. Muhammad Ali, *Burhan al futuh*, B.L. 1884, ff. 206b. The use of the Turkish term *Yengi dunya* suggests that the information originally came through Turkey.

⁵² Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 516-23 for a detailed account of America; also *Risalah*, ff. 7b-10a. For a brief biography of Columbus and an account of the latter's voyage, cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 146b-147a.

British for similar objectives. Muhammad Husain opined that the discovery of the New World greatly stimulated the Europeans to cultivate and explore such subjects like astronomy and geography and the natural sciences, which were employed for further discoveries.⁵³

Muhammad Husain observed that the Muslim expulsion from Spain and the discovery of America occurred concurrently. Following the re-conquest (a term which neither Mir Husain nor any other writer used, as for them this was like any other historical event without any emotion or religious sentiments attached to it), Muslims moved towards *Maghrib*.⁵⁴ Murtaza too, very briefly alluded to the fact that the Muslim expulsion from Spain and the discovery of America happened simultaneously in the history of Europe, a fact about which he was informed by Scott.

One question which came to occupy these authors, in particular Itisam, Muhammad Husain and Latif, was the existence of America within the mental horizons of the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. Itisam first sought to inform his readers of the role of Alexander as depicted in the medieval classics like *Sikandarnama* (Book of Alexandar) and *Shahnama* of Firdawsi: a world conqueror and the one who measured the entire sea-bed. Itisam asserted that European scholars were of the opinion that the Muslim commentators tended to exaggerate Alexander's image as an exemplary hero, peace-loving, and courteous. Itisam painstakingly explained that the Europeans argued that Alexander, as well as his teacher, Aristotle, belonged to Greece, a European country, and Alexander's teacher wrote his work in a European language. Consequently a European scholar's criticism and evaluation of Alexander's achievement could be more balanced. However, Itisam made a concession to the medieval scholars, indicating that

⁵³ Cf. *Risalah*, f. 10a.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 7b.

Alexander could not measure the sea-bed, but probably he attempted to measure only the sea coast from Greece to Europe.⁵⁵

Latif sought to clarify the issue further and opined that Pythagoras, the celebrated Greek philosopher, felt that calculation of heavenly bodies pointed to the existence of an inhabited world in the "Southern Quarter" (*rab' junubi*) of the globe, surrounded by water. Even then, the said scholar never tried to put his ideas into reality by exploring the imagined world.⁵⁶ Latif sought to emphasize that such notions which had formed part of the medieval Persian geographical works, that Alexander had an idea of this "Southern Quarter" being inhabited like the known part of the world and planned to explore that imagined and supposed land, were insubstantial, unsatisfactory and vague. Latif further reiterated that, even if Alexander had conjectured an inhabited world in the "Southern Quarter" of the globe, he never set out to explore this imagined world. Such notions, like Alexander moving in ship towards the "Southern Quarter", were nothing more than just a myth.⁵⁷ Alexander's moving towards the "Southern Quarter" was a mere flight of fancy and vague imagination. Why? Because three hundred years before now, expounded Latif, the properties of the magnet had not been discovered: the mariner's compass and other navigational aids which are available to the voyagers now were not available to the sailors in those times. It was almost inconceivable to undertake the long oceanic voyages⁵⁸ and to sail the ships from one place to another when land and sea coast were out of sight. The art of navigation taking ships from one place to another, out of sight of land with the aid of a compass (*qutub numa*) was the

⁵⁵ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 22b-24a.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 116a.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 116a-117a.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 117.

achievement of one of the philosophers of Europe (Columbus). Later on, the other scientists continued to improve upon it.⁵⁹

Itisam too, concluded that the existence of this land was beyond the geographical speculations of the Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato.⁶⁰ Since it has been altogether a new discovered land, it was called the "New World" (*duniya i nau*). Itisam thought that modern European scholars were of the opinion that in the beginning of creation, America formed part of the known world (Europe), but during Noah's deluge it got separated from the rest because of a severe earthquake during which the entire globe was drowned in water. The islands which were found amidst the seas were probably the mountains, while the land-mass around the island was absorbed into water.⁶¹

Next to the above discussion, what occupied our writers was the racial origins and historical roots of the native population of America. Latif wrote that it was a land like any other part of the world and comprised countries, big cities, seas, mountains, and wild forests. It was inhabited by all the races of mankind: white, black and brown. They had a primitive mode of life and their methods of warfare were crude. They knew of precious stones, pearls, gold, and silver, but not other metals. Their knowledge of the outside world was almost nil. They were absolutely ignorant of the story of creation. Some of them were idol-worshippers while others worshiped the sun. They did not discriminate between "forbidden" (*haram*) and "permitted" (*halal*) acts, as they lacked a religion with well-defined institutes. Latif and Itisam both noted the absence of written script, as these people employed symbols of trees and animals for communication, with

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*

⁶⁰ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 163a.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, f. 163b.

particular meanings understood only by them.⁶² Itisam concluded that these aboriginal tribes were uncivilized, but not barbarous.

Itisam sought to describe the colonization of America by European powers in chronological sequence. He wrote that the Spanish were the first to reach the New World, being followed by other Europeans. The Europeans brought back immense treasure troves from their discovered land. Initially the Americans resisted Europeans as aliens, but Europeans eventually succeeded in bringing simple people to their side by offering them European novelties like clothes, artificial jewellery, wine and bread, and by using persuasive tongue.⁶³ Itisam referred to the dehumanization and the enslavement of the natives by the Europeans. He commented that the natives were reduced to subjection (*farmanbardar*) and were held as servile labours (*mazduran i karguzar*).⁶⁴

Muhammad Husain also described how different nations succeeded in occupying lands commensurate to their respective power and strength. However, some areas still remained under the natives. He also noted the establishment of the European plantations in America, for which the labour was imported from African countries like Sudan.⁶⁵ Latif wrote that the Europeans went to America in large numbers, and they took new animals and plants with them. As for the "white man's" burden, Latif noted that from every state of Europe people went to educate the primitive American tribes. Gradual interaction and social intermixing with the emigrants led to improvements in the archaic

⁶² *Ibid.*, ff. 165b-166a, and *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 176b-177b.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, f. 165a.

⁶⁴ *Op. cit.*

⁶⁵ Cf. *Risalah*, ff. 8a-10a.

manners and behaviour of the aboriginal and many of them embraced Christianity (*deen i isawi*).⁶⁶

Muhammad Husain, Itisam and Latif could clearly comprehend the economic benefits which accrued to the Europeans through the discovery of America and the subsequent occupation of the land. It turned out to be an immensely lucrative enterprise. Gradually, Europeans brought under their possession hitherto unoccupied lands which had silver and gold mines as well as other metals like copper and lead. Itisam knew that the gold and silver which was imported by Europeans to the East was from America, for there was an extreme scarcity of bullion in Europe prior to its influx from America. It was not only gold, silver and other metals, even commodities like timber and wood were also imported into Europe from that land. Moreover, America, like India, had prosperous agriculture of wheat, barley, sugar, tobacco, cotton and other fruits.

Itisam narrated that Europeans went to America for permanent settlement and engaged in farming, horticulture and ship-building. The European settlers constructed huge mansions and laid down orchards for their comfort in their newly-adopted home. Gradually, the administrative structure also evolved. In every province, they appointed one chief (*amir*), a provincial governor (*subedar*) and land-lord (*zamindar*), an estate-holder (*talluqdar*) and a fort commander (*qiladar*) for administrative purposes. Official rules and regulations (*mulkdari*) for the administration of justice and a system of education and learning were laid down systematically on the model of the mother countries.⁶⁷

Abd al Latif visualised that in his times America had become a flourishing land. Its ships were going around the world importing all kinds of grains and other articles

⁶⁶ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 177b.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 166b.

to their own country. New animals were brought from Europe and reared. They grafted new plants and grew all kinds of fruits not available in other countries. The American continent and its landscape was dotted with innumerable cities and magnificent buildings. Comparatively speaking, this part of the inhabited globe was more advanced than the Northern Quarter, as it was well-populated, affluent and abounding in riches, and had a well regulated system of government.⁶⁸

Itisam expressed similar opinions: day-by-day America was growing more prosperous, populous and self-reliant. Its people developed techniques of warfare like fortification and began to manufacture arms and ammunition, canons and guns. As the Americans came to possess strong warships, artillery and self-disciplined armed forces, they considered themselves superior to Europeans in the art of warfare. This led to the emigrants regarding themselves equal to Europeans and eventually they began to aspire for equality and independence.⁶⁹ They gradually became rebellious (*baghi*) against the British monarch. Itisam interpreted the American war of independence as a revolt of wealthy and prosperous nobility (*amir*) against the British. The second and immediate reason for the war was the imposition of taxes over and above what was customary. Itisam had an idea of the deeper reasons of war. He traced the Anglo-French conflict since the very beginning of the process of America's occupation. The first among the European nations that discovered the land and subsequently occupied it was Spain, followed by the French. The latter also brought extensive territory almost equal to India under its control. The British were the last to enter the competition and they could occupy only a small territory, as large as Bengal. But later, the British overpowered the French and seized some of their territorial possessions and added to their own.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 178. For a similar opinion, cf. *Risalah*, ff. 7b-10a.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 167. For a similar narrative, cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 177b-178a.

Consequently, this enhanced the power and prestige of the British, but no doubt it created further animosity.⁷⁰

Among all our authors, Ghulam Husain Khan's account was written at a time when the war was going on. He succinctly described the reasons, and the course of war, the involvement of other powers in it and its impact on the contemporary Indian political scenario. He wrote that France sided with the American rulers secretly, as the latter could not participate openly because of a peace treaty with Britain, its hereditary foe, and the terms of the treaty were yet to expire. Another country, Spain, was involved in this war as it had been exerting influence on the continent of Europe since long and consequently got united with France against the common enemy. A third power, Holland (*Wullendez*), though initially committed to no war got involved because it beheld extreme jealousy against the British political success in India and it saw the war as an opportunity to earn profits, by exporting arms and ammunitions in enormous quantity to America.⁷¹ The British monarch sent naval forces to crush the rebels, but faced strong resistance and suffered both in naval and land battles. In fact, both sides suffered heavy casualties.⁷² The Americans were successful in land engagements on account of their numerical strength.⁷³ Nevertheless, peace was concluded because after all, both were of the same nation and community (*ham qaum*).⁷⁴ Ghulam Husain also emphasised the strong kinship relations between the Americans and the British. They were of the same blood, sons and progeny of the British.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 166-167.

⁷¹ Cf. *Siyar*, pp. 958-60.

⁷² Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 168a.

⁷³ *Op. cit.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 168a.

Ghulam clearly visualised that the war of independence had repercussions on contemporary Indian political scenario as well. It renewed on-going hostilities among the European countries, the British, the French and the Dutch. The British Governor General Warren Hastings received orders from England to declare war against the Dutch and to seize their factories and forts. Accordingly, the British attacked the Dutch and destroyed their factories at Patna and Hugli. Most of our authors perceived it as a war of purely commercial nature, for it could not disturb the balance of power in Europe.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Ahmad sought to draw a somewhat inappropriate parallel by pointing out with surprise that the Britons who were in India, despite the vast geographical distance from their homeland, did not aspire for sovereignty; rather, they showed greater loyalty and obedience towards their king, probably even more than the Britons living in Britain.

4 RELIGION

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century there existed some knowledge of the religion of Europe among the Indian Muslim literate classes. This knowledge consisted in the traditional image of Christian faith defined in the Holy *Qur'an*, a significant part of which is the unique status of Jesus as a prophet of Islam. But another image of Christianity was presented in the interpretation and practices of the Christians in the West, an image which first revealed itself to Indian Muslims during the high Mughal period, from Akbar and Jahangir onwards. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, direct contact with the West resulted in these two images converging, a fact which resulted in a new knowledge.

The writers under study had a somewhat different mental make-up from the traditional religious elite, the *Ulama*, for their interest in religious matters was not so strongly motivated. Perhaps they were more interested to explore the sources of the West's strength, which they thought lied in its political systems, sciences and technical developments. Therefore, they concentrated their attention on these aspects. But they were themselves Muslims, and had been imbued with Islamic values. They were educated in the Islamic system and they were aware that the new culture they were exposed to professed a religion which had an intimate relationship with their own. Naturally, some discussion of this aspect of life was bound to occur. Which particular aspects of Christianity came under discussion, and how did our authors interpret the various aspects of religion of Europe? Before taking up these questions it seems

essential to see what was the nature of the existing knowledge of the Christian faith before any direct exposure to the Western Christendom.

4.1 The Muslim Attitude towards Christianity

Let us first have a view of the traditional Muslim image of Christianity and the place of Christ as revealed in the Holy *Qur'an* and as understood by the Muslims. The Holy *Qur'an* refers to Christ in fifteen *surahs* and devotes to him ninety-three verses. Among all the Prophets, Jesus has a unique place, not only because he is considered the immediate predecessor of the Prophet Muhammad, but because of the belief in the second coming of Jesus before the final Resurrection. What keeps this interest alive is the Muslim belief that their own religion is *the* religion — the completion of the Divine message to mankind — with the Prophet Muhammad being the "Seal of the Prophets", and the Holy *Qur'an* being the perfection of Revelation. It was not a new religion, but a common heritage of Prophets such as Abraham, Moses and Jesus, who received God's message before Prophet Muhammad.

It was this fundamental belief of Muslim people in the continuity and perfection of God's message to mankind through a successive chain of Prophets, a comprehensive vision of the totality of God's concern with mankind, and the historical integrity and unity of Islam as a religious tradition which led them to explore, explain and keep an integrated view of earlier revealed faiths. This consciousness of the historical past is evident in the compilation of universal histories — an important branch of historiography. In these universal histories the historian attempts to provide a historical perspective of the development of Islamic civilization in the world and a broader view of it on the entire canvas of human history. These accounts are similar in detail on almost every aspect, except that the sophistication of linguistic expression and emphasis

on details differs in each individual writer. The authors begin with the story of creation, Adam, Noah, Abraham, then successively the lives of all the Prophets, followed in an exact chronological sequence. Then, they seek to delineate such historical facts as the genealogy of Mary the mother of Jesus, the story of Zakariya and Yahya, then, the birth of Maryam, the annunciation of Yahya and the Annunciation of Isa *al-Masih*, the conception, birth of Jesus, his miracles, preaching, the attitude of the Jews, and finally his Ascension to Heaven as revealed in the Holy *Qur'an*.¹ These accounts are invariably based on the Holy *Qur'an* and the authors cite Quranic verses in order to elucidate their descriptions of various events in the life of Jesus Christ and of the Second coming before the universal Resurrection. Similarly, the writers attempt to provide a description of the lives of the Apostles and their endeavour to spread faith throughout the world. Each such description is followed with a narrative of the life of Prophet Muhammad.²

The knowledge exemplified in such accounts is mainly derived from the Holy *Qur'an*. In the era under discussion, we can also see that there also existed an awareness of the differences and also the reasons of the differences among the Christian people.

¹ For the biography of Jesus Christ and the spread of the Cristian faith, cf. Sadiq Isfahani's (b.1609), *Subh i Sadiq* (completed in 1638-39 at the court of Jahangir), Bodl. Pers. MS. Ouseley 292, ff. 53b-62b. The author describes the life of Mary, the birth of Christ, his miracles, the arrival of a table of victuals *Maidah* and the Ascension to Heaven. He also gives an account of the life of the Apostles and their attempts to spread the faith in different parts of the world. Sadiq provided an excellent picture, not only of the life of Christ, but the whole story of the Christian faith profusely interspersed with Quranic verses. Another work which also contains an account of the life of Jesus was written during Aurengzeb's reign by Shaikh Muhammad Baqa. Cf. *Mirat al alam*, Bodl. Pers. MS. Elliot 242, ff.18b-19b. These biographies of Jesus Christ were invariably followed with an account of the life of Prophet Muhammad and the spread of Islam in the world and also preceded by an account of the story of the creation of Adam, the lives of Abraham, Solomon and Moses.

² Following the example of earlier writers, several authors of general histories attempted life to give an account of the life of Christ during the eighteenth century. Cf., for instance, Yusuf Ali Khan (d. 1781), *Hadiqat al Safa* (Garden of Purity), compiled in 1770, Bodl. Pers. MS. Elliot 155, ff. 2b-32b. Following the established tradition, this contains the story of creation followed by an account of the lives of the prophets, David and Solomon, the construction of *Masjid i Aqsa*, the birth of Christ son of Mary (*Isa Ibn i Maryam*), the arrival of *Maidah*, the miracles of Christ, His Ascension to heaven (*Zikr rafa Ruh Allah*) spread of faith by Apostles (*Hawariyyun*). For almost similar details, cf. Muhammad Aslam Ansari Qadri's, *Farhat un Nazirin* (written in 1770-71), Bodl. Pers. MS. Caps. C.5, ff. 41b-56b. Another detailed description of Jesus Christ and the spread of Christian faith by the Apostles, cf. *Mirat i Aftabnuma*, ff. 75b-78b, where a complete list of the prophets in exact chronological order is provided. Also, *Lubb us siyar*, ff. 385a, for a small biographical sketch of the Jesus Christ.

These differences of opinion were thought to have originated in Jewish-Christian rivalries. Our writers opined that there existed three major divisions among the Christians, named after the interpreters themselves, namely the Nestorians (*nasturi*), the Jacobites (*yaqubiya*) and the Melkites (*malkanya*). Some Christians, the Jacobites, held that Christ, a single person composed, however, of two natures. There were others, known as the Nestorians after the founder of this doctrine, who made a sharper division between the two natures in order to maintain the full humanity of Jesus and thought of God as dwelling in the man Jesus from his conception. The third group, the Melkites, thought that Jesus had a double nature, part divine (*lahut*) and part human (*nasut*), and Jesus the divine became manifest in human form. All of them believed in Trinity (*Salis salasa*).³ There existed some notions that the office of the Pope began with St. Peter the Apostle.⁴ Briefly speaking, this was the Muslim understanding of Christianity or what may be termed as Islamic Christology as reflected in the universal histories.

4.2 Sources of Knowledge

There was a continuous growth of knowledge about Christianity from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century onwards. A different kind of exposure to Christianity as practised and professed in the Western Christendom occurred in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, when the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) invited the Jesuit Fathers from their headquarters in Goa to unfold the principles of their faith before the

³ For a mid-seventeenth account of the doctrinal differences, cf. *Subh i Sadiq*, f. 60a. Also *Mirat al alam*, f. 20b. Similar views were repeated by writers in the eighteenth century. Cf. *Hadiqat al Safa*, f. 32b, *Farhat un nazirin*, f. 55b. For an exposition of the three schools of Christian thought in the seventeenth century, cf. Muhammad Rabi ibn Muhammad Ibrahim, *Safinah-i Sulaimani*, B.L. Or. 6942, ff. 19b-20a.

⁴ Cf. *Subh i Sadiq*, f. 59b.

Emperor.⁵ It seems that apart from the much discussed Jesuits' participation in the discussions at the *Ibadat Khana* (House of Worship), Akbar's major interest lay in obtaining a Persian translation of the Pentateuch and the Gospels in order to have direct access to their sources of faith.⁶ Akbar's continuous attempt to obtain Persian or Arabic translations of the New and the Old Testaments points towards the conclusion that these were not available in India at that time. Unlike other Islamic countries, India did not have large Christian communities except in the coastal regions of India, especially the Malabar coast where the first settlements of the Portuguese, the first Europeans who reached the Indian subcontinent, took place.⁷ This is clearly evident from the royal letters which were sent to the Fathers at Goa. Each royal embassy sent to the Fathers residing in Goa carried a royal letter with a request to send the revealed books (*Kutub-i samavi*), the Pentateuch (*Tauret*), the Gospels (*Injil*) and the Psalms (*zabur*) in Arabic or Persian, along with a translator, with a promise of royal protection and patronage.⁸

⁵ It seems that the writers under study did not distinguish between the Eastern Christian communities, the Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites, and Western Christianity. Similarly there seems to be no evidence whether they were aware of the differences between the Eastern Papacy, the Patriarch, and the Pope, the spiritual head of the Latin Christendom.

⁶ For a comprehensive account of the Jesuit mission, their relations with the Emperor Akbar and his son and successor Jahangir, cf. Edward Maclagan, *The Jesuits and the Great Mogul* (London, 1932). Also, V.A. Smith, *Akbar the Great Mogul, 1542-1605* (Oxford, 1917), pp. 168-76. The first Jesuit mission reached Fatehpur Sikri in 1580, and the Jesuits presented Akbar seven of the eight volumes of the Polyglot Bible prepared by Christopher Plantin during 1568-72. Contemporary chronicler Abd al Qadir Badauni (1540-1615) also recorded the arrival of the first Jesuits mission at Akbar's court along with the Gospels (*Injil*); he further reported that "Akbar ordered Abul Fazl to translate Gospels into Persian and the latter began with the words *Aj nam i tu Jesus o Kristu* instead of *Bismillah*, and Shaikh Faizi (d.1595), Akbar's poet laureate and brother of Abul Fazl, added to it *Subhankal iswak yahu*, i.e. "praise be to Thee, there is none like Thee O He!" It seems to have been more a friendly gesture in order to show respect to the Fathers, who immediately responded to the emperor's call. Putting Prince Murad under Monserrate for learning the Portuguese language was a similar gesture of friendship. Cf. Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhabut twarikh*, ed. Ahmed Ali, K. Ahmad, N. Lees, Calcutta, p. 260.

⁷ There existed small Christian minorities in coastal regions of India since the early days. But their presence was never taken into account, with the exception of a reaction to Portuguese presence as recorded in the *Tuhfat al Mujahidin* by Zain al Din Mabari, the local historian of Malabar in the last quarter of the sixteenth century.

⁸ For the text of the letters addressed to Father at Goa, addressing him "the wise-man of Europe" (*Danayan i farang*), cf. Abul Fazl, *Inshai Abul Fazl* (Lucknow, 1270), pp. 37-9. A similar letter has been translated from Italian into English by Rehatsek; cf. *Indian Antiquary*, April 1887. Another royal
(continued...)

In 1595, the arrival of the Jesuit Father Jerome Xavier (1549-1617), a Navarrese and the grandson of St. Francis Xavier's sister, resulted in the establishment of a new kind of relationship.⁹ Xavier learnt Persian at the court and also gave lessons to Abd al Sattar bin Qasim Lahori in Portuguese as well as Latin, enabling the latter to assist in the translation work.¹⁰ This is the first known example of the collaboration and cooperation of an Indian Muslim to translate European knowledge into Persian. The work produced by Xavier with the assistance of Abd al Sattar covered a wide variety of literary range and found its way into other Muslim countries, Persia, for example, as well as in some European countries, such as England, the Netherlands, and even the Vatican city in Italy. The fact that these works survived in the libraries of the Indian sub-continent as well as in Europe in considerable number testifies to the popularity and fame of the works produced.¹¹ These works introduced the Indian scholars to European Christianity, and our authors used these works in the late eighteenth century when direct

⁸(...continued)

letter was sent with an envoy, Sayyid Abdullah, accompanied by a Portuguese, Domenico Perez, as a translator. This shows Akbar's keen desire to obtain the Gospels: "to beg you to send to me two Fathers, learned in the scriptures who shall bring with them the principal books of the law and of the Gospels because I truly and earnestly desire to understand their perfection". Cf. also V.A. Smith, *Akbar The Great Mogul*, p. 169.

⁹ Jerome Xavier (1549-1617), a grandson of St. Francis Xavier, entered the Society in 1568 at Alcala. Later on he left Lisbon for Goa, after serving as the Rector of the college of Bassein and Cochin, as master of Novices and as superior of the professed House of Goa. He came to the Mughal court as a member of the third mission. There, he spent more than twenty years in the service of Akbar and he was later patronised by Jahangir. He returned to Goa where he died as Co-adjutor-Archbishop elect of Cragnore. For more details consult, *Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, pp. 50, 197-9.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.* It is reported that Xavier was able to converse with the Persian speaking aristocracy and the latter were amused with Xavier's choice of diction and vocabulary. For Abd al Sattar bin Qasim's progress in learning Portuguese and Latin, cf. *Samarat al falasfa*, f. 2. It is said that Abd al Sattar learnt a European language from Father Xavier and within six months he was able to understand works in the language, but he found it difficult to attain proficiency in speaking. It seems both had some translation aids at their disposal, such as a dictionary into different languages. One such lexicon had survived in Xavier's papers. Cf. *Bulletin of School of Oriental Studies for 1923-25*, Vol. III, p. 13. *Rudimenta linguae Persicae: A Grammer of the Persian language with vocabulary - Latin Portuguese and Persian.*

¹¹ For details of works and the Libraries of India and Europe where the manuscript copies of these have survived, cf. *Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, pp. 203-21.

exposure to the Western world took place. Therefore, it would be relevant to have a view of what was translated into Persian.

The first work prepared by Father Xavier with the assistance of Abd al Sattar bin Qasim Lahori was a biography of Jesus Christ entitled *Mirat al Quds* or *Dastan i Masih* compiled in 1602 at Agra.¹² His second work was devoted to the life of the Twelve Apostles, written at Akbar's request. Subsequently, it was issued in instalments as four of the lives were presented to Akbar before his death in 1605, but was dedicated to Jahangir in its final form in 1607.¹³ Later on, in 1609, Xavier prepared a third work, entitled *Aina i Haqnuma* ("The Truth Reflecting Mirror") in the form of a dialogue between a philosopher, an *alim*, and a Padre on Christianity, the Divinity of Christ, the Commandants of Gospels and comparisons with the teachings of Islam. It also gave reasons for the superiority of the Christian faith over Islam. Subsequently, the Father also prepared an abridged form of these works for the perusal of Jahangir.¹⁴ The first work of Xavier on the life of Christ was criticised by the Protestants in Europe. The

¹² There exist numerous copies of the above in Indian libraries as well as in Europe's oriental collections. For details, cf. Storey, *Persian Literature*, pp. 163-4. This work was compiled at Agra in 1602 with the assistance of Abd al Sattar bin Qasim Lahori from holy scriptures (*Injil i muqaddas*) and other books related to the prophets (*kutub i paighambaran*). Cf. *Mirat al quds* (*Mirror of Holiness*), Bodl. Pers. MS. Fraser 256, ff. 199b-200a. A Latin translation with text was prepared in 1638 at Leyden as part of the Protestant criticism by de Dieu. Cf. *Dastan i Masih, Historia Christi Persice Conscripta simulque multis modis contaminata a. P. Hieronymo Xavier, Soc. Jesu. Latine reddita et animadversionibus notata a Ludovico de Dieu* (Leyden, 1639). For a description of the work, cf. H. Blochmann, "Note on the Persian MS. entitled *Mirat ul Quds, a Life of Christ compiled at the request of the Emperor Akbar by Jerome Xavier*", *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1870, pp. 138-47, where the preface is translated and chapters are summarised. Also H. Beveridge, "Father Jerome Xavier", *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1 vii, pt. i (1888), pp. 33-9, and A. Rogers, "The Holy Mirror or the Gospel according to Father Jerome Xavier", *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, X July-Oct(1890), pp. 184-200. The last is the fullest analysis of the work. The *Samarat al falasfa* also contained a biography of Jesus Christ.

¹³ For lives of the twelve Apostles, cf. *Dastan i Ahwal i Hawariyan*, Bodl. Persian MS. Laud. Or. 173; for details of this work, cf. Fr. Xavier's *Persian Lives of the Apostles*, Rev. S.J. Hosten S.J., *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, N.S. X(1914), pp. 65-84, and E. Maclagan, *Jesuits and the Great Moguls*, pp. 209-11.

¹⁴ Cf. *Aina i Haqnuma* B.L. Harl 5478, completed in 1609 and dedicated to Jahangir; for details of this work, cf. *Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, pp. 206-9. For its abridgement, entitled *Muntakhab Aina i Haqnuma*, B.L. Add. 23, 584.

Aina i Haqnuma then set a flame of controversy among the Muslims of India and Persia. A Persian, Sayyid Ahmad bin Zain al Abidin, wrote a reply to it entitled *Misqal i safadar tahliya i Aina i Haqnuma*, ("The clean-polisher for the brightening of the truth-reflecting mirror") in 1623, which aroused response from Rome in 1628 and 1631.¹⁵

However, although the above works were practically based on the Gospels, they were more of a controversial nature. The actual translation of the scriptures in Persian and Arabic reached India not from Europe, but from further Islamic lands. There resided large Christian and Jewish communities in the Ottoman empire and Persia. They spoke Arabic and, in the case of Iran, Persian. The knowledge of what they believed and practised was therefore, available. It was from these countries that the Persian and Arabic translations of the Gospels reached Akbar's court and thenceforward Europe itself. It was an Armenian priest, Father Nicholas, brother of the Bishop of Jerusalem, who brought a Persian translation of the four Gospels, dating from the fourteenth century, for presentation to Akbar around 1605, immediately before the emperor's death. The Armenian priest, too, died on the way at Lahore and his books fell into the hands of Jesuit missionaries. Father Xavier is credited with having prepared a version from these Gospels.¹⁶ Similarly, the Psalter's (*Zabur*) Persian translation reached India through a Florentine traveller, Giambattista Vachiete (1552-1619), who arrived at Akbar's court in 1604 along with a Persian translation of the Psalms which he had

¹⁵ For details of the controversy caused by *Aina i Haqnuma* in India, Persia and Rome, cf. *Jesuits and the Great Moguls*, pp. 208-9.

¹⁶ The Jesuit Father sent copies of the four Gospels to the king of Spain and a copy for the Vatican Library, Cf. *Jesuits and the Great Moguls*, pp. 213-15.

obtained from the Jews in Persia.¹⁷ He also brought the Gospels in Arabic, printed in the Vatican, and presented them to the Jesuit Fathers at Agra.¹⁸

In 1616, when Thomas Roe visited the Mughal court as the ambassador of King James I of England and VI of Scotland, he brought back a copy of the Psalms in Persian made by some Carmalites at Isfahan in 1616 and presented it to the University of Oxford.¹⁹

In the mid-seventeenth century the author of *Dabistan i Mazahib*, ("School of Religions"), Mulla Mubad Shah, a Zoroastrian, obtained information on Christianity from Portuguese factors in Surat. It was at the same place that Mubad Shah obtained his information about the basic tenets of Christian faith in order to compile his section on Christianity, from a writer (*nama i nigar*) of a Portuguese priest known as Padre Francis. Mulla Mubad Shah noted that the priest was respected by the Portuguese of Surat and Goa. The *Dabistan i mazahib* contained an account of the life of Christ and a few dogmas and sacraments according to the Roman Catholic faith. The author noted that the Gospels (*Injil*) were in the tongue of Jesus Christ (*Zaban i Isa*) and had also been translated into four languages, namely Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Syriac and all of these were regarded as the "word of God" (*Kalam i ilahi*) by the Christians.²⁰

It was mainly Roman Catholicism which was introduced in India through the Jesuits and the Portuguese. From the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the British

¹⁷ Xavier is said to have prepared a fresh version from this text of the Psalter (*Zabur*) into Persian. Cf. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, II, 1922, pp. 532; also *ibid.*, 1923, p. 138. The only known manuscript of the above work is at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

¹⁸ For details, cf. *Jesuits and the Great Moguls*, pp. 211-2.

¹⁹ Thomas Roe presented the Persian translation of the Psalms to the University of Oxford upon his return to England in January 1620 (Bodleian Persian MS. Bodl. Or. 130).

²⁰ For *Dabistan i Mazahib*, cf. the article by J. Horoviz in *Encyclopedia of Islam*. For the text, cf. *Dabistan i Mazahib*, Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Pers. MS. University Collection, *Farsi Akhbar*, No. 8, ff. 288a-298a. Mubad Shah did not mention a Persian translation of the Gospels which were available in India by 1647, when the author consulted a Portuguese priest at Surat.

envoys, travellers and adventurers who went to India showed more interest in obtaining concessions for trade and commerce from the Mughal authorities rather than involving themselves in the religious issues. However, the contemporary chroniclers perceived some vague notions of religious differences between Portugal and Britain. For instance Ferishta, writing in the first decade of the seventeenth century, noted the basic difference between the English and the Portuguese. In his view, the English considered, unlike the Portuguese, "Jesus Christ to be a servant of God (*bandah*, literally "slave", in theological terms means "the creature") an envoy (*Rasul*) and messenger of God, and that Almighty God is one, with neither a wife nor a son."²¹

Coming to the eighteenth century, there are instances of Muslim scholars who associated themselves with Christian scholars in order to explore these religions, especially in Persia, from where Persian translations of the Old and New Testament reached India through various channels in the seventeenth century. Shaikh Muhammad Ali Hazin noted in his autobiography that he associated himself with the learned men of the Christians, Jews, Magi or Zoroastrians (*Majus*) and the Sabeans (*Sabiya*), in order to explore the doctrines of these religions. It was at Isfahan, which had considerable Christian and Jewish communities, that Hazin cultivated intimate intellectual contacts with a Christian priest, called Khalifah Awanus. The latter was well-versed in Arabic, Persian, logic, astronomy and geometry. Hazin wrote about Khalifah Awanus that he had read several books on Islam and evinced a keen desire to explore the subject further, but because of fear, indifference and want of proper esteem among Muslim scholars for this group (*tabaqa*), Awanus could not attain his objective until Hazin cultivated close

²¹ Cf. *Tarikh i Ferishta* or *Gulshan i Ibrahimi* (The Rose bed of Ibrahim), p. 373. This view of the religious differences between the British and the Portuguese as underlying the Anglo-Portuguese rivalry continued to recur in the period of our enquiry. For instance, cf. Ghulam Basit, *Tarikh i Mamalik i Hind*, f. 119a.

scholarly contacts with him. Hazin read the New Testament (*Injil*) with him along with the commentaries as well as some other works related to Islam. Similarly, Khalifah Awanus, sought clarification on various issues related to Islam.²² Thus, both Hazin and Khalifa Awanus had fruitful exchanges of ideas about their respective faiths.²³ Hazin also sought scholarly contacts with a Jewish scholar called Shuaib, and with the latter he read the Old Testament (*Tauret*) and got its translation copied for his personal perusal.²⁴ He also availed of the opportunity to investigate about the Magi at Shiraz and with the Sabeans at Shushtar and Dizful.²⁵ Evidently these religious scriptures were available in Persian along with commentaries which enabled Hazin to study them.

Abd al Latif reports a similar interest in comparative religion about his uncle Sayyid Abdullah,²⁶ who sought close intellectual contacts with scholars of the Christians, Jewish and Zoroastrian faiths in Persia. Sayyid Abdullah perused Gospels with commentaries from a Christian priest called Kashish.²⁷ Similarly, Sayyid Abdullah

²² Cf. *Tarikh i Ahwal*, f. 29.

²³ Cf. Hazin's autobiography, *Ahwal i Hazin*, Bodl. Pers. MS. Ouseley Coll. 273, f. 29, for contacts with Khalifah Awanus who compiled a book on Christian theology. Cf. Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of British Museum Persian Manuscripts*, p. 5, MS. No. Add. 23, 583, where the contents of MSS. are noted. For Hazin's intellectual contacts with Jewish scholars, cf. *Ahwal i Hazin*, f. 30. Hazin obtained a Persian translation of the Old Testament (*Tauret*) from his Jewish informant Shuaib. For contacts with Magi, cf. ff. 42-43. For contacts with Sabeans, f. 77. Hazin reported that the Sabeans were very few in Persia and confined to Dizful and Shushtar. They were followers of Enoch (*Saab*) and their religious text was called *Zubur i Awwal*, i.e. "The First Psalms".

²⁴ Cf. *Ahwal i Hazin*, f. 30.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 42-43; for his meeting with the Sabeans, f. 77.

²⁶ Sayyid Abdullah (1701-1759) belonged to a prominent scholarly family of Shushtar in Iran. Grandson of Nimatullah Jazairi, he was educated in his home town Shushtar and at other centres of learning in Iran and Turkey. The grandfather compiled several works, including a history of Shushtar: *Tazkirah i Shustariyah*. The manuscript of this work is lodged in the British Library, Add. 23, 534. For the printed edition of the same, cf. Sayyid Abdullah Shushtari, *Tadkira i Shushtar* (ed.), M. Hidayat Husain, Calcutta, 1914-24, Bib. Indica Series. For the life of Abdullah, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 60-1, as well as Hidayat Husain's introduction. For the wider intellectual concerns and the writings of Sayyid Abdullah, cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 49a-54b.

²⁷ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 52a. Abd al Latif explained that the term *kashish* was derived from the root word *qissis*, meaning 'priest' or 'bishop'. The Christian scholar Kashish was among the scholars of various faiths who were invited by Nadir Shah to testify certain verses of the Holy *Qur'an* from the Pentateuch (continued...)

in order to satisfy his quest for the knowledge of other religions, studied the Old Testament (*Torah*) and commentaries with the Jewish scholars of Isfahan, and associated himself with scholars of the Zoroastrian religion at Shushtar, to explore the sources of their faith.²⁸

To sum up: previous to the direct contact with the Western world, there existed three kinds of awareness of Christianity. First, Christ and his mission as contained in the Holy *Qur'an* and further elaborated upon by the Muslim commentators. This is what constituted the inherited knowledge which was as old as Islam itself with ever present consciousness of the unique place of Jesus Christ among the Prophets. Second, there was continuous growth of knowledge of Christianity as believed and as practised in the Western world from the closing decades of the sixteenth century and further enhanced in the next century. Thirdly, there are instances of occasional interaction with scholars of Christian and Jewish faith. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century direct contact with the West renewed the consciousness of the existing knowledge. All the above three channels formed the basis of our authors' knowledge when the direct exposure took place.

Abd al Latif was influenced by his uncle Sayyid Abdullah, who had an interest in comparative religions and had also read the works of Shaikh Hazin. Itisam al Din and

²⁷(...continued)

and the Gospels. An interesting episode is narrated by Khawaja Abd al Karim Kashmiri, who was in the service of Nadir Shah in 1739 and accompanied him to Qazwin, and who returned to Delhi in 1743 to compile an account of his travel in 1784-85. Once, so the report goes, Nadir Shah summoned the scholars of Christian and Jewish faith along with their respective scriptures to elaborate upon the following verse of the Holy *Qur'an*: "Muhammad is the Prophet of God and those who are with him are fierce against the unbelievers, but compassionate towards one another. Thou mayest see them bowing down prostrate, seeking a recompense from God and his God will. Their signs are in their faces being marks of frequent prostration. This is their description on the Pentateuch and the Gospels". Nadir Shah, who required the exposition of the above verses from heavenly books, ordered Mehdi Isfahani to obtain the Persian translations from the Jews and the Christians. Mehdi reported to Nadir Shah along with seven learned men (*Ulma i Tauret wa Injil*), with Persian translations of the Old and New Testament. Cf. Khawaja Karim Kashmiri, *Bayan i Waqi*, Bodl. Pers. MS. Ouseley 276, ff. 64a-65a.

Murtaza Husain referred to and quoted from the translations by Padre *Zeronamu Shivar*, the Persianized form of Jerome Xavier's name during Akbar's reign.²⁹ Presumably these translations were available to Murtaza in his local library at Bilgram which was a centre of learning. Itisam al Din possessed a Persian translation of the Gospels from which he quoted extensively to elucidate his points, throughout his discourses on religion.³⁰ At the same time he especially referred to the specific version of the Gospels presented to Emperor Akbar by a certain French priest (probably confusion for Portuguese) and quoted extensive passages from it.³¹ The fact that there was no lack of Persian translations of the Gospels is further proved by the number of surviving manuscripts in libraries.³²

Yet, in spite of the existence and availability of this knowledge, there existed nothing parallel to show the place of Christianity in Islamic thought in the context of India in the medieval period.³³ It might come as a surprise to a western scholar, but not to one who has some idea of the socio-intellectual concern of the Muslim scholarly world in the period under study.³⁴ Knowledge of western interest in Islam reached India in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, when Muhammad Husain informed

²⁹ cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 183.

³⁰ Itisam emphasised his access to a text of the Gospels in several of his discussion of this aspect. Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 104a, 113a, 116a and 117a.

³¹ *Ibid.*, f. 143b.

³² For the manuscripts of the Gospels in Persian, cf. *Kitab i Injil*, Gospels in Persian of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, British Library, Add. 19, 431. For another version of the four Gospels in the British Library, cf. Or. 1419, written in India towards the close of the eighteenth century. This belonged to Claude Martin (d. 1800), a French national who served in the Awadh state with Shujauddaula and the latter's successor Asafuddaula. For a brief sketch of Claude Martin in contemporary British periodicals, cf. *The Asiatic Annual Register for the year 1801*, pp. 34-6.

³³ Cf. A. Hourani's seminal study of the place of Islam in the European thought, *Islam in European Thought*, pp. 7-60, where the author examines the development of the ideas about Islam in European thought and scholarship, showing in particular how the views of the nineteenth century thinkers and scholars reflected the dominant philosophical and historical ideas of their age.

³⁴ Cf. the Introduction to the present essay.

his readers about an English translation of the Holy *Qur'an* by George Sale (1697-1736).³⁵

A few years ago, a man known as Sale had attempted a translation of the Holy *Qur'an* into English (*zaban i English*), and the latter had succeeded in translating it with reasonable lucidity and eloquence. Sale had also written commentaries upon difficult verses of the Holy *Qur'an* in the light of the famous exegetical works like *Baizawi* and *Kashshaf*. Sale sought to compare his own religious texts with the Holy *Qur'an*. At one place the latter said that the Ascension of Christ did not take place from the cross. Sale spent around seventeen years in Arab countries where he pursued various exegetical works in Arabic.³⁶

Thus, Muhammad Husain came to know of the growing trend towards comparative study of religions in Europe.

The late eighteenth century was witnessing the rise of Orientalism in the West, with its first sign becoming manifest in the British colony of Bengal.³⁷ In 1786, Sir William Jones (1746-94), a distinguished British student of Oriental matters, then resident in Calcutta as the Chief Judge working for the East India Company, laid the foundation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal which stimulated his other colleagues to pursue researches on the Eastern world, its culture and religions. At Calcutta, William Chambers, a junior colleague of Jones working in the judiciary at Calcutta possessed an excellent collection of Arabic and Persian books on the history, poetry, dictionaries and lexicons of these languages. Abd al Latif admired the fact that William Chambers could speak Persian so fluently that it was difficult to distinguish his speech and pronunciation from that of the Persian speaking elite (*Qizilbashiya*). It was from William Chambers' personal collection that Abd al Latif acquired the text of the Pentateuch (*Taurit*), the Gospels (*Injil*) and the Psalms (*Zabur*) to satisfy his own intellectual quest. He studied these texts in Arabic along with commentaries which were prepared by Muslims in

³⁵ Cf. *Risalah*, ff. 4b-6a.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 4b-6a. George Sale (c. 1697-1736) made the first accurate translation of the Holy *Qur'an*. Cf. G. Sale, *The Koran* (London, 1734).

³⁷ For our author's contact with William Jones at Calcutta, cf. in the present essay the chapter on "Education and Orientalism".

Istanbul. He specifically mentions that his knowledge of Christianity and Judaism was derived from close perusal of these scriptures. For clarification, he discusses the difficult and complicated passages with Tafazzul Husain.³⁸ Most of our writers met British officials, scholars and administrators in India or worked as their assistants and employees, and it is natural that in such close client-patron relations, some occasional discussion on religious issues also came up.

4.3 A Definition of Christianity

It was common knowledge that the entire Europe professed Christianity. What was Christianity, was also well understood. Muhammad Husain, one of the earliest writers, explained that all Europeans were Christians (*millat i nasrani*).³⁹ Similarly, Itisam also opined that they were the repositories of earlier revelations, and therefore they were the "people of the Book" (*Ahl i kitab*).

Christianity was defined by the writers who are the subject of the present study in the same way as for other educated Muslims: a revealed faith, with its followers enjoying the status of *Ahl i Kitab*, i.e., people of the Book, "possessors of the Scriptures", repositories of the earlier revealed books. God transmitted His message in revelations which are known as *Injil*, the Gospels, through the Prophet Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was referred to with respect with various Quranic titles, he was an envoy

³⁸ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 206. After the death of William Chambers, his brother Robert showed William's collection to Abd al Latif, who reports several copies of the Holy *Qur'an* and other sacred books the library. Latif acquired a number of copies of the Holy *Qur'an* and sent these to state of Hyderabad, but he failed to persuade Robert Chambers to sell the copies of the Old Testament, the Gospels and the Psalms with commentaries prepared in Istanbul. William Chambers published the translation of Gospels from Calcutta, *Mathew, 1-5, from Greek into Persian* (Calcutta, 1795). Cf. T.H. Darlow and M.F. Moute, *Historical Catalogues of the Printed Edition of Holy Scriptures in the Library of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, London, The Bible House, vol. 2, 1911, p. 1202, quoted in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yashter, Vol.IV, Faciclude 2 (New York, 1989), p. 204. Cf. the article by Kenneth J. Thomas.

³⁹ Cf. *Risalah*, f. 4a.

and Prophet of God. Murtaza referred to him with the full title, *Isa Ruhullah Ibn i Maryam*, "Jesus the Spirit of God, son of Mary". Mary (*Bibi Maryam*) gave birth to him in Bethlehem without having seen a man, an allusion to the Virgin birth of Christ. The faith itself was denoted by various Persian terms *Din i Isawi* or *Mazhab i Isawi* and its adherents were called *nasara* and some times *ahl i nasara* or *qaum i nasara*, which stood for "Christians" and "Christian community". Itisam very briefly explained that Christians were called *nasara* (*Nazerene*) because Jesus Christ was born near the city of Nazareth, close to Jerusalem (*Bait al muqaddas*). Murtaza also traced the chain of Prophets beginning with Noah (*Nuh*) coming down to Prophet Muhammad, tracing through Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

Murtaza referred to Christ's place of birth in Islamic Christology.⁴⁰ Murtaza also alluded to the significance of Jerusalem as the land of Prophets, its topography, *Masjid i Aqsa*, its eschatological importance, its significance for Islam, the place of ascension of the Prophet Muhammad, and the first congregational mosque and *Kaba* of Islam.

Itisam sought to trace genealogical links between Christians and Muslims. First he referred to the tradition of Noah and his three sons Ham, Sam and Yafith, and the division of the inhabited globe by Noah among them. After several generations, Abraham was born. The Arabs were the descendants of his son Ishmael, son of Hagar,

⁴⁰ Murtaza drew heavily on existing sources which contained the biography of Jesus Christ. Yet, compared to what was written by writers in the seventeenth and even eighteenth century, his biography of Christ did not rate highly. For instance, cf. *Subh i Sadiq*. This manuscript, which presumably formed part of the Ouseley Collection in the Bodleian library, was originally transcribed by Murtaza Husain and later quoted as the source of his information; the account of Mary and the description of the birth of Christ is extremely refreshing and well documented with citations of the Holy *Qur'an*. Similar is the case with other eighteenth century works, namely the *Hadiq us safa*, the *Farhat an nazirin*, and the *Mirat i Aftabnuma* noted earlier. These biographies can be compared with any portrait of Jesus by present day Islamicists. Nonetheless, what was new about Murtaza as well as Itisam was that they both sought to understand the life of Christ and the subsequent developments of Christianity in the context of the Christian world. Other works did not show any awareness of Christ as understood by the Christians.

while from his second wife Sarah was born Isaac, the ancestor of Christians of Rum and Syria.⁴¹

Itisam sought to put Christianity in a historical perspective. He wrote that after the demise of Jesus, the office of vice-regency (*Khilafat/Imamat*) devolved upon his Twelve Apostles. These Twelve Apostles (*Hawariyyun*) went to various countries and propagated the Holy Law (*Sharah i Muthar*). They also compiled and arranged the Gospels (*Injil*) which were regarded as the most authentic account of the faith. After the death of the twelve Apostles, differences arose among the religious leaders and scholars concerning the traditions and articles of faith with each one of them becoming leader (*Imam*) and an expositor (*mujtahid*). They came forward with their own interpretations and explanations of the laws and traditions (*din wa ain*). Since then differences became manifest in their religious beliefs (*mazhab wa millat*). The religious differences in Christianity was a point which was equally emphasised by Murtaza and he briefly alluded to the three main groups of Melkites, Nestorians and Jacobites, but without any attempt to explore the various schools of thought. The idea that Christians had been divided into no less than seventy-two sects and the faith as professed by them was not the same as preached by Jesus and transmitted to the latter by God, was an old and traditional one.⁴² Evidently Itisam and Murtaza both quoted Maulana Rumi's interpretation and ideas in this respect, while alluding to the dissension and divisions

⁴¹ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 100-101.

⁴² The idea of divisions among Christians was rigid and stereotyped since earlier times. Similar perceptions are found in seventeenth as well as eighteenth century works. Briefly speaking, it was thought that people of Christ (*Ummat*) followed him for seventy two years. Later on it was a certain Jew called John who misled the Christians causing three divisions among them: the Jacobites, the Melkites, who believed that Jesus was God, and the Nestorians, who considered Jesus the son of God. All of them believed in the doctrine of Trinity (*salis salasa*). For an account of the doctrinal differences about the nature of Christ, cf. *Mirat al alam*, f. 20b. For an exposition of the nature of differences, cf. *Subh i Sadiq*, f. 60a, *Farhat un nazirin*, f. 55b, and *Hadiqat al Safa*, f. 32b. Knowledge of the doctrinal differences between Christians seems to have filtered through from other Islamic lands, Egypt, Syria, Persia and Anatolia, where there existed large groups of Jacobites as well as Nestorians with their respective Churches.

among the Christians.⁴³ Abd al Latif, too, endorsed the idea of a civil-war and blood-lettings in Europe on account of religion.⁴⁴

Itisam and Murtaza paid some attention to the doctrines, beliefs and sacraments of Christianity. However, neither used the actual term 'Catholic' or 'Protestant' to describe their respective doctrines. Let us examine briefly how Itisam and Murtaza defined the various dogmas and beliefs. Itisam noted that the basic tenet of the Christian faith, with the exception of the British, an allusion to the Anglicans, was that they regarded Jesus Christ as "son of God". The British argued that the pure nature of God can not be associated with physical fatherhood. The attribute of God is that neither He is born of anyone, nor any one is born of Him. The Almighty God had no counterpart. But the British also thought that God allowed Jesus to be called his son as an exercise of Divine favour and thus to exalt him in dignity among the other prophets.⁴⁵ Itisam similarly described the concept of Passion and Redemption which was derived from the Persian translation of the Gospels, but without any comments. He wrote that Christ reappeared the third day after his pious body went to the fourth heaven, in accordance with the promise made to his Apostles. Christ sat on his grave and preached to them that he was the son of Mary. He suffered pain and Jews inflicted tortures upon him in this world, but this will bring universal forgiveness (*bakhshaish*) on the day of judgement. He also negated the possibility of any future prophet. Christ also promised that he will

⁴³ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 104a, and *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 184. Also, cf. Muhammad Rabi, *Safinah i Sulaimani*, B.L. Or. 6942, ff. 19b-20a. The author succinctly explained that there were three points of difference: "some claim that Jesus was son of God, some say he was God himself and still others believe that he consisted of three separate persons whose aspects were substance, knowledge and life, the Trinity (*Aqanim i Salasa*) being the very essence of creation. They maintained that the person which was knowledge entered into the material body of Jesus."

⁴⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 120b-121a.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 104a-104b. For Murtaza's description of the belief, dogmas and doctrines of Christianity and a reference to the discussion with Scot where Murtaza introduced Islamic notions, cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 182-4.

reappear for the second time near the Day of Resurrection, when the sun will rise from the west and the entire mankind will profess his religion and all religious differences will vanish.⁴⁶

Murtaza, too, discussed the doctrine of Reincarnation, Passion and Redemption with Jonathan Scott. Interestingly enough, along with the Christian concept of crucifixion, Murtaza added the Muslim concept of crucifixion. He expounded that, according to the Muslim belief, Christ had not been crucified, instead God had raised him to heaven; only a likeness of him was found by the Jews who inflicted torture upon him⁴⁷. Murtaza viewed the entire episode in chronological order by suggesting that six hundred and twenty years after the demise of Jesus Christ, Prophet Muhammad was born, and the faith of Islam was revealed to the world. Murtaza added that, according to Muslims, Jesus Christ will reappear and would kill the *Dajjal* (literally "butcher"). Jesus would follow the precepts of Islam and would wage war for the propagation of the faith for forty years, would marry and have sons, migrating finally to Medina, would perform pilgrimage (*Haj*) and be buried beside the Prophet Muhammad, where there exists a particular space for Jesus's grave. Murtaza added that a few people believed that Jesus will reappear as the *Mehdi*.⁴⁸

Itisam could not see the practice of confession in any favourable light, again something he thought practised by the Portuguese, Spanish and French, but not by the British. Like Redemption and Passion, Itisam did not have any equivalent for Confession. He criticised the practice of Confession on the grounds that no intermediary was desirable in man's relationship with God and such customs tended to give undue

⁴⁶ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 105a.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p.182.

⁴⁸ Cf., for instance, *Mirat al Alam*, f. 19a, *Subh i Sadiq*, ff. 56b-57a, *Farhat un nazirin*, ff. 41a-41b, and *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 183.

recognition to the priestly class. He found some analogy of this practice with the role of Brahmans in India who had a complete monopoly to read, write and interpret religion for others, while the rest of the people were deprived from direct recourse to the sacred texts. He referred to some event in France in the 1740's concerning the wealth and riches of the priestly class which led the French monarch to execute those priests and confiscate their property with the exception of those who were pious and virtuous.⁴⁹ Itisam seemed to have visited some churches in France and to his iconoclastic mind it was unacceptable that the Christians installed statues of Jesus and Mary, as to him it verged on idolatry. He vehemently censured the Catholic churches where statues of Jesus and Mary were installed and prostration before these statues was made. He admired the British for not carrying out such practices in their churches. He cited Swinton who also criticised such practices prevalent among the French, Spanish and the Dutch.⁵⁰ In fact, Itisam had a high appreciation for the kind of Christianity which he thought was practised in Britain for the following reasons that he gave: firstly, the British did not believe that Jesus was the son of God, rather the British believed that God the Almighty called Jesus his son to exalt him above the other prophets.⁵¹ The British believed in the oneness of God. Secondly, the British did not believe in Confession, and they did not install the statues of Jesus and Mary in their churches.⁵² The British monarch also did not acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope. However, in England, too, there was a small section who considered Jesus as the "son of God", an

⁴⁹ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff.110. Perhaps Itisam was alluding to the expulsion of the Jesuits which took place in France in 1762, when their property was resumed, and in 1773, when the Jesuit order was dissolved by Pope Clement because they were becoming powerful. "The order was not restored until a generation later". The above remark, however, is rather harsh and not based on historical fact.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 109-110a.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, f. 104.

⁵² *Ibid.*, f. 108.

allusion to the Catholic community.⁵³ Itisam sought to emphasise that despite such trends, the fundamental article of faith (*Iman*) of the British was also belief in the oneness of God.⁵⁴

4.4 Interrelations of Revealed Religions

While Itisam's main concern was to discover the various tenets of the Christian faith, Abd al Latif sought to analyze the inter-relationship between revealed faiths and their respective scriptures. The two writers paid some attention to the Jewish faith as well. Itisam wrote that the Jews were also regarded as the People of the Book (*Ahl i Kitab*), with their holy scriptures they were sometimes called *Bani Israel*, at others *Yahud*. The faith was believed to have been transmitted by Moses (*Musa Kalimullah*, i.e., "one to whom God spoke"), and the Jews were the followers (*qaum*) of this faith. Abd al Latif knew that a large population of Europe professed this faith before the spread of Christianity.⁵⁵ The scriptures transmitted by Moses were called *Tauret*, the Old Testament. Jesus had also declared that the truth had been revealed before him in the Torah.⁵⁶ Murtaza wrote that Jonathan Scott informed him that the point of view that Jesus Christ also preferred the Jewish faith or the faith of the Magi before Christianity was wrong; since from the beginning Jesus had his own mission to fulfil. Murtaza further enumerated the Ten Commandments. He specifically informed his readers that,

⁵³ *Ibid.*, f. 112a.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 112a.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 120b-121a.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 107.

according to Scott, the original document of the Torah was limited to a few tablets and contained traditions, but later commentators had expanded it into volumes.⁵⁷

Itisam and Latif emphasised that Christ fully endorsed the commentaries as laid down in the Torah and ordered that the words of the Torah will remain intact and he did not add any new commands to it. Jesus bequeathed his will (*wasiyat*) to his people (*Ummat*) to obey the injunctions, commands and prohibitions mentioned in the Torah.⁵⁸

Abd al Latif found echoes of the Holy *Qur'an* in the Torah. He particularly noted that the story of creation and the story of Adam were largely the same. He found a striking resemblance between the Holy *Qur'an* and the Jewish scriptures, yet he did not elaborate the points of resemblance and the reasons for the similarity (i.e., from the Muslim point of view God is the common source for both the revelations). Nonetheless, Latif briefly pointed out that the Torah, which comprised various chapters and sections, and many of its stories and traditions, commands and prohibitions, punishment (*siyasat*) and penal laws (*hudud*), bore resemblance to what was contained in the Holy *Qu'ran* — the word of God (*Kalam Allah*). But in the Torah each one of the commands and laws was in separate chapters and sections, and these were not finally merged together. It comprised of separate sections on compulsory duties (*Wajibat*), desired actions (*mustahbat*), commanded (*muakkidat*) and disapproved acts (*makruhat*). Moreover, some of the stories of the Old Testament vary in details and the places alluded to were different from those in the Holy *Qur'an*. Latif concluded that the New Testament did not contain anything except the stories relating to the birth and death of Christ, an

⁵⁷ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 181-2.

⁵⁸ Both Itisam and Latif cited the Ten Commandments, albeit without any comments; cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 107, and *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 206b.

account of Jesus' Ascension to Heaven.⁵⁹ He commanded his people to follow the injunction of the Torah. Each one of his Apostles narrated the tradition in their own way, which gave rise to differences in opinion, yet it was Matthew's version which was regarded as the most authentic; whatever was popular belonged to his narration (*riwayat*).⁶⁰ Similarly about *Zabur*, Latif asserted that it was the narration of religious scholars, though it was written in a poor and weak style.⁶¹

Some popular theological questions which had formed part of the Islamic-Christian controversy also came up, albeit briefly, during Itisam's and Abu Talib's sojourn in Britain. The discussion centred around the nature of prophethood and information about the coming of the Prophet Muhammad in the Gospels. Itisam wrote that the British did not believe in the coming of Muhammad as was foretold in the New Testament. He repeated the traditional argument of the Muslims, that the original Gospels had been lost. The New Testament which the Christians possessed was compiled by Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John, and the tradition (*riwayat*) of the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as his mission, had not been included in any detail as was originally reported by Christ himself. Yet, Itisam opined that some indications of his mission were there, which are still evident from such passages of the New Testament as the Parable of the Labourers in Vineyard, which the commentator narrated in full.⁶²

⁵⁹ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 206b. Apparently, Latif read Arabic Apocryphal Gospels of the childhood of Jesus Christ.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 206b-207a.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 206b-207a.

⁶² Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 113a-114a.

Abu Talib also reports having entered into discussion on similar issues with the Bishop of Llandeff.⁶³ With the latter Abu Talib enjoyed intimate contacts during his sojourn in Britain. The Bishop of Llandeff was a person of scholarly disposition and much inclined towards philosophy. Abu Talib reported that the Bishop once raised the question of the will (*wasiyat*) of Jesus as mentioned in the Holy Gospels, about the coming of Prophet Muhammad and Jesus's command to his people (*Ummat*) to follow him. Abu Talib said that the Bishop hastily denied this tradition (*Khabar*), but agreed to have a discussion on this issue next week. Abu Talib claimed that on the appointed day, the Bishop acknowledged the truth of the information. The disputant further explained that the ancient Greek version of the Gospels, containing a specific account of the arrival of Prophet Muhammad, tallied with the verses of the Holy *Qur'an*. Consequently, Abu Talib queried the Bishop as to why the Christians did not obey the command of the *Injil*, their heavenly Book. The Bishop replied that the particular verse alluded to probably had been a later interpolation into the text by one of the Caesars of Rome, as the latter after the spread of the faith embraced Islam with an overwhelming zeal. The above answer of the Bishop led Abu Talib to argue that no interpolation was possible in a religious text which was already available to people in innumerable numbers. He then sought to strengthen his argument further by pointing out that the Prophet Muhammad, during his discourses with the contemporary Christian communities, declared that he was the promised Ahmad, the one whom Jesus commanded them to follow. The author concluded that the Christians did not deny the

⁶³ Abu Talib did not mention the name of the Bishop, who was Richard Watson (1737-1816). He was born at Heversham and graduated from Cambridge in 1759; elected fellow of Cambridge in 1760; later elected to a Professorship at the same; Fellow of the Royal Society in 1771; elected to the Chair of Divinity at Dublin College in 1782, and eventually appointed Bishop of Llandeff. He was vigorously engaged in the promotion of Biblical studies, and the defence of revealed religion was his favourite topic through pulpit and press. Cf. *Dictionary of National Biography*, Sidney Lee (ed.), Vol. XX (London, 1909), pp. 935-8.

command of Jesus, but they argued that he was not the person promised as they were still waiting.⁶⁴

Abu Talib reports that the discussion was closed by the Bishop with the remark that Abu Talib had come to England to forsake his traditional faith (*mazhab i qadeem*).⁶⁵ This is obviously a one sided version of the discussion. Apparently Richard Watson, the bishop in question, being a scholar of divinity and an ardent supporter of revealed faith, would have showed Abu Talib a Greek version of the Bible which contained information on the "Paraclete", or Greek term *Periklutos* (the celebrated) which, for Abu Talib, was synonymous to "Ahmad", irrespective of the opinion of Watson about the verse in question.⁶⁶ Itisam, whose interest was more intense in the subject, amply shows that themes which formed major themes of western images of Islam during the medieval period, like the personality of Prophet Muhammad and the nature of his prophethood, had survived until the closing decades of the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ He also reported that the majority of the British did not believe in the

⁶⁴ Cf. *Masir i talibi*, ff. 137a-138a. The information of the arrival of *Ahmad* by Jesus Christ was noted by other writers too. Cf., for instance, *Mirat i Aftabnuma*, f. 77b, although this work does not mention anything about Christian attitudes. The Quranic text is IXI, 6: "And when Jesus, son of Mary, said: O! children of Israel I am God's messenger to you confirming the Torah which was before me and announcing the good tidings of a messenger who will come after me, whose name is Ahmad". For the Muslim identification of 'Ahmad' with the Greek term *periklutos* (celebrated), a corruption of *parakletes* ("the Paraclete" in John XIV, 16 XV, 23-27), cf. the article "Ahmad" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, by Joseph Schacht. This had been a fundamental theme of enquiry for Muslims in any encounter with Christians. The same question was asked by Caliph Al-Mehdi (r. 775-85) to the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy (727-823), and by Akbar to the Jesuits in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. For the panoramic view of the issues debated in Muslim-Christian encounters in Baghdad, at the Mughal court and Lucknow, covering a wide range of perspective and change in emphasis in debates, cf. the unpublished article by A.A. Powell, "The Truth reflecting Mirror: Muslim Christian Disputation in pre-colonial Era", read at Oxford in 1989.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Masir i talibi*, f. 138a.

⁶⁶ This was a fairly common belief among the Muslims, irrespective of its interpretation by the Christians. Cf. *Mirat i Aftabnuma*, f. 77a: "Jesus Christ preached belief in the oneness of God and asked his people to follow *Ahmad Mustafa*, the Prophet Muhammad." The author noted it without any polemical purpose.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 112b-122a. For western images of Islam in medieval ages, cf. R.W.Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Harvard University Press, 1962). That such images and concepts survived until the eighteenth century, cf. N.A. Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh, 1960), pp. 271-307.

revealed nature of the heavenly books. They regarded these as being the works of Prophets who themselves compiled them, as the leaders of their people. Consequently, they did not believe in the message of the Holy *Qur'an*, but admired Prophet Muhammad for giving his people a holy law (*Sharia i muthar*) and because he was endowed with genius and possessed intellect which was evident from the religion he preached. Itisam elaborated further that the British criticised the Prophet for resorting to the use of force of arms to propagate his faith, a fact clearly unbecoming to his prophetic office, while the earlier prophets only used preaching and persuasion to convince the people of the truth of their missions and performed miracles. Itisam reported that such points were raised by Swinton, to whom he replied that, initially, the Prophet too endeavoured to spread his message through sermons and preaching. But this method did not yield the desired effects and the *Quraish* began to commit atrocities upon his followers. It was in such circumstances that God ordered His Prophet to wage war against the non-believers and he resorted to a holy war (*Jihad*) which was made obligatory upon every Muslim.⁶⁸

Itisam reports a similar discussion between John Graham, an East India Company official, and Munshi Mir Sadr al Din and Munshi Mir Siraj al Din, at Burdwan, in Bengal.⁶⁹ John Graham raised the above and other questions, concerning the Muslim exclusive claim to salvation and claimed that Prophet Muhammad did not perform miracles, but trained pigeons and lived in solitude whenever his people asked him to perform miracles. Itisam wrote that the Munshis present could not answer these questions of Graham except by saying that they believed what "God willed and what his

⁶⁸ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 114a-115.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 115. Presumably Siraj al Din and Sadr al Din were in the employment of John Graham at Burdwan. It seems the discussions took place around the 1770's, when Itisam had returned to India.

Prophet ordered" (*Qala Allah wa Qala Rasul*).⁷⁰ Itisam claims to have answered the above points raised by John Graham persuasively. Our author asserted that the Prophet Muhammad was the seal of the Prophets and he would be an intercessor on the Day of Judgement and he, too, performed miracles such as the dividing of the moon. But miracles alone did not have the desired effects upon the people, as earlier the prophets performed a number of miracles and specially Christ performed more miracles than any other Prophet, all clearly recorded in the New Testament. Among his known and famous miracles were that of restoring the eye-sight of a man blind from birth and the curing of a leper. Jesus also raised the dead always with Divine permission as proof of his mission. But people did not accept his message except for the twelve Apostles. Jews went to inflict pains and torture upon him. Similarly pagan Arabs and the *Quraish* began to torture Prophet Muhammad and his followers, until the Prophet was forced to take recourse to more effective and vigorous method against his enemies when mere preaching and persuasion did not work.⁷¹ Itisam felt elevated that he could come up with persuasive arguments in England as well as in India to convince his disputants.⁷²

4.5 The Pope and Reformation

What was lacking in the image of the religion of Europe prior to the direct exposure to Christianity was the knowledge of the sixteenth century religious upheavals in the European world, the Reformation, and the consequent ideological division of the Christian west into Catholic and Protestant. It is difficult to trace any information about this religious division of far reaching consequences in Indo-Persian literature prior to the

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 115b-116a.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, f. 114a-117a.

⁷² *Ibid.*, f. 117a. Itisam especially mentions that the other two Munshis, Sadr al Din and Siraj al Din, borrowed the text of the New Testament to prepare a copy for themselves.

period of direct contact with the Western world in the second half of the eighteenth century. It would hardly be expected from Jesuit missionaries who were inspired with missionary zeal, following the process of Counter-Reformation in Europe to go to Asia and Africa in increasing numbers, that they would have informed about the Protestant faith and its various denominations. All of these Muslim writers came to know about the Reformation in Europe which they sought to describe with great interest. But although none of them seemed to have been aware of the actual term, the "Reformation", their detailed and evocative narrative makes it absolutely clear that they were describing the sixteenth century upheaval in Europe.

Every writer under study has something to say about the position of the Pope in Christianity in the pre-Reformation Europe. It was something with which Muslims had been acquainted since a long time.⁷³ The Pope was usually referred to as *Papa* or sometimes "Pope". Latif wrote that the Pope was regarded as a representative of Christ. In this capacity, as the representative (*Khalifa*) of Jesus Christ, the Pope was also the absolute master of all European monarchs. It was the Pope who, as spiritual head, interpreted religion for the upper classes as well as the laity and defined what was lawful (*halal*) and prohibited (*haram*). The Pope exercised his authority over other monarchs of Europe through his representatives (*walis*) and no financial or political matter was decided without seeking the prior approval of his representative. Similarly, in every powerful kingdom, landed property and cash (*wazifa*) was enjoyed by the papacy. A third of the revenue of the entire Europe, of which even the riches of *qarun* would not equal the tenth part, was enjoyed by the Pope and the Padres. In the sermon

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For instance, Badauni was aware of the Papal office. He noted briefly: "The learned men of Europe (*afranja*), known as Padres (*Padri*), and their infallible head (*mujtahid i kamil*) was known as Pope (*Papa*), who could change the religious ordinances as he might deem advisable, and even the king could not disobey his decrees brought the Gospels (*Injil*) with them. They forwarded proofs for the Trinity (*salis salasa*) and sought to unfold the tenets of the Christian faith and thus to spread the Christian faith (*nasraniyat*)". Cf. *Muntakhab ut twarikh*, p. 260.

(*Khutba*) and the coins the name of the Pope was recited first, thereafter the names of the monarchs.⁷⁴ Thus, the Pope was perceived as a kind of priest-king whose unlimited religious authority enabled him to exercise enormous influence in politics as well.

Muhammad Husain and Abd al Latif also added the method of the election of the Cardinals and how the Pope was appointed from amongst seventy-two Cardinals. Abd al Latif elaborated upon the system of education of the high priestly class in Rome, the seat of the Pope in Italy. He remarked that the office of Cardinal was regarded with respect. Even kings, princes, the upper strata and the commoners left their native countries to receive education at Rome and, if fortunate, succeeded in becoming Cardinals there.⁷⁵

Every writer sought to describe the process of the Reformation without using any equivalent term for it. They defined it simply as a process in which the supremacy of the Pope of Rome had been challenged in the sixteenth century. The process of the overthrow of the papal authority was thought to have begun in England where Henry VIII revolted against it; later on he was followed by other European monarchs. Much of the church property was confiscated and divided among the state officials and the British king himself. Latif thought that the Reformation occurred in England primarily because this was the country where philosophers arose from the sixteenth century onwards, and their philosophical ideas found favourable reception among the ruling elite. These philosophers and men of learning laid down rules and regulations in such a way that the religious authority of the Pope ceased to be effective. None of the authors were aware of the names of the leaders of the Reformation except Muhammad Husain who noted that it was Martin Luther and his successor John Calvin who raised voices against

⁷⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 124a.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 124.

the Pope, as both excelled in religious polemics. Both were accused of apostasy (*riddat*) by the Pope. Gradually, a number of people followed them and a new religion (*mazhab i jadid*) came into existence. Since then, the absolute authority of the Pope had ceased and he was left in possession of a piece of land and his seat in the old Rome, the capital of Italy.⁷⁶

There was one positive effect of the Reformation noted by every writer: the fact that, prior to it, science and learning was confined to priestly classes, but after the denial of the supremacy of the papacy, Latif noted that the English monarch commanded his own new priests to translate the Gospels (*Injil*) into English so that there would be no need of the Pope and Padres to interpret the religious texts.⁷⁷

However, there were some negative consequences too. Latif considered the growth of unbelief in Europe as an offshoot of the Reformation. He thought that the British upper class' expression of indifference and scepticism towards religious matters could be traced to the Reformation. This lack of concern in religious matters was due to the discredit of the Padres (*padri*) and the final overthrow of the Pope on the one hand, and, on the other, the high esteem of the philosophers in Europe in general and the appearance of people who accepted natural religion (*Tabi'in*), which occurred since the mid-sixteenth century. English people led the way in this respect and since then all over Europe a curtain was drawn over religious matters.

Bells were rung in the churches, once a week on Sundays the common people and the lower classes go to places of worship. The Padres (*padris*) also attend and preach the sermon for women while the philosophers and upper classes acknowledge the concept of the unity of God

⁷⁶ Cf. *Risala*, ff. 6a-7a. Among all our writers, none used the term 'Reformation' or any equivalent. With the exception of Mir Husain who knew Luther and Calvin by name, others did not mention the names of the leaders of this movement. Similarly our authors did not know the exact term 'Protestant'. For a similar account of the position of the Pope and the Reformation, cf. *Mirat i ahwal i jahan numa*, ff. 121-123.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 125.

(*Wahdaniyat i Khuda*) and consider the remaining articles of faith -the Prophethood, the Resurrection and everything else- like prayers and going to church- to be but idle tales.⁷⁸

4.6 Religion and the British

All these writers were interested to form an idea of the European people's attitude towards religion, particularly that of the British. Itisam was extremely disturbed that the British did not perform compulsory religious obligations, such as prayers (*namaz*) and fasting (*roza*). It was only on Sundays, he noted, that the villagers and the semi-urban area people went to the churches. These church-goers considered the performance of Sunday prayers more important and desirable than other mundane affairs. Murtaza also similarly queried Scott on how the British offered prayers and whether they kept fast.

Itisam further informed his readers that in their day-to-day eating habits, the majority of the British did not distinguish what was forbidden (*haram*) and what was allowed (*halal*). They did not distinguish cleanliness (*paki*) and impurity (*napaki*) in their daily life on the basis of religion. They consumed whatever was natural and good for health. In matters of food they followed what was laid down in their medical books and accordingly abstained from food items on medical grounds. The underlying reason for these unrestricted food habits was that they interpreted certain events in Christ's life-time in a way which allowed them to indulge freely in drinking and eating pork. But a few among them who endeavoured to uphold the tenets of the Torah abstained from consuming unlawful things (liquor and pork), since Jesus had fully accepted Torah and had urged his followers to follow its commands and prohibitions.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 126.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff.106-108a. Christianity did not have any injunctions with regard to food, but Itisam's thinking stemmed from his understanding of his own religion. Islam prescribes prohibitions on liquor and pork.

Itisam further explored the reasons for the neglectful British attitude towards religion. He sought to explain the common British neglect of a strict religious code as due to various prevailing trends in the British society: some of them thought that God created this universe for man's comforts and enjoyment. Man must concentrate all his efforts towards fulfilment of a single objective, the maximization of comforts. Every effort was to be directed towards this aim, whether it was related to agriculture, science, technical progress, learning, education, increase in human knowledge, development of the human mental faculties, maintenance of an army for the protection of a country's borders from enemies, protection of people from evils and calamities, construction of buildings, good living, eating good food, or wearing expensive clothes. They thanked God, but without any concern for accountability on the Day of Judgement. They were of the opinion that excessive devotion in worship and fasting, and offering prayers would render the constitution weak, which might obstruct their efforts for further advancement. In such a situation their country would become weak while their enemy's power would grow and they might fall an easy prey.⁸⁰

Itisam noted another trend in the British society. He felt that some of the British considered the intellect (*aql*) of prime importance. They gave preference to the intellect and reasoning over the traditions and sayings of wise men and even of the prophets. Some of them, like the rationalists (*mutazila*) and the materialists (*dahriya*), did not believe in the world hereafter. They did not even believe in the prophethood of Jesus and his message, and even denied the heavenly nature of the Gospels, by saying that the compiler of the New Testament, Jesus, was simply a common man. Itisam was not surprised to observe these trends, as he was aware of the prevalence of such views among the materialists and rationalists in the Muslims society as well. For him these

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 111b.

people in Britain were their counterparts.⁸¹ There were others, Itisam wrote, who had crossed all bounds and went to the extent of denying God to be the creator of this universe. They believed that this universe and all the living beings on earth came into existence by themselves; they grew, withered away and died within its own life-circle.⁸² Obviously these comments echoed the philosophies of materialism, agnosticism and atheism which formed part of the British upper class ideology.⁸³

Abd al Latif and Abu Talib, too, were aware of the rationalist scepticism among the upper middle classes of Britain. Abu Talib openly criticised the British upper classes for lack of faith in religion and resurrection (*millat wa ma'ad*) and their excessive inclination towards philosophy. He saw the evil effects of the lack of religious uprightness in the lower social echelons in Britain. He felt that the under-privileged section of society was devoid of honesty, yet it could not encroach upon the property and wealth of the rich strata because contemporary Britain experienced a stable government and laws which safeguarded the upper class interest.⁸⁴

Latif attributed the non-conformist and latitudinarian approach in religion to the Reformation which gave prominence to the philosophers over the religious classes. Latif was also aware of the on-going western Biblical criticism and the use of the press for the dissemination of individual opinion and differences on these matters. He noted that some of the scholars had transgressed all bounds of sensibility. They had exceeded habits of sobriety in arguing on issues such as the birth of Christ and Ascension to heaven. Even the European monarchs had no power to restrain and censure the writings

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, f. 112a.

⁸² *Ibid.*, f. 112b.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, ff. 106a-107b.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 146a.

of their subjects.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, the commentator closes his account of the European attitude towards religion with a mystical verse of Rumi, without any judgement on the gentlemanly indifference of eighteenth century Europeans towards religion.⁸⁶

Itisam's attitude was somewhat ambivalent, and a certain dichotomy is discernable in his account. On the one hand, he clearly disapproved of the various rationalistic philosophies, on the other hand he was highly appreciative of the British attitude toward other people's faith. The notable features of the British attitude towards other religions was tolerance and co-existence. For instance, the Jews who were the followers (*Ummat*) of Moses and still adhered to their faith were being subjected to an enormous amount of pain and tortures. They were ridiculed and held in contempt wherever they lived (they were also living in Arab, Syria and Turkey). They were expelled from Europe. The entire Christian people considered them insignificant and paid them no respect. They were neither respected nor accepted as equal members of society. All Christians were after their blood, and they would be burnt to death if found in any European country.⁸⁷ Itisam explained that the reasons for this great animosity between the Christians and the Jews was basically religious in nature. The Jews were considered responsible for inflicting pain on Jesus. They were considered to be hostile to his mission.⁸⁸ But the British attitude towards the Jews as observed by Itisam, was tolerant, as their religion was based on the principles of peace with all (*Sulah kul*). Therefore, the Jews observed by Itisam in London engaged in trades like selling clothes and fruits.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 131b-132a.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 126a: "The ascetic frequents the mosque, the pilgrim traverses the desert; where the nightingale is, and wine, such deeds are idle."

⁸⁷ For the Jewish attitude towards Jesus in his life-time, cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 104b-105a.

⁸⁸ For the position of the Jews in Europe, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 105b-106a.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 105b-106a.

On the other hand, as compared to the British, Itisam thought, the French were extremely intolerant towards other people's faith. He conjectured that if some Muslims built a mosque, gave the call for prayers and generally followed the articles of their faith and practised the rituals of Islam, the French would simply persecute them. But the British did not interfere in other's religion. The characteristic feature of the British was their tolerant outlook, they believed in co-existence and they followed a policy of co-existence, peace with all. To Itisam the British proclaimed that they had no concern with anyone's faith in accord with a popular maxim in Britain: "Isa for his own faith and Musa for his own".⁹⁰

Itisam's sensitive mind paid some attention to the minority communities who lived outside Europe. He saw that the Christians who lived in Syria and Turkey were weak and paid capitation-tax,⁹¹ like the Armenians (*Armani*), who originally resided in a place known as Arman in Persia and later moved to other places. Although they were also Christians, they had some shades of difference: they did not have their own land (*Sahab i mulk*), nor their own king, and the Europeans considered them an insignificant community. They were viewed as originally being descendants of slaves and, hence, lived like purchased subjects and tribute payers in the Islamic lands.⁹²

Abu Talib had a less articulated interest in religious issues, and religion entered only rarely in his discussion of British society. It was in his detailed discussion of the British political system that he explained to his readers, albeit briefly, that in Britain religious and political aspects of life were not intertwined. He wrote that the British-Christian law (*Shariat i Isawi i English*) did not interfere in the affairs of the state and the socio-

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 109a: *Isa ba din i khud Musa ba din i khud*.

⁹¹ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f.105a.

⁹² For the Armenians of *ibid* f 105b

economic life (*maishat*) of the people. Yet, Abu Talib thought that in Britain there was a separate minister for spiritual affairs (*Wazir Shariat i Isawi*), an allusion to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had no say in the affairs of state for the above reasons.⁹³ The author further explained that the main duties and the jurisdiction of the religious clergy was confined primarily to (a) leading the prayers in the churches (*imamat*) and delivering sermons (*khutbat*) on Sundays, (b) uniting people in marriage ties and settlement of divorce, (c) burials, (d) naming the newly born babies (*tanassur*). Abu Talib added that this last ceremony was essential, since according to the Christian faith a child was born without any religion and, therefore, could not be a Christian until baptised.⁹⁴

Abu Talib sought to describe the Anglican church and its hierarchy, without employing the term Anglican. He wrote that the entire country was divided into parishes and each parish had its own church with its prayer leader (*imam*) called "clergyman" (Abu Talib, obviously did not have any Persian equivalent for it). Several clergymen were under the jurisdiction of one bishop, and the latter were twelve in number. All these Bishops were under the headship of one Bishop, an allusion to the Archbishop of Canterbury. When a Bishop died, the king in consultation with the Archbishop appointed a new Bishop from among the clergymen. Abu Talib further elaborated that in lieu of its services the church received provisions and remuneration for its officials in the form of a share in the produce which was collected for each parish by the clergymen on behalf of the bishop and the clergy.⁹⁵

⁹³ Cf. *Masir i talibi*, f. 146a. The author mentioned Dr. Muir as the Archbishop of Canterbury.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 137a.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 137.

Abu Talib noted that the British religious class was socially well-established and had considerable wealth at its disposal. During his sojourn in London, Abu Talib had frequent meetings with the bishop of Durham, enjoyed his hospitality and often conversed with him with the aid of an interpreter. During these conversations the bishop informed Abu Talib that he did not touch food without having fed thousands of people during the scarcity of those days.⁹⁶

The writers under study sought to assess Christianity as they understood it, according to their own faith. At the same time there were purely intellectual motives too. Nonetheless, in spite of much amazing details, our authors' concern with the religious aspect of Western life was not as strongly motivated as in the realm of the western political systems, scientific and technical inventions and perceptions of European geographical and political expansion in India and the Islamic world. Such lack of motivation is most conspicuous in the case of Latif and Abu Talib. Religion entered only rarely in the latter's discussions and then only to complete his picture of the British political system and to discover that the clergy was more well-read and well-informed even than the princes; yet, it did not have any say in the formulation of state policies. Similarly, Latif's concern with the Reformation clearly stemmed from his desire to understand contemporary European developments in their historical perspective. He was also not unaware of the on-going Biblical criticism in Europe, yet he did not bother to

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 139a. Abu Talib did not mention the Bishop by name. He was Shute Barrington (1734-1826), successively Bishop of Llandaff, Salisbury and Durham. He was born in Berkshire, educated at Eton and graduated from Oxford in 1755; served as Chaplain-in-ordinary to George III, was consecrated as Bishop of Llandaff in 1769, and in 1782 translated to the see of Salisbury, where he charitably aided the necessitous clergy and poor of the diocese and spent much money on the repairs of the Cathedral and the episcopal place. In 1791 he succeeded to the rich see of Durham and presided over it for thirty five years, a vigorous champion of Protestant establishment, opposed to Catholic emancipation. He left numerous legacies of charities, including one Barrington society for promoting Religious and Christian Piety in the Diocese of Durham. Cf. *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol.I, p. 1214.

unravel these issues in any detail. The fact that Islam has neither allowed a formal priesthood nor any ecclesiastical hierarchy, and, hence, the phenomenon of elaborately organised Christian churches was difficult for a Muslim to comprehend, is an inadequate explanation. Perhaps, the reason lay somewhere else.

The Muslims had their own framework while thinking and postulating about Christianity. Since the beginning, for Muslim thinkers — the *Ulama* as well as for common educated Muslims — Christianity was a revealed religion and Jesus Christ was one of the line of authentic Prophets with a unique and distinguished place among them. This Quranic Jesus was ever present in the Muslim imagination and belief, before any contact with the West. At the same time, any idea of the divinity of Christ was simply against the uncompromising monotheism of Islam. Arguably, Itisam's enthusiasm for Anglicanism was based on his understanding that the British believed in the oneness of God. Abd-al Latif also thought that the British believed in the unity of God (*Wahdaniyat i Khuda*). Moreover, a number of questions asked by these authors stemmed from their understanding of their own religion. Itisam, whose interest in this aspect was most articulated, judged the standards of morality and religion in Europe, particularly in Britain, with his own yardstick. Murtaza's queries addressed to Scott about how the British offered prayers (*namaz*), whether they fast (*roza*) and what were the constituents of the Gospels (*Injil*) — if it was translated into English and the original text was available — and whether the English laws derived from the New Testament, reveal that Murtaza had in his mind an analogy with the Holy *Qur'an* which consists not only of the holy scriptures, but is also the source of law.⁹⁷ Itisam's recurrent wishful imagination that had ^{the} Christians accepted the truth of the message of Prophet Muhammad, the final and complete religion for all mankind, all visible differences

⁹⁷ Cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, p. 614.

between Christians and Muslims ^{would} ~~vanish~~ recurs as an idealism all through his discourses on religion.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 106a and 110a.

5 OBSERVATIONS ON BRITISH LIFE

All the authors who are examined in the present study offered comments on the socio-cultural life of contemporary Britain. Among these writers, Itisam al Din and Abu Talib, who had the opportunity to visit Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century, concerned themselves with, and tried to comprehend, almost every aspect of British social life which they could observe. They were meticulous in recording the varied manifestations of contemporary British life. The accounts of these two writers are remarkable for their fullness, comprehension and breadth of vision. Their impressions of British society, especially those of Abu Talib, relate to the period in the history of Europe which was later characterized as the "Age of Revolutions".

Contemporary Britain was a much observed country and these Indian travellers had added to the body of observations. Their reports are here subjected to close examination perhaps for the first time. These reports do not greatly differ from what the French travellers Abbe Le Blanc and Montesquieu wrote about their neighbour in the early part of the century. Like the French observers, these Indian writers were also conveying messages to their own countrymen, but they were less vigorous in spirit than their French counterparts. Obviously, occasional comparative comments and exhortatory remarks occurred in their account too, as we shall show.

5.1 A New Society

When our first traveller, Itisam, visited Britain in 1767-69, British society was in transition. The Agricultural Revolution, the Enclosure Movement and the early industrial changes were in process. Itisam's highly appreciative observations on the agricultural landscape and rural scene of green pastures and healthy livestock suggest that an outside observer could easily discern the prosperity of the country.¹ The Industrial Revolution had not yet been foreshadowed by the Commercial Revolution, though technical inventions such as the wind- and water-mills are mentioned in Itisam's account. (Itisam obviously took note of items such as watches which were exported to India, and were thus known to the visitor). These socio-economic changes became more visible as the century progressed. Abu Talib thus had the good fortune to visit the country when various social transformations, later known as the Agricultural Revolution, the Demographic Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, had already set in, and their impact was fairly apparent in society. Another important revolution, the French Revolution, had already taken place on the continent of Europe, and its effects were felt everywhere in the world, though, after France itself, probably nowhere so much as in Britain. All the above phenomena found place in his impressive travelogue. Our authors did not employ the terms 'Agricultural', 'Demographic' or 'Industrial Revolution' to describe these phenomena, nor perhaps they were aware of them. These key terms, after all, themselves entered Western historiography much after the beginning of the socio-economic transformation. Nonetheless, Abu Talib was, to a large extent, successful in conveying the elusive quality, commonly referred as "spirit of the age". The *Masir i*

¹ For the main agricultural products, items of export and import, means of transport, methods of cultivation, nature of soil, rotation of crops and livestock, cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 168-177a.

Talibi represents a successful translation of one cultural system into another. His work is a living example of the "portrayal of the age".

Britain represented a new society with its own unique features. Abu Talib as a poet predictably recorded his first expressions of the new society in poetry. He sought to describe every aspect of life in lyrical verses, "applying old forms to modern life". He attempted to portray the new culture in verse and fully created vivacious and life-like images of the human and the material. England, for him, was nothing less than a dream-world, a land of enchantment which left the sensitive and emotional poet spell-bound. The author called his poetic verses *Masnawi Surur Afza* ("the pleasure augmenting verses"), filling it with romanticized life-like images of his new cultural world. Roads, coaches, market-places, illuminations, the painter's studio, the fruit shop, the sweet-meat shop, the perfumery, the jewellery-shop, the china-ware shop, the machine shops, the factory and the industrial instruments became the poet's themes.² It was not only the convivial side of British life that found lively expression in his poetry, but serious subjects too: the centres of learning, the University of Oxford and Cambridge, became the subjects of his verse. Abu Talib was not, however, merely indulging in flights of fancy and imagination, he recorded serious thoughtful analysis in his verses. The poet expressed his inner frustration at finding his own people (*Qaum*) unable to benefit from such travel and cross-culture experience. In his poems he touched on almost every aspect of the British socio-cultural life. In his *Masir i Talibi* he

² Cf. *Diwan i Talib*. The only extant copy of this poetical collection now forms part of the Bodleian Library's Persian Collection, No. Persian e-9, ff. 71b-123b. Some of the poems of the *Diwan* are found in *Masir i Talibi*. The opening verses of the *Diwan* express the degree of the author's intoxication and enchantment with London, followed by other aspects of London life. The verses entitled "*Masnawi mausam sharah i khususiyat Landan wa England*" describe London's and England's weather, travel facilities, play-houses and places of entertainment. In short, the author sought to record every impression of British life in verse. Moreover, this *Diwan*, like *Masir*, includes verses in praise of the beautiful women of Britain. One poem in particular describes the physical attributes and attire of Miss Julia Burrell (ff. 116b-120b). But with happiness came sorrow: the last part of the collection is devoted to an elegy on Tafazzul Husain's death (ff. 121b-122a).

elaborates these impressions in greater depth and clarity. Nonetheless, it took him some time to adjust mentally with the new world, after he overcame his deep sense of enchantment and bewilderment. In the second volume of *Masir i Talibi*, when the author seriously dealt with these themes, he specifically refers to his earlier poetical composition *Surur Afza*, calling it a product of the fertile imagination which the climate of London had excited in his mind.³

Abu Talib's acumen enabled him to provide a graphic picture of British social and various other aspects of Western life. His extensive social contacts with the British aristocracy and gentry enabled him to view them closely. His observations are mainly of those one might call "the leisured classes of Hanoverian England". He socialized with these classes and, for obvious reasons, the majority of his acquaintances had served in India in high positions, such as former Governor-Generals, officials of the Company, and in the administration of the regional Indian states, such as the Awadh where Abu Talib served as a revenue official. The author tried to do justice to his hosts' warm hospitality by drawing small biographical sketches of them besides the accounts of his meetings with them. Consequently, the first volume of *Masir i Talibi* is devoted to this purpose. It gives a detailed picture of the way of life of the British aristocracy and the upper and middle classes, their social values, life-styles, entertainments, hobbies, and pastimes.

Apart from those who had served in India, Abu Talib sought to cultivate scholarly contacts with the British literati, scientists, painters, Orientalists and scholars, including

³ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 102b-169a. The second volume of the *Masir* is exclusively concerned with Britain, and it is entitled accordingly: *Dar Bayan i Inghland wa Landan dar Rasum Dasturat Inglish wa falsafaha wa hikmatha* or, "a description of England and London, its customs, practices, philosophy and learning".

the members of the Royal Society of Britain.⁴ He also makes occasional comments about the less privileged, the poor strata and the peasantry. But it was another author, Itisam who successfully filled this lacuna through his abiding interest in the less fortunate. Itisam, too, devotes extensive comments to the middle classes, but not to the exclusion of the underprivileged.

5.2 A Portrait of London

In Hanoverian England, London was the centre of the nation's culture, fine arts, intellectual pursuits, taste, and fashion; it was also the centre of government and economic life. London was also the centre of a large part of the world's trade. It was the centre of internal trade, the greatest centre of the ship-building in the world. Through its market, trade and shipping, it also became the world centre of insurance and banking. The official census of 1801 described it, as "the Metropolis of England, at once the seat of government and the greatest Emporium in the known world". For these observers, London stood as a monument to man's material achievements. The travellers were simply enchanted by everything they saw in the fast developing metropolis. Almost all travellers stayed in the British capital or visited it. Abu Talib spent two years and five months in the city. In a sense London became Abu Talib's milieu. Itisam, the earliest of the visitors, sought to describe the conventional sights of London like the Tower, with

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For an idea of Abu Talib's acquaintances one may cite the names of well-known personalities such as Warren Hastings, Cornwallis, and John Shore. Other equally famous personalities included, Metcalf, Macpherson, Charles Cockrell, Johnson, Colonel Symes, Rouse Boughton, Colonel Mackenzie, Strachey, Robert Chambers, Ducarrol, Colonel Osborne, Huddleston, General De Boigne, who were all acquaintances from India, offering their hospitality during his sojourn in England. Among his scholarly friends were literary and intellectual figures like Frederick Eden, John Sinclair, Joseph Banks, painters like Edrige, Devis, Jesuit Drummond, Ridley and North Cote, Orientalists like William Ouseley, and Wilkins, book traders like Debrett, Christie the auctioneer, and Wedgewood, the porcelain manufacturer. This portion of *Masir i Talibi* which takes up most of the first volume is amusing in its details and highly evocative. The author sought to reconstruct contemporary social scenario by providing small sketches of the persons mentioned along with graphic details of discussions and meetings. Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 63-102.

its lions and armory, Westminster Abbey, British Museum, the River Thames, St. James Palace, St James Park, Royal palace, Westminster Bridge and St Paul's Cathedral.⁵ But in case of Abu Talib the enchantment was far greater. Of course, the face of the British metropolis had under-gone a radical transformation when he visited London in 1800-1802, compared to the 1760's when Itisam visited it.

England struck visitors, in the early modern period, as a country with excellent communications. The mail- and stage-coaches and the private carriages were light and elegant. The English inns with reception halls, the coffee-rooms with the dining parlour and special dining rooms for the coach passengers, the apartments and the postal facilities seemed to have no parallel in any European country or indeed in the country that they came from. Britain's facilities for travellers formed one of the subject of Abu Talib's versification. He describes how the mail-coach covered a distance of a thousand miles in six or seven days. These coaches were available in France as well as in the other countries of Europe, but generally lacked the cleanliness, tidiness as well as the punctuality of the British coaches.

Abu Talib went into great detail in recording his own experiences. He had the opportunity to travel by mail-coach in Ireland and noted the driver's strict adherence to timing. And, having travelled in France, he had a measure of comparison. To him, the British coaches seemed elegant and light and arrived at the appointed time for supper and dinner. The inn-keepers (*ahl i musafir khana*) maintained a high standard of cleanliness and their food was more delicious than that of the French. He concluded that,

⁵ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 63a-84b. Itisam's description of London is no less evocative than Talib's, especially where the former remembers the three months he spent in the fashionable area of Covent Gardens.

due to these travelling facilities, travel was a means of broadening mental horizons which remained a constant British preoccupation.⁶

Abu Talib describes the topography of London and its circumference. He remarks: "London was the largest city among the cities of Europe as well as those of India, and almost all the other cities I passed through".⁷ One third of his travelogue is appropriated in description of the streets of London, its lighting, perpetual pageantry, parks and fashionable landscape, places of amusement, shops, coffee-houses, taverns and aristocratic saloons. His long stay in London's various areas such as Margaret Street, Brook Street and Rathbone Place gave Abu Talib a close view of various sides of London life.⁸ His sense of wonder and enchantment is evident from his graphic account of such aspects of London life as its buildings, its houses built in uniform design and how the dimension of each storey and the material used in the construction of every part and each house was the same. He also noticed how the fashionable squares of London served as the focal points, and how the network of streets radiating outward from these was pleasant to view. For Abu Talib, it was obviously a complete novelty in architectural planning. He also described the interior decoration of houses, their stately porticos, richly ornamented doorways, exquisite iron-work, warm brick work, imposing stair cases and lofty rooms.⁹ The interior decoration of houses delighted the observer. Their diverse objects-tapestry, vases, fire-places, garden-furniture together with the treatment of walls and ceiling displayed a sense of spacious dignity and fine

⁶ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 112a. Itisam was equally appreciative of the fact that travelling to other countries constituted an integral part of the British life-style.

⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 104b-11a. Abu Talib's detailed account of London could well serve as a contemporary source on the subject.

⁸ For the names of the places where the author lived in London, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 63b-4a.

⁹ For London's buildings, squares, parks, lighting, coffee houses, places of amusement, banks and exchange houses, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 104b-11a.

handling. These were described as examples of taste and refinement, at the same time retaining their utility. London's consummate splendour simply intoxicated the traveller and it became one of his abiding concerns.

Abu Talib wrote with admiration that in London a stranger would imagine that street lamps were magnificent illuminations to celebrate some festive occasion. He described how these lightings gave London an air of grandeur and magnificence and wrote that the lamps which had two or sometimes four branches were enclosed in crystal globes and fixed on posts at a little distance from each other. They were lit at sun-set in winter and summer and this made the overall effect exceedingly grand. It reminded him of the marriage celebration of Wazir Ali Khan in Lucknow; but that had lacked such elegance. The lamps were made of glass because of the coldness of the climate and the rainy season. It was the personal responsibility of every house-owner to keep his house illuminated, and not the task of the local administration of London.¹⁰ London's well-paved roads and night illuminations and the surface of the roads formed an object of admiration for Itisam too.¹¹

Itisam reported extreme curiosity among the people of his host country. He wrote that, upon his arrival at Dover, the British people were amused to see him as they had not previously seen any Indian (*Hindustani*) dressed in Indian costume like him. He mentioned that the British people had seen sailors from Jahangirnagar and Chittagong (the humble sailors were unlikely to have been dressed up like Itisam, who wore his full medieval aristocratic costume).¹² They took him for some nawab of Bengal or relative of a nawab's family. They called him a black man (*mardum i siyah*) on account of his

¹⁰ For an account of the lighting in London, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 121a-23a.

¹¹ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 72a-4b. It reminded Itisam of the cleanliness in Calcutta.

¹² Cf. the portrait of the author attached to the English translation of *Shigarfnama*, (*An Excellent Intelligence*, frontispiece).

dark complexion. Itisam mentions this specifically, but his colour consciousness is without racial connotations. Within a few days of his arrival, he was able to mix and feel at ease with the British to enjoy their hospitality.¹³ Abu Talib's presence in Ireland also created considerable curiosity among the local people, and some even conjectured that he was a Russian general whom they were expecting, while others took him for a German noble, and some were of the opinion that he was a Spanish aristocrat, but the majority agreed that he was a Persian prince.¹⁴ It was as a Persian prince that Abu Talib became famous in Britain, probably on account of his fair complexion and sharp features, and his belonging to a Persian-speaking elite.

Abu Talib was not only concerned with the festive side of London life, its clubs and play houses; he also took note of the inner life of these places and of the circulation of newspapers (*kaghaz i akhbar*). He noted that the newspapers provided information about every city of England as well as about other European cities. They included prices of various commodities and information about performance at opera-houses, play-houses, musical gatherings, and the marriages and deaths of the aristocracy. The method of distribution of the newspaper was that those who wished to receive it daily deposited a certain sum of money with the owner and the latter supplied the newspaper everyday. Some copies were sold individually for three or four *falus* (small coins of uncertain value). But those who could not pay even this small sum, read the papers in public places such as the coffee-houses, where they went to eat and consume coffee and tea. The newspaper had other serious purposes also. The ministers of the state became aware of public opinion about their actions. The newspaper was also an organ for political lobbying. The populace made their grievances known to the government through

¹³ *Ibid.*, ff. 61a-3a.

¹⁴ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 51b-2a.

newspapers. Moreover, people had their own way to warn neglectful ministers. First, they drew their pictures in a funny and comical way to ridicule the minister. The cartoon was a standard picture of John Bull, but referred to a specific minister whom people wished to ridicule. It was drawn in such a way that, if the minister who was being ridiculed saw his caricature, it would excite laughter in him also. The second way to attract official attention was through plays. No one could stop people criticising the government in these ways, whether the criticism was valid or not. Similarly people could use the press for other and better purposes such as for the dissemination of their ideas; they could get their opinion published through it.¹⁵

Before arriving in England, Itisam had the opportunity to stay in France for three weeks, when his ship called at the port of Nantz where he stayed for a week, then for a fortnight in Calais. He spent his time observing the French life-style in those places. Itisam could not visit Paris though he mentions that Paris was a well-populated and flourishing city. His attention, as usual, was mainly devoted in observing the the peasant-life at Nantz and Calais. In addition, he had some general comments to offer on French architecture and dress, eating habits and the social life of the French peasantry. He noted that the poor people lived in miserable conditions, and that their food mainly consisted of barley bread and broth, and their dress was of coarse wool.¹⁶

Itisam had some comparative comments to offer about the socio-intellectual life of France and England, and made a clear reference to the traditional French superiority in education and social manners. In the words of Itisam: "French people considered themselves superior in learning and knowledge, arts and crafts (*sanai wa badai*), philosophical discourses, polite social intercourse, wit and humour, ethics and

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ff.111-2a.

¹⁶ For a description of Nantz and the life of peasants in the town, cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 53a-5a. For the life of peasantry at Calais, cf. *ibid*, f. 56.

humanness (*admiyat*); in comparison to the people of England, as well as of other countries of Europe". Itisam further pointed out that French people claimed that the British aristocracy send their sons and daughters to France for education. The French excelled in such arts as music, and pastimes like horse-riding. The British received training from the French in these areas. Itisam had some idea of recent social changes in the socio-intellectual developments in Britain. He commented that, at present, the British regarded themselves as incomparable in education, knowledge, arts and crafts. In fact, it was the result of "French training". In the past, Itisam asserted, the British did not possess such superior skills; on the contrary, they were known for their incompetence and ignorance, "like the Indians are at the present". Itisam further commented that since the French were polite, well-behaved and educated in comparison to the English, the former could easily win the hearts of foreigners, wherever they went to earn their living, while the English could not. Itisam concluded his discussion with the philosophical remark that

knowledge and learning (*ilm wa hunar*) were in fact, gifts from God to mankind. God gave these to man to earn a living, respectability and honour in this world and the next; nevertheless still man neglected these, but at his own ultimate peril.¹⁷

It seems very unlikely that their observation of London-life inclined our writers to draw comparisons which, in turn, evoked feelings of inferiority in any way. Any statement to this effect is hard to find in either Itisam or Abu Talib. Occasional comments such as the well-paved, well-cleaned, spacious and well-illuminated roads of London reminded Itisam of Calcutta, or that St Paul's Cathedral resembled the mausoleum of Qutub Shahi, are less comparisons than outbreaks of nostalgia.¹⁸ Similarly, Abu Talib's, comparison of the Thames with the Ganges and of the Liffey

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 56a-7a.

¹⁸ For a comparison with Calcutta, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 71b-84b and f. 71.

river with Gomati of Lucknow may be treated as nostalgia. Why did the travellers not offer any such direct comparison? Partly because such scales of comparison were not part of their consciousness. But, more significantly, they had little to offer in comparison to the metropolitan capital of a nation which was on the verge of industrialization. Signs of industrialization were not so apparent during Itisam's visit in 1767-69, but Abu Talib's observations relate to the industrialising Britain.

Nonetheless the question of comparison was raised by Abu Talib in an interesting manner. The author offered some comparative comments in the first part of his travelogue preceding the description of Cape Town, an African city settled by Europeans.¹⁹

Upon beholding the spectacle of the city of Cape Town, the magnificence of the city of Calcutta- the latter being unique among the cities of India (*bilad i Hind*)- and the splendour of its buildings were quite obliterated from my mind. When I reached Ireland, the charm and beauty of Cape Town was erased from my imaginations. Later on, when I arrived in Dublin the capital of Ireland, the attraction and splendour of Cork began to disappear from my imagination. I had a similar experience when I saw the consummate splendour of London, the British capital. During my return journey to India, my entire experience was reversed in Paris, the capital of France and a city of magnificence and grandeur. Its inhabitants led simple lives: nonetheless, the manners and comforts of daily living, the cleanliness and tidiness of the houses and the lighting arrangements, the roads and landscape gardening along the squares were not quite like those in London. Paris had superb buildings, all constructed of stone and well gilded, than the buildings of London but it did not quite fascinate me. [consequently,] I felt as if I had been fallen from paradise to hell. When I came to see Italy, I understood the magnificence of Paris. The splendours of Italy (*Rum i qadim*) could not excite my imaginations till I reached Constantinople (*Istanbul*), a city that excelled Baghdad, Mosul, and all the cities of Islamic world (*bilad i Islam*) as a perfect paradise. Murshidabad in Bengal, and Baghdad rose in my estimation after having seen Basrah; each of these will be described later.²⁰

The author did not elaborate on his statement in the travelogue. He avoided any direct comparison of an Indian or Islamic city with a European counterpart. It is evident from some occasional comparative comments of his that he had it in mind to attempt

¹⁹ Itisam al Din made a brief sojourn at Cape Town on his way to England and gave some account of the life of the city, especially of its less fortunate inhabitants, those of the slave plantation colonies. Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 42b-5a. Later, Abu Talib stayed for a short period in the city and described its Dutch and British settlements and the life of indentured labour in great detail. He also gives an account of Cape Town itself, which in his eyes seemed like a miniature European city. Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 17b-25b.

²⁰ Abu Talib did promise to compare the cities, but in fact he did not. The last sentence is fairly ambiguous. Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 20b-21a.

comparison, but he did not do so. Upon seeing the Ayia Sophia mosque in Istanbul, he compared it with London's St Paul's Cathedral and with St. Paul in Rome. The observer remarked that:

the last two were famous throughout Europe but having seen the Ayia Sophia mosque the earlier two faded from my memory. The entire mosque was constructed of various kinds of stones, spacious courtyard under the dome, more than hundred meters space and surrounded on all sides by lofty aisles and supported by pillars and gallery with dais for the Sultan.²¹

Instead of comparing London with any city in the Eastern hemisphere, Abu Talib, perhaps quite appropriately, chose to compare it with a city in the Western hemisphere. He compared the British capital to Paris. Paris was the nearest rival and the second largest city in Christendom. Abu Talib whole-heartedly declared the superiority of London in comparison to the French capital.

On his home-bound journey, Abu Talib spent forty days in Paris and described Parisian life graphically, its lofty houses, salons, the life-style of its inhabitants, its entertainments, such as its opera-houses, and play-houses.²² The writer visited four French historical monuments, namely the Boulevards, Palais-Royal, the Tuileries and the Louvre and in his picturesque descriptions noted that there existed nothing like these four monuments in the world. His visits to the Louvre led him to comment upon the art of sculpture which he thought was especially well-developed in ancient Rome.²³ With the decline of the Roman Empire which promoted various arts and skills, these statues and other pieces were preserved by the Pope and the other European monarchs. Napoleon Bonaparte upon his conquest of a country also brought famous pieces of art to his capital Paris and preserved them in this building. Now, those who wished to learn

²¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 199b-200a. Abu Talib was aware of the history of Ayia Sophia as a church built by Constantine, the founder of the city, the first of the Caesars to embrace Christianity. Later, when Sultan Muhammad conquered the city, it was sanctified for the purposes of Islam.

²² For an account of Paris, its coffee houses, clubs, historical monuments, people, the author's meeting with the French Orientalist De Sacy etc., cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 170b-175a.

²³ *Ibid.*, f. 174.

and practice this art went to those places. Having seen the collections of Louvre, London and Dublin seemed to him more like toys.²⁴ In music and opera, the French were thought superior to the British.

Abu Talib noted that the comfort of London was far superior to Paris, as in Paris city-houses lacked elegant interior decoration, the fire-places were untidy, the lighting dim, the shops had no dazzling window displays. The Parisian roads were narrow and often badly paved. Abu Talib, in his characteristic way, dealt in immeasurable detail with the Paris life. He found its coffee houses, hotels and inns filthy. The houses were lofty, but they did not stand comparison with their counterparts in London. Paris had nothing compared to the civil amenities, refinement, suavity, and elegance of London life. London's comfort and travel arrangements were completely absent in Paris. In fact, what the author sought to convey to his readers was the fact that London was far superior to Paris in urbanity.²⁵

Abu Talib expressed his surprise that "people in London complained about the high prices of various commodities" and cited Paris as an example of inexpensiveness of provisions: "[but] I myself everywhere found essential commodities much more expensive than in London, not only in Paris, but in other cities of France and also Italy (*Rum*) — wherever I happened to stay".²⁶ Finally, it was the insipid and distasteful French cookery which forced the visitor to leave Paris (after forty days) earlier than planned.²⁷ Apart from Paris, Abu Talib visited two other French cities — Lyons and Marseilles — which he sought to describe. On the way-back he stayed in Genoa,

²⁴ For the above comparative comments, cf. *ibid.*, f. 174b.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 171b.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 172a.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 172.

Leghorn, Malta, and Smyrna, finally arriving in Istanbul. He passed through various other Ottoman cities like Malta, Diarbekir, Mardine, Mosul and reached Baghdad. He also visited the port city of Basrah before reaching Bombay, and then Calcutta. In his characteristic style he dealt with the social life of these cities, their roads, means of transport, major products, and the local administration. A careful perusal of the entire travelogue suggests that London remained his favourite among all these for its urban life, comforts and general condition.

Though Abu Talib could not compare London with any of the cities of his own country, he did assume certain notions of superiority, mannerliness and claims to urbane living in Lucknow in comparison to the Ottoman city of Baghdad, where he spent a month. Abu Talib enumerated the main characteristics of Baghdad while describing its topography. He found the two cities divided by the river Tigris: "On the eastern bank was situated the New Baghdad (*Baghdad i nau*), which had the houses of the Pashas and the Ottoman aristocracy, while the Old Baghdad was on the western side of the Tigris largely in an island". Despite its location on the outskirts of the desert, its surroundings were plain, yet had a magnificent appearance. However, from within it was fairly dirty and humid, particularly the old town. During the winter it was muddy like Murshidabad. The markets of the new town, although built of bricks and mortar with arching roof, had narrow, dark and stinking lanes. The houses of the respectable people were made of bricks and clay, yet, were as weak as the old houses in India. The woodwork and the ornamentation of the rooms were unpleasant and of coarse appearance. Even the famous buildings like those of the Pashas could not be compared with the houses of the middle classes of Lucknow, not to mention the buildings of nawab

Asafuddaula and that of Hasan Reza Khan.²⁸ According to Abu Talib the fame enjoyed by these cities in India was hollow. He characteristically said:

The fame of the urbanity of the cities of Baghdad, Basrah and Najaf etc., cities of Iran, resounded like a tumult in India, like the sounds of a drum, which were pleasant only if heard from a distance. In fact the following verses composed for Isfahan were equally applicable for Baghdad: "So great was Bagdad's envy of Isfahan that the Tigris forms tears coursing down its face."²⁹

Abu Talib concluded with a sense of superiority that from Constantinople to Basrah he had been unable to find a house which a middle class (*mutwassatin*) inhabitant of Lucknow would have found comfortable.³⁰ In fact, Abu Talib found nothing to appreciate about Baghdad. Indeed, he found numerous coffee-houses which were even filthier than those in Constantinople.³¹

Abu Talib's highly developed sensitivity to art and aesthetics can be attributed to his upbringing and education in the highly-sophisticated cultural milieu of Lucknow. Lucknow was not only a centre of art and culture, but was witnessing one of the richest and the most creative periods in the history of architecture. The *nawabs* patronized art and artists and did everything to make their capital a centre, as Delhi had once been. The Nawabi capital Lucknow constituted a window to the West. It seems likely that Abu Talib developed some interest in European architecture before he visited Europe.³²

²⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 219b. For details and the description of the above buildings of Asafuddaula as well as other monuments of the *nawabi* period, cf. the monumental study of Rosie Llewellyn Jones, *A Fatal Friendship*, pp. 167-213.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 219. In the translation of the quoted verses I was kindly assisted by Dr Julia Meisani.

³⁰ *Op. cit.*

³¹ *Op. cit.*

³² The European influences in the architecture of Lucknow have been demonstrated in ample detail by Jones, *A Fatal Friendship*, pp. 19-21. It was perhaps no coincidence that Abu Talib, on his return journey, during a stop-over in the French city of Lyons, went to visit the house of General Claude Martin (d. 1800), the architect of numerous buildings of Asafuddaula and the latter's successor. Abu Talib may have known Claud Martin. Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 179b.

5.3 Some Aspects of Family Life

Abu Talib paid some attention to British family life and noted some aspects of daily life. He had a brief excursion into the day-to-day social life before he explored the higher realms of culture. He carefully described the daily routine of the three different strata of the British society. First, he wrote about the middle classes with whom he socialised most of the time and, therefore, could write about with some degree of confidence:

The middling sort of people (*awsat un nas*) after having taken eight hours of sleep spend one and half hour in washing, clothing, shaving and than had breakfast at which they spent about one hour at the table. Thence onwards from about eleven o'clock to five, i.e., for six hours, they remained preoccupied with their business either at home or outside, then they would dine and spend two hours with ladies and one hour with male friends in gossiping, playing etc. The unmarried males, usually after dinner went to the places of public amusement, like gambling- and play-houses where they enjoyed themselves till around eleven and then went to bed. Some spent time in night assemblies listening to music and dancing etc. A few went for gambling between nine and eleven in the the evening, twice a week. But those who gambled had to keep separate money for their enjoyment, otherwise they would be dubbed professional gamblers since it was considered a social evil and a disgrace to those who indulged in it. After eleven they would eat again; this they called supper. It consisted of a small amount of cold meat-chops, some sweet dishes, wine. They then went to bed around mid-night.³³

The upper class (*tabqat i ali*) began its day one hour later than the middle class and went to bed two hours later than the others. The people of the third class, the common people, began their day one hour earlier than the middle classes and accordingly went to sleep one hour earlier than them. Thus, they usually remained busy for more than sixteen hours without rest. Throughout the day, they remained active while nocturnal hours were spent in sleeping. Abu Talib thought that the British were helped by the weather which kept them alert and healthy.³⁴

Describing English food, Abu Talib mentioned at the outset its simplicity. He found it tasty and well-prepared. Dinner usually consisted of bread, soup, fish and varieties of meat and rice. The second course included roast meat, chicken and delicate sweet dishes, tastefully prepared. The third course had all sorts of fruits both dried and

³³ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 123b-24a.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 24b.

fresh ones. They ate in moderate quantity at fixed times and normal meals were three in number but often became five, if the snacks and cakes (which in India were called *tiffin* by them) are included. All three social groups (*tabqat-i salas*) remained occupied in their daily routine. The advantages of division of time were many. First, people did not tend to neglect their hours of duty. Thus, servicemen and servants remained aware of hours of their duty and performed it well. Consequently, the upper class had ample time to enjoy themselves in convivial parties.³⁵

The British aristocracy enjoyed the products of hot houses. Abu Talib saw hot house techniques as aristocratic indulgence in luxury. But this technique enabled them to grow fruits like cherries and strawberries, both of which were special products of Europe. The ruling elites of India (*Salatin i Hind*) could not procure even a single strawberry or cherry for one hundred thousand rupees, while the common people in England enjoyed expensive Indian products. Although the Indian products were very expensive, nonetheless, every one could enjoy them once a year or so on special occasions.³⁶

Abu Talib also noted the prices of daily provisions for the populace were very high, in spite of numerous mechanical innovations which, by cutting labour costs, had reduced the prices of various items.³⁷ In this comparison, perhaps, Abu Talib had the Indian situation in mind, since he thought London was cheaper than other European cities, notably Paris. A good diet for the populace was a serious problem: "The prices of various commodities were so high that some of the villagers could not buy bread and

³⁵ The above discussion led the author to enumerate with scientific accuracy the length of days and nights in Britain and the seasonal variations. Cf. *ibid.*, f. 124b.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 112b-3a.

³⁷ *Op. cit.*

meat and they had to subsist on potatoes".³⁸ It was the ministers' responsibility to bring prices down. Abu Talib explained that one whole meal bread (*nan i khamiri*, literally "leavened bread") weighing two *asar* was for half a rupee and meat per *asar* half a rupee. Porter beer was consumed by the poor as wine and cost half *asar* for two *anas*.³⁹ Abu Talib paid some attention to the internal management of household life and sought to describe the division of labour between man and woman. A woman had to perform tasks like the preparation of food, lighting the fire, washing the clothes, cleaning the floor, and making the beds in the house; this primarily required physical rather than mental exertion. Women also performed jobs like selling things in shops. Women working in shops had the merit of attracting customers who enjoyed their conversation while making purchases.⁴⁰ The second advantage of women being employed in daily work was that they were kept away from vain talk and their entire mental energies were devoted to their jobs. Abu Talib conjectured that if the British had not have divided duties between the two, it would have caused enormous confusion and women would have been idle talkers like their Indian counterparts.⁴¹

Abu Talib thought that the English philosophers had devised methods so that, in spite of free social inter-mixing with males, British women were not quite free. It was an established custom that outside men were not permitted to enter the house at dinner time and during the night. Women did not go out to visit men, nor go out of the house without being accompanied by the husband or father or brother or a trusted servant. It was also not customary for women to stay overnight, even at their parent's house,

³⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 154b.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 112b. Abu Talib was employing prevalent Indian measurements and currency.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 125a. Abu Talib cites his personal experience of buying pastries regularly from a shop run by a beautiful girl.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, f. 125b.

without their husband. No women could do anything which was unpleasant for her husband. If she behaved in a way that her husband disliked, confinement in a room and even light physical punishment was imposed. If a women was found to be having an illicit affair, she faced social disgrace and was no longer admitted in respectable social circles. If such a thing occurred, the husband could deny her any right to expensive jewellery or other property. Since an English woman did not have any right over her husband's property or over her own children, she faced the possibility of ultimate ruin if she did not behave properly. It became apparent, concluded Abu Talib, that the English, in spite of having accorded apparent liberty (*azadi i zahiri*) and a show of respect to women, used flattery and politeness — which did not them cost anything. Muslim women, on the other hand, in spite of the practice of *purdah*, which was a form of imprisonment and a cause of tumult and mischief, had full control of their household, servants and children, and, moreover, were free to visit friends and relatives.⁴²

However, Abd al Latif and Ahmad bin Muhammad held different view on this matter. For them, excessive freedom for women was undesirable. Both sought to describe the prevalence in Europe as a whole and especially in England and France, of such practices as courtship, pre-marital relations, extra-marital relations and contractual marriages, the last being considered a French custom. They condemned these practices as social evils. Latif indulged in wishful thinking, suggesting that before the discovery of America, European women, like Greek women, used veils. But French women were the first to give up the veil and later on this custom became common throughout Europe.

⁴²

Ibid., f. 126a. However, Abu Talib seems to have changed his opinion after direct exposure to Western life. Immediately after his arrival, he wrote a highly defensive treatise about the position of Indian Muslim women. Its English translation was published in a contemporary British journal, along with a brief biography of the writer; cf. *Asiatic Annual Register*, 1801, Miscellaneous Tracts, pp. 100-7, "Vindication of the Liberties of the Asiatic Women", by Mirza Abu Talib Khan, with a note from the editor: "Our readers will peruse with interest the information which it contains, respecting the domestic economy of the Mussulmans of Hindustan, and the peculiar privilege and customs of their women: and our still limited acquaintance with their customs..."

He also mentioned that not more than one wife per man was permitted in Europe, though he did not provide any further explanation⁴³.

Both Abu Talib and Itisam had a high opinion about British attitudes towards the moral and social education of their children. Abu Talib elaborated upon this aspect of British family life. Its main purpose was to inculcate the sons with a high sense of honour, the capacity to endure hardship, and with the knowledge of various arts and sciences. Female education had different ends in view. Women were taught arts like dancing and music, how to hold pleasure assemblies and how to be witty, elegant, shrewd, humorous and polite. Abu Talib carefully noted the clothes and diet of the children which were aimed at protecting their health from the extremes of the climate. The dresses of young girls and boys were elegant and aimed at comfort and utility. An example was the vest of young girls: it was intended to protect them from the cold and was stitched in such a way that their figures developed in the right way. He noted such minor practices as putting a bandage across the ears of children while they slept in order to protect distortion of their hearing. Food for children was simple and served at fixed times. The sweet-meat dishes and other such delicacies were not served to the children till the age of twelve. Since the maid-servants did not have access to the food, they could not feed children more than the fixed quantity. The children were taken out to parks and other open places to enjoy the fresh air and to allow them some view of the outside world as they grew up. The British brought up their children with care, respect and veneration, and neither punished them physically nor spoke to them in a harsh manner. The maximum punishment given to a child, in cases of improper behaviour, was confinement to his bedroom. Children's toys were made with a purpose in mind. Some had alphabets engraved upon them; story books were illustrated with pictures, and

⁴³ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 134a, and *Mirat al ahwal*, f. 130.

based on questions and answers which the children would enjoy and which would also excite their imagination and help them to learn. British children thus developed a certain awareness of reading and writing even before they actually went to school. Sons were sent to the *maktab* which they called school (*Iskool*) to receive instructions. But the girls were usually educated at home by their mothers and brothers. The girls were brought up so that they acquired basic skills of reading and writing at home. But for the training of girls in dancing and playing musical instruments a separate teacher (*ustad*) was employed, a master of the related art. After the girls learnt the basic rules of dancing and music, they participated in pleasure assemblies to improve their performance. Sometimes they went to those lady teachers who were known for their skills in the desired area. The young girls further read literature which contained stories suggestive of how to be witty and humorous (an illusion to novels), and which were purposefully written to promote these characteristics in them.⁴⁴ Boys had to undergo a far more rigorous training. They were sent to boarding schools where they were deprived of the soothing and enduring care of their parents and were kept under the strict discipline of teachers. These boys could not help but devote their mental energies to learning and playing. In these schools the rules for both teaching and punishment were very strict. This was meant to facilitate the task of the teacher as well as the student. The boys spent one or two weeks each year with their parents. In brief, each child spent an average of six years at school and acquired knowledge in the essential subjects, i.e., completed the primary education. During this period they learnt to imbibe virtues, such as enduring hardship and patience in times of distress.⁴⁵ Abu Talib noted that British family life had great harmony, discipline and order. The underlying reasons for these

⁴⁴ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 129b-30a.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 131a.

were several, he said: first the tradition of single marriage and of all progeny being of single wife. Second, the equality maintained by the parents among their children; the parents did not disclose their feelings even if they loved one child more than the other. Third, near relatives had no claims over the property of the family, unlike Muslim families, where other relatives had high expectations. Fourth, division of labour and distribution of duties between husband and wife: the key of the office was in the hands of the husband and the remaining household tasks were the responsibility of the wife. Above all, the disciplined and discreet behaviour of family members in cases of dissension played a formative role.⁴⁶

Abu Talib had a high admiration for the tradesmen, manufacturers and professional social groups in Britain. He observed that the professionals (*ahl i hirfat*) behaved with decorum and decency. It was, for him, strange to find that the professional class had notions of gentility and politesse similar to those of the aristocracy and upper classes. In dress, social manners and intelligence, there was not the slightest difference between them and the aristocracy and gentry. If a buyer tried to argue with them they maintained their civil conduct and polite conversation.⁴⁷ There was no question of a shop-keeper deceiving the buyer even if the latter was unknown to him. To describe the various manufacturing products of the country would merely be to repeat the known fact that British industrial products "were objects of admiration throughout the world".⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 129b-30a.

⁴⁷ In his characteristic style Abu Talib, cited various eye-witness accounts, in order to bring home the point about the gentility of the British professional classes. Cf. *ibid.*, ff. 126a-7a.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* ff. 27b-28a.

5.4 *Virtues and Vices of the English*

Abu Talib had a high degree of appreciation for British culture. Nonetheless, he was not an uncritical and indiscriminate admirer. He had his own criteria for judging the culture. He sought to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the British society in a separate chapter of his *Masir* which he called "Virtues (*fazail i English*) and Vices of the English people (*razail i English*)". The characteristics ascribed to British society reveal the author's own understanding of the causes of rise and fall of civilizations in human history.

Abu Talib echoed the traditional Muslim notion of luxury as the reason for the decline and decay of a culture and society. It is difficult to say whether Abu Talib had read *Muqaddama*, the treatise by the famous Arab historiographer Ibn Khaldun, as we have not discovered any explicit mention of this classic work even in the contemporary Indo-Persian literature. Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain whether Abu Talib's consciousness of the decline and decay of contemporary Muslim societies was heightened by pursuing that work. Nonetheless, like his other literate contemporaries, Abu Talib was fully aware of the decline and dissolution of the Mughal empire, which he noted in his synopsis of world history.⁴⁹ The decline of the Safwids in Iran was known to him, as his father came to India following Nadir Shah's invasion of Persia. His brief stay in Istanbul and sojourn in Ottoman lands during his return back to India made him aware of the growing weaknesses of the military and bureaucratic machinery of the Ottoman state and of the fact that its institutions lacked vigour and energy.⁵⁰

Abu Talib's assessment of the weaknesses and strengths of the British society seems to have been motivated to a large extent by his own understanding of the rise and

⁴⁹ Cf. *Lubb-us siyar*, f. 432.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 167b-168a.

fall of civilization, and above all of the empires which sustained it. For the British nation the author employed traditional Islamic terms, *mulk u millat*, *millat u daulat*, which obviously did not have the same connotations as "nation state" and "nationality" had in Western parlance. These terms did not emerge until the nineteenth century; the very concept of the nation-state, and nation-hood was a post-French Revolution phenomenon. Nonetheless, the seeds of the concept had been planted in the soil of Europe following the Revolution. This is clearly reflected in Abu Talib's account, as he uses terms like *qaum i inglish* for the British nation and its citizens.⁵¹ Abu Talib probably wished to convey the idea of citizenship, which, in Western usage, referred to members of a particular state.

On the balance-sheet of criticism of contemporary British society, the vices far exceeded the virtues. What Abu Talib considered the qualities of British society primarily related to the stable system of government and the on-going Industrial Revolution. (These two aspects are described separately in two chapters which will form the subject of the next two chapters of the present study.) The author thus concentrated on what he thought were the weaknesses of British culture. It seems that the author's assessment did not require any further explanation and elucidation, as he was a gifted writer and his ideas were to a large extent self explanatory.

Among the distinguished qualities of the British was their sense of honour and self-respect. This was especially true of the upper classes. The latter quality was attributed to their upbringing. These values were inculcated in them along with a hatred for those who did not possess them. The qualities were present among them to such a

⁵¹ The author almost invariably employed the term 'English' (*Ingish*), but his comments related to the British in general.

degree that the English upper classes could sacrifice their entire worldly possessions, family and riches, for the sake of their respect and self-esteem.

A second excellence of the English people was their ability to appreciate and recognize merit and to respect those who possessed it. They honoured those who possessed these virtues and excellence. These had immensely favourable effects on their intellectual milieu. In Britain, acknowledged merit and scholarship raised the status of the person among his fellow community; this, in turn, raised the prestige and esteem of the nation and the community. This was in complete contrast with other countries where, even if a scholar had demonstrated his mental ability, he was not usually paid any respect and veneration. Even those who had pretensions to learning and knowledge did not recognize the merits of others. The reason for the lack of respect for the scholarly attributes of a gifted person was the (dangerous) feeling of envy that there were others like us. When, on account of these false notions, the individual was not respected by his own people, others too failed to recognize his merit. The lack of recognition had adverse consequences, for it obviously led to a sense of deprivation among scholars and, generally, those who possessed skill and intellect. An inner sense of neglect and despondency (*dilshikastigi*) grew up among them. This disregard of the scholars had far reaching consequences in longer terms, as it resulted in disrespect and disgrace (*qillat i abru*) for the entire community.⁵²

The third recommendable virtue, as noticed by Abu Talib, was the British dislike of breaking the law (*qanun*); every individual remained within his legal rights, within his social status in the hierarchy. This strengthened the state and religion (*millat wa daulat*) and promoted unity in the nation and stability in its socio-economic life (*madan*). Abu Talib propounded that any community (*qaum*) possessing such virtues

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Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 145b.

would not face extinction, nor decline from the status it had achieved in the development of its civilization. The second favourable consequences of the above virtue was a deep satisfaction. Since rules and regulations were clearly laid down, "people did not long for those enjoyments and luxuries which were not possible for them to attain. Those obsessed with ambitiousness, an enormous propensity and inclination for luxury, often remained dissatisfied beings".⁵³

The fourth laudable virtue, according to our analyst, was the British intellectuals' concern for the welfare of common men and their unwillingness to do anything detrimental to the cause of the less fortunate. This quality, Abu Talib emphasized, was beneficial for the English intellectuals too; the opposite attitude was wholly wrong and short-sighted. These intellectuals (*uqla*) had an abiding concern with inventing new machines to tackle the scarcity of labour. Abu Talib sought to illustrate the above quality with reference to an invention designed to save fuel. "During my sojourn in England, a person invented a kettle to tackle the high prices of fuel, coal and firewood. If a mere piece of paper was lighted beneath the surface of the new kettle, it could boil even meat."⁵⁴ The author felt that such inventions had rendered things easy, and facilitated labour in industrial enterprises, such as the construction of houses. Various mechanical instruments facilitated work in the kitchen. The author felt that inventions had reduced the labour of house-building and domestic tasks. These task which in India required fifteen servants, were done in England by a man and a woman.⁵⁵

The fifth quality found by Abu Talib in the British was their preference for new trends over old. This passion apparently had some disadvantages as well. In their thirst

⁵³ *Ibid.*, ff. 145b-146a.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 146.

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*

for the new (*jadid*) they usually replaced their old household items before they were worn out. This was an extravagance. Entire household items in London were being replaced every season (instead of every year), and those who continued to use their old provisions and household items were looked down on. Abu Talib also noted the positive consequences of such new trends; for example, each time the items were replaced the house looked pleasant and acquired a fresh appearance. More significantly, "it was for the benefit of the artisans (*ahl i hirf*) who were an important component of their nation (*qaum*)".⁵⁶

The sixth estimable quality was the technical-mindedness of the British: "they had a natural inclination and passion for the invention of tools to facilitate work and were most of the time occupied with the search for such devices and means".⁵⁷

The seventh admirable characteristic of the English people was the simplicity of their life-style and manners which was manifest in every aspect of their country, from the choice of colour, jewellery and clothing to household items. "In this respect the English people have no equal", declared the commentator, but noted a similar good taste among a few Iranians.⁵⁸

The eighth quality was their intellectual disposition — their excellence of mind. This characteristic was the hall-mark of the upper classes as well as of the less affluent sections. Even the underprivileged possessed intellect. This quality was fairly manifest in the British technical developments and in the stability of state affairs.

The ninth laudable characteristic of the English was their continuous effort to acquire fame and riches, knowledge and skills (*ilm wa hunar*). This was true even of a

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 146a.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 146b.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*

person, who, in the opinion of other people, might already have attained a state of perfection (*kamal*) in a particular field. To Abu Talib the underlying reason was the English concept of perfection:

In their opinion, the state of perfection in any individual is different from ours. It is more an ideal than a reality (*haqiqat*). They [Europeans] think that man had, by continuous efforts, by degrees and stages, from being an uncivilized, savage and cannibal, achieved the high status of the philosopher Newton. It might happen that in times to come man would achieve such a high degree of perfection that even Newton the philosopher would, in comparison with the man of the future, look like a savage.⁵⁹

This latter remark is somewhat ambiguous; probably the author was alluding to the the European philosophers' views on civil societies — the idea of the human race having been in continuous progress since primitive times. Secondly, Abu Talib also sought to point out that the Western notions of progress were different from Islamic ideas. But he did not specify *how* Western philosophers' views on human progress and the perfectibility of man were different from Islamic ideas of the development of mankind. He clearly referred to the pervasive impact of Newtonian ideas of a mechanistic view of the universe among contemporary intellectuals. As he states:

Even today Newton's ideas are of prime importance, in treading the ways of progress and decline, which is only natural. The European scholarly world showed such insistance that nothing should be revealed which would contradict the great Newtonian ideas, that nothing contrary to them was hypothesized or conceived.⁶⁰

The tenth virtue Abu Talib found among the British was their hospitality and their liberality. Abu Talib briefly concluded his account of what he found appreciable and admirable in English culture with the remark that these laudable virtues were the hallmarks of their ancestors and forebears, and were perhaps more firmly rooted in their ancestors. The present prosperity and strength of British nation was the result of the above qualities.⁶¹

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, f. 147a.

However, what the author described as the vices of the English society were far more complex and extensive. First, he noticed that English people lacked faith in religion and resurrection and had an inclination towards philosophy. The effects of these were more conspicuous among the lower classes, which totally lacked honesty and integrity in comparison with their counterparts in other countries. Although the lower classes of society also feared law (*qanun*), and could not encroach upon the property of the affluent classes, they were always looking for an opportunity to attack the well-to-do. As a result of this fear, the houses of the rich were always kept closed. The wealthy classes did not socialize with any one not of similar social status.

The state was still strong and laws were still respected. The upper classes were endowed with a high sense of self respect, and so the attitude of the lower classes was not damaging. If the vice referred to became a common weakness and gradually influenced the behaviour of those who were the pillars of the state (*arkan i hukumat*), it would lead to dire consequences for society.⁶²

The second evil of the British people was their sense of pride verging on haughtiness and vanity. Because of their self-pride, they did not take the prospect of calamity into serious consideration, nor did they devise methods to avoid or to tackle it. Abu Talib cited an event which occurred during his sojourn in London, when people gathered to protest against the high prices of provisions and excessive weight of taxation. The people were almost in revolt; the police sought to prevent anything untoward happening, but, to Abu Talib's dissatisfaction, nothing was done to remove the grievances of people. People thought that no remedy was possible. Abu Talib commented that the situation was somewhat similar to what had happened earlier in France on the eve of the Revolution. The ill-fated monarch was ready to redress his

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Op. cit.

people's grievances only when it was too late. Abu Talib nevertheless concluded that "it was the pride and imprudence of those who were strong, unlike the widespread feeling of self-complacency, neglect and apathy among Indians and the Iranians."⁶³

The third British weak-point was their excessive attachment to their property and intense involvement in worldly affairs. However, this vice did not have any unfavourable effects whatsoever, since it was beneficial for society at large. It did not have any unpropitious consequences; it rather heightened their determination to guard their property. Nonetheless, it might breed miserliness, especially in old age. In contrast, liberality and the habit of spending lavishly, even where it verged upon prodigality, was a commendable virtue especially during old age.⁶⁴

The fourth weakness was their excessive desire for comfort and ease of living. Again this trait was more like those who possessed power and wealth and quite unlike the opium-eaters of Hindustan and the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, this characteristic obstructed them in the performance of virtuous deeds and laudable acts such as the acquisition of knowledge, and the capacity to endure hardship and help those in need. Abu Talib cited his personal experience that "none of my friends in England were ready to act for me as interpreter to settle my weekly rent and for any other daily requirement without payment of charges for brokerage. While in Paris my experience was quite different." Abu Talib felt that the British had divided their entire daily routine in such a way that they had little time left for others — the whole day was devoted to selfish pursuits.⁶⁵

⁶³ *Ibid.*, f.147b.

⁶⁴ *Op. cit.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 148.

The fifth vice of the British people was related to their temperament, their instability of disposition, over-sensitiveness, quickness to take offence. Our moralist commented that the English were easily provoked. It was harmless at the individual level, but seen from a broader societal perspective it had bad effects. Because not paying attention to friends' needs and failing to share their views and emotional vulnerabilities could lead to undesirable consequences in the long term. Lack of these amiable qualities would lead to the loosening of societal bonds of friendship and cordiality. To Abu Talib, societal ties were strengthened by sociable qualities such as warm-heartedness and friendliness. If this lack of sympathy should, with the passage of time, move from the individual to society at large, including the ruling elite, it would cause the decline of the state (*daulat*). If the intellectuals of the nation were also affected, it would result in enormous damage to the cause of nation and its people.⁶⁶

The sixth weakness according to Abu Talib was their way of life. Their entire day was taken up in dressing and sleeping. Abu Talib was not happy with upper-class Englishman's dressing up from top to toe in no less than twenty-five articles of clothing. He minutely and disapprovingly specified the daily routine of dressing. His was an intimate view of the daily life style of the upper classes in England.⁶⁷

The seventh undesirable characteristic of the British, according to Abu Talib, was their excessive desire for luxury. He listed the luxuries and extravagance he perceived, which, interestingly enough, he was himself enjoying in the host country. He found displays of luxury evident in all aspects of the upper class British house-hold; their kitchens were equipped with expensive utensils, and filled with such items as the coffee, tea, meat and expensive wines, which they also displayed on their dining tables. Not

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 149a.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 149.

only in food, but in dress also they maintained expensive tastes. Without these luxuries they found life difficult; they ignored the virtues of simplicity. Abu Talib was extremely emphatic on the point of luxurious living in Britain. He sought to prove the virtues of simple living by providing examples from the Islamic past. He writes that

if the history of Arab and Turkish conquests were carefully perused, it would become evident that the underlying reasons for their success were two:- first, lack of desire for anything but the bare essential, which in turn enabled them to remain active and physically mobile and gave them sufficient time to acquire knowledge and learning. Secondly, they spent very little on their wants. To safeguard the country they levied half of revenues levied by previous rulers. Therefore, the conquered populace preferred them to their previous rulers and became heartily and willingly united with them. This process went by degrees until the greater part of the globe came under Muslim rule. Although, other factors such as bravery and sense of unity in the community (*qaum*), use of bows and arrows, and good horses were also important factors, they alone could not explain such great a success in such a short period.⁶⁸

Abu Talib sought to illustrate the virtue of simple living by citing Caliph Ali, who lived on barley bread to set an example for his fellow Muslims.⁶⁹

The eighth criticism related to British scholarship concerning other cultural areas and social groups. According to the critic,

their error lay in assessing other peoples learning and languages (*zaban wa ulum*). They acquired some understanding of a particular subject and then began to claim as if they knew every language and had become masters of it. They would compile books on the subject, and got these printed to disseminate their recently acquired knowledge.⁷⁰

Abu Talib defended his criticism of the British scholars' endeavours to explore and study other cultural areas by citing other countries' scholars and arguing that they shared his opinion. This criticism of the British attitude towards other cultures was confirmed by the fact that both the French and Greek languages were cultivated in England. The British people eagerly purchased inaccurate books just to boost the morale of the writer, and persisted in treating them as good guides to the subject. He added that some British intellectuals endorsed his criticism. But the latter, he adds, were of the opinion that some

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 150.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, ff.150-151a. The author also cited examples from Iran's history and an anecdote of Taimur, who warned his nobles of possible danger to his realms from those enemies who were brought up facing hardship and adversities.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 151a.

knowledge was better than none, as it was only by the degrees that perfection could be achieved. Abu Talib contested his British friends' view that ignorance was better than defective learning; the former, he argued, could be removed. But to improve the learning of those who had perused inaccurate books was a more difficult task. To remove the erroneous ideas implanted in a mind is a more arduous task than to implant fresh and correct ideas. Abu Talib cited the example of the Persian grammar written by William Jones and which enjoyed considerable popularity; he found it inaccurate. The critic softened his criticism by adding that probably this was compiled before Jones had studied Persian in India. But having studied the language, Jones could not find time to correct it, owing to his official duties as the Chief Judge in Calcutta court, and also due to the lack of accurate grammar books to follow as models. Abu Talib asserted that those who had read the above manual and then came to study Persian from him during his sojourn in London were difficult to teach in comparison with those who had no previous knowledge of Persian. Such books were so numerous in London that the accurate works on the subject would soon be outnumbered.⁷¹

The ninth British vice was the English East India Company's policies in India. The British pursued a policy of open aggrandizement with extreme selfishness in hope of benefiting from it, even if it was detrimental to the interest of others. They did not restrain their passions and appetite. In pursuit of their goal, they were submissive and humble, but once they achieved their aim they changed their attitude and behaved differently. Some of them, more far-sighted, did not suddenly change. But even those did not take into consideration the amount of damage suffered by the person who had assisted them, nor did they endeavour to fulfil the promises they had made.

In India I had a similar experience with Colonel Alexander Hannay, Middleton, Johnson and Blain. These people approached me when they were in need of my assistance and sent me on

⁷¹ For reconsideration of the above, cf. in the present essay the chapter on "Education and Orientalism".

several expeditions, promising to help me. But when they had achieved their aims, they left me to be mistreated by my enemies.⁷²

Abu Talib contended that it was not only true at the personal level, but such a well-known fact in India that there was no reason to doubt it. The author contended, for instance, that Lord Hobart, Governor of Madras, during his governorship wanted to act against the remaining regional powers of India. He therefore solicited the permission of Sir John Shore who was then Governor-General of India. John Shore refused permission on the grounds that even if such a measure was expedient, it was nonetheless contrary to the treaties which the Company had entered into with Indian overlords. Hobart replied: "Your advice would have been appropriate, had the Company been even a little reticent [in the past] in pursuing a policy of open war and territorial aggrandizement (*qabugiri*). But this was evident to the entire world. Consequently, to let the opportunity pass away, would be nothing but a blunder".⁷³

Finally, Abu Talib was dismayed at the British lack of appreciation for other people's customs and practices; they admired every aspect of their own culture "even if it was not admirable".⁷⁴ This is again illustrated through numerous examples of events which occurred during his sojourn in London. The author narrated that he was once being questioned by his hosts about Islamic religious practices such as Haj; he was asked to provide a rationale for the pilgrimage. He replied by asking "what were the reasons to baptise the child, i.e., to present it before the Padre, the clergymen, in church,

⁷² *Ibid.*, ff. 151b-152a. This experience of the author was related to his unemployment at the court of Lucknow, when he sought to assist the above officials in their revenue realization in the area and fought several pitched engagements with the local landed elite to subdue them. This was a move on the part of the author to win the favour of the British officials and the Resident in the court of Lucknow, in the hope of reinstatement in his position as *amil*, revenue collector in the Awadh state. His efforts did not succeed — hence the bitterness. Cf. the biography of author in the chapter "The Observers" in the present essay.

⁷³ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, pp. 271-2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 152a.

to make the child a Christian"⁷⁵. A second question was why Muslims ate with their fingers, which seemed a disgusting practice. The author contended that its advantage was to eat warm food and moreover, good meat could be enjoyed on the bone. "After all, a man's own fingers were cleaner than the feet of the baker's boy who usually prepared flour for the bread"⁷⁶. The author reports having answered various questions in similar manner, but reports these events with dislike.⁷⁷

Abu Talib concluded that most of these vices were the net results of the modern age (*jadid ul ahad*), and were caused by excessive luxury and wealth. Nevertheless, their adverse effects were still contained by the power of the state and by the individual will. Moreover, weaknesses thought to be peculiar to the British were possessed by other people too in no lesser proportion.⁷⁸ He summed up his exhaustive list of weaknesses among the British with a note of frustration; the British argued against such criticism almost like the opium-eaters of India or the ignorant and proud Ottomans. If any one sought to convince them by examples from the ancient history of the Arabs, Turks and Iranis, they would retaliate by suggesting "that the qualities and virtues you ascribed to the nations and its people (*qaum wa hakumat*) and to the governing elite, would have been found in earlier peoples as well, since in no period of history had man been free from inherent weaknesses like worldly allurements and capriciousness".⁷⁹

The vices and virtues detected by Abu Talib in British society were obviously based on his own personal experiences and observations. As such, they are obviously subjective in their nature. They are perhaps the expressions, echoes and outcome of

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 152b-153a.

⁷⁶ *Op. cit.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 153a.

⁷⁸ *Op. cit.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 153b.

prevalent social ideologies in British society vis-à-vis rationalism, liberalism and individualism. Of the sources of Western social thought, neither Abu Talib nor any other writer under study had any awareness whatsoever — for obvious reasons: they were not versed in the Western languages and literature. Abu Talib's criticism of the upper-middle class' lack of faith in religion and excessive inclination towards philosophy could be related to the increasingly prevalent bourgeois norms. His criticism of their passion for acquiring wealth and excessive attachment to worldly affairs relate to the individualism which was pivotal to the contemporary class ideology in Britain. What he admired was the stable state-system based on law, the British intellectuals' concern for the uplift of the masses and their belief in progress. But this inherent dichotomy was obviously incomprehensible to the critic; hence the criticism and moral judgement. In fact the virtues and vices of the British social life described by Abu Talib had already been discussed by Itisam al Din, albeit in less detail. Perhaps many of the ideas of the earlier observer were taken up by the Abu Talib. Itisam opined that, although the British lacked faith in religion and resurrection (*ma'ad*), they had devised methods of managing their social affairs and ways of earning a livelihood. They had, in short, subordinated their religious concerns to worldly affairs. He also noted that the British thought a young man might sometimes lack initiative or industrious habits and fail to devote his life to the pursuit of knowledge or acquisition of wisdom, despite his having sound mental faculties and physical fitness; he might prefer to depend on charity instead of earning a living. For this reason, the British preferred the affairs of this world to religious matters. In fact, they had formulated the rules and regulations of social life in such a way that each individual had no option, but to occupy himself with the acquisition of various arts and crafts: "A diligent search for revenue and the accumulation of riches and the means to have a comfortable social life from the beginning of maturity to the

end of one's life".⁸⁰ Itisam was of the opinion that a British youth who did not seriously concern himself with the acquisition of education and wisdom (*ilm wa hunar*), but showed signs of incompetence and wasted his time as if he had renounced this world, somewhat like the Indian youths, would be admonished by the senior responsible countrymen (*arbab i adalat*). The latter would seek to show the inept youth the right path, through wise counsels, advice and moral exhortations.⁸¹ The British did not consider their parental inheritance as easily earned wealth squandered, rather they considered it as a means of building up their material wealth further.⁸²

Itisam saw immense benefits in the law of primogeniture. He explained that, although in accordance with the Book of God, parental property was to be divided among all the sons, "these people (*qaum*) for regulating worldly affairs had discontinued the practice."⁸³ The British argued that, if the entire family property, including business concerns and houses, were to be divided among all sons, it would eventually lead to the decrease of wealth and possessions. To the British each family constituted a social unit and therefore, a source of strength. If this basic unit were to grow consistently weaker, the entire nation would become weak and its prosperity would decline. Sometimes the father would give cash or gifts to their sons, but the actual property, houses and buildings, gardens, landed estate (*taalluqa*) and land holdings (*zamindari*), which constituted the major source of income, were inherited only by the eldest son, without any share for the others. If the father, during his life- time, or through his will, distributed some of his ancestral property among other sons, and these sons also expired,

⁸⁰ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 156a-156b.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, f. 156b.

⁸² *Op. cit.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, ff. 156b-157a.

the eldest of the remaining sons would become the owner of the deceased brothers' property. In some cases, if the younger son was still receiving education and was under age, the eldest brother would pay for his maintenance costs such as clothing and fees, and marital expenses, from the income of the ancestral inheritance.⁸⁴ Later, on coming to maturity, the younger brother tried to set up an independent household, estate, or landed property. If the younger brother was unable to establish a separate business, he usually joined the elder brother, shared his responsibilities and made his living in this way.⁸⁵

Coming from a semi-urban background in the province of Bengal, Itisam paid considerable attention to the life-style of the British landed aristocracy. He opined that their major source of income came from abroad. After earning sufficient wealth, they invested it in an estate (*taalluqa*) in their own country and built a house to live in. Usually their household would have a garden and a separate section for livestock. They would keep a separate area in which to grow vegetables and fruits. Some of these products were used for the family, while the rest were sold on the market. Some people invested their income in trade and commerce and jointly sent ships abroad. Even the affluent British lived austere in their personal lives. They usually employed only one servant to assist them through several types of jobs. For instance, a single person served as cook and baker or accompanied the coach. House-wives kept an account of their household expenses. The male members of the household enjoyed hunting and travelling. Some did not even keep a private coach and travelled in a hired one, when necessary. Even the ministers and the nobility did not employ more than two servants. The royal carriage did not have more than eight retainers. Itisam contrasted the above attitude with

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 157a-157b.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 157b-159a.

that of its Indian counterpart. The Indian aristocracy and wealthy rajas employed a larger retinue consisting of the mace-bearers (*naqibs*, *chobdar*), along with a large number of cavalry and infantry. The British considered such a display of pomp foolish.⁸⁶

Itisam felt that the British had a healthier attitude to life than Indians. Unlike the Indians, the British considered reliance on parental property equivalent to living on charity. The British spent forty years of their life both in the active pursuit of learning and later in searching for a means of livelihood and earning wealth. For the latter purpose, they visited other countries. Within forty years they had earned enough to enjoy the rest of their lives, sometimes even more than the inherited riches of the eldest son. They returned to their own country, and invested their earnings in an estate, a house and farm; there they spent their life with their family. Itisam concluded that, due to this pattern of social life, the wealth of the British people increased. He also noticed a population-explosion taking place which, according him, was due to more births and a lower mortality rate in contemporary British society. As he noted, "each couple had at least seven or eight children and all would usually survive."⁸⁷

Itisam's appreciation of the British social life and cultural values did not end there. He found that the British philosophers held that the purpose of man's life was not simply to acquire riches and wealth, but to indulge in the noble pursuit of knowledge for humanity at large. He frankly criticized the life-style of the Mughal aristocracy, noble and rajas, who were totally given to worldly pleasure without any concern for the common social welfare. The British disapproved of this life-style, whose social values and ethos were the hall-mark of the Indian aristocracy. The British spent a considerable part of their life in travel, to broaden their mental horizons, visiting new and wonderful

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 162a.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 159a.

places. Eventually, they settled down peacefully with their families. This, Itisam found, contrasted with Indian social life, where a youth would marry without any prior economic arrangements, and later on would undergo mental agony. In fact, Itisam's emphasis on the healthy British life-style echoed some of the prevalent social concerns of the Scottish literati at a time when he was residing in Edinburgh. Themes such as the concept of familial bonds, a happy conjugal life and the domestication of women were some of the most hotly discussed issues in contemporary Edinburgh.⁸⁸

To Itisam, the British spent their retired life fruitfully, as they devoted their remaining days to the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, even if they had reached an advanced age of seventy or eighty years. They spent this period in exploring new vistas of knowledge and formulating new ideas and views. They cultivated medical science, engaged in industrial innovations and the compilation of historical works, prepared rules and regulations (*dastur ul amal*), manuals and guides (*qanuncha*) concerning every branch of knowledge. In this way they sought to contribute to the benefit of the populace. On the other hand, Itisam was dismayed to find that the Indian aristocracy held a very different attitude towards life. They, "the ignorant people" were wasting their lives in composing verses in Hindi and Persian, in praise of beloved, wine or goblet. They sought subtleties in trivial matters. Itisam argued that these indulgences in *munshiana* style — in the construction of fine sentences and ornate phrases — was nothing but vanity in the Indian aristocracy. For Itisam, this preoccupation of the Indian leisured classes was nothing but indulgence and wasted time. They also led others to think about such inconsequential matters. Itisam used the British as a surrogate for his

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, f.160a. John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1987).

thinly-veiled criticism of the Indian aristocracy's obsession with poetry. The critic asserted that:

the British considered such indulgence in poetical compositions and discourses and versification nothing more than an ineffectual, unprofitable and useless exercise. Such poetical collections and their respective composers, were regarded by the British as insane (*diwana*).⁸⁹

But all was not well with the British society. For Itisam, there were some prevalent customs and practices which the British themselves accepted as vices. Itisam rationalised his criticism by attesting that vices and virtues were both natural in any human being. Moreover, the customs and traditions of different countries and social groups also differed from each other. Intelligent people in Britain accepted that some of their social customs were vices. Itisam posited that one of such vice was the phrase "God damn you",⁹⁰ which Itisam translated into Persian and explained that the word 'God' stood for "Almighty Allah", and 'to damn' meant "to curse somebody". He added that it was equivalent to what the Muslims called *lanatulla* (May the curse of God fall upon you).

It was considered extremely undesirable to use this for any one, whether said in anger or in a state of light heartedness. Some of the scholars and educated people of Britain would never utter this sentence. Christian people believed that God's pious name should be pronounced when worshipping Him, not in the markets or public places such as roads.⁹¹

The two other social evils pointed by Itisam, were the practice of duels and gambling. It was strange for Itisam to see people challenging and accusing each other as liars and then fighting with pistols. Sometimes, in order to save their lives people ran to other countries. Similarly, gambling was a major social irritant. People would loose their wealth; only a few could win.⁹²

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 160b.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 190.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, f. 190a.

⁹² *Ibid.*, ff. 190a-191a.

5.5 Social Equality

It was understood by all our writers that in contemporary British society, the common man enjoyed great social freedom. Freedom was achieved through legislation, a responsible state, and stable government. Itisam, whose major pre-occupation remained with the status of the underprivileged groups in British society, was the first to concern himself with those who, unlike the aristocrats, did not possess sufficient wealth to enjoy life. Were the latter deprived of the benefits of a well-regulated state? The observer was satisfied to discover that despite the economic disparity each individual enjoyed great social freedom. He noted with admiration that "The British (*qaum i angrez*) identified themselves as 'free men' (*friman*), i.e., every individual was free from bondage and subordination. Customs like ownership, servitude, and slavery did not exist among them".⁹³ Itisam found British society different from other societies which carried on the traditions of "slave" and "king". He explained that the British people in general, the aristocracy, the bureaucrats, and the common people disliked the very word 'servant' (*naukar*).⁹⁴

Abd al Latif and Ahmad bin Muhammad were both aware of the fact that in Britain every individual had the right to seek social justice through the courts of law and hence the powerful could not oppress the weaker. British people's lives were regulated by law and by their constitution which defended the existing social relationship between those who ruled and those whom they ruled. This freedom was derived from laws; no one could transgress the law. The king had the right neither to appoint judges (*ashab i adalat*) nor to dismiss them. Therefore the judges were free from the compulsion of

⁹³ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 136a-137a.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 136a-137a.

higher authority and were independent in deciding cases. The common people had the right to seek justice.⁹⁵

Abu Talib later on dealt with the above subject in greater detail and with characteristic coherence in a separate section which he called "Laws of Freedom" (*qawanin i azadi inglish*). He appreciated the freedom enjoyed by the British people and he felt that this freedom which was based on a rational philosophy was a source of spiritual contentment and inner pleasure. Abu Talib explained to his readers that the British had nothing to fear from their superior authorities unless they had committed a breach of law. English property, like self-respect, was fully protected by law. The authorities had no control whatsoever over people's personal lives. Members of the upper class, (*ashraf*) unlike their equivalents in India, could go to public places to buy things from the market-place; they were free to enjoy themselves at places of public amusement and entertainment like any other citizen. They could openly criticise their ministers through newspapers (*akhbar*), or by delivering speeches in public.⁹⁶

The English in general, and their upper classes in particular, took great care of their prosperity and wealth, which at present had reached its zenith. This was a result of their state being based on stable laws. When they considered it expedient to introduce any change to their existing laws, they did it with extreme caution and fear. "Perhaps even more than one would fear the decline of a state and its people (*saltanat wa millat*)",⁹⁷ Abu Talib adds. Consequently, the ministers did not introduce any sudden change in the existing system, even if its reasonableness and necessity had been

⁹⁵ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 139b-140a, and *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 135b-136a.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 127.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 128a.

suggested by their intellectuals (*uqla*). They did it only by degrees. They thought that what at the outset appeared beneficial might not have good results, and *vice versa*.

However, to Abu Talib, British freedom did not imply that the British were free to do whatever they wanted. They could do whatever was permitted by law (*qanun*) and did not harm other fellow- beings. The English, by nature, were law abiding people: they followed the prescription of custom (*shar'shari*) and public law (*shar'urfi*) with a proper regard for equity. At the same time, the British had such a high sense of honour and social respectability, that if ever it was proved that any upper class gentleman dined with a person of lower status, others would abstain from mixing with him socially.⁹⁸

Those who caused anguish to other people and dared to transgress the law were bound to be punished immediately for their offence and crime. If the judicial officials delayed the punishment of the offenders, the populace would accuse them of negligence. The sources of this anger and outrage on the part of the populace were threefold, and they had far reaching social implications. The first reason was obvious: delay in punishing offenders. Second, the criminal had disgraced the entire community; and third, such a person was a source of negative inspiration and showed simple-hearted fellows a bad example in transgressing the law.⁹⁹

In spite of this appreciation of social freedom and equality before the law, Abu Talib was not completely satisfied. He noted that social equality did not extend to economic matters and was more a matter of appearance than of reality. The very notion of the "upper classes being equal to the lower" was an illusion. In fact, the difference between the comfort of life of the upper and the lower classes was enormous. The gap between the two was wider than in India. Servants were bound to show so great a

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 127b.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 127.

respect that they were not free to leave their masters before a certain time. These restrictions were such that "even the slaves in India might be considered kings in comparison to them".¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, it could not be denied that to the the careless observer, the servants might appear equal. The first reason for this apparent social equality was, according to Abu Talib, that the difference in clothing between the aristocratic, the well-off and the non-noble groups in society was not obvious. The upper classes usually wore expensive, clothes but these were simple. If seen from a distance, they looked similar to those of common persons. Second, when walking on roads, commoners walked along with their superior classes. In fact, the author complained, the lower orders in the British society openly rubbed shoulders with the upper classes and the latter could not even rebuke them.¹⁰¹ Third, in conversation and correspondence, the style of mutual address was the same, even between master and servant.¹⁰² Fourth, no servants ran behind the coaches of their employer, they simply occupied back-seats with the travelling equipage and sometimes they rode horses to follow their masters. Fifth, although the house-owner had far more luxurious and comfortable beds, the servants did not sleep on the floor. More significantly, "no employer could punish their servant even if they had committed a wrong act, but he could have legal recourse".¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 128b.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, f. 128b. The author sought to convey this point by citing an anecdote concerning the British heir-apparent, who, having been treated disrespectfully by an uncivil fellow during a walk, threatened the fellow with a walking-stick, asking him to behave properly. The person approached the court of law and lodged a complaint against the 'prince'. The court official charged the prince a fine of several thousand rupees.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, ff. 128b-129a. Abu Talib sought to clarify this point by describing what he personally saw. One day Mr. Hastings came to visit the author. The owner of the house in which Abu Talib was living had painted the doors of the house with black paint which had not yet dried. As the house owner was collecting his pots and brushes, Mr. Hastings put his hands on the wet paint, which spoiled his expensive gloves. When Hastings protested, the landlord, in similarly harsh tones asked why he had been so careless. Hastings smiled and reported it to the author who reproduced the incident.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, f. 129a.

But Abu Talib's appreciation of the freedom of British people differed from the earlier commentator, Itisam. Abu Talib was primarily concerned with the manifestation of social freedom within the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. He himself fully enjoyed the social freedoms of an upper class English man. Itisam's view of British social equality was more radical than that of Abu Talib. It stemmed from his understanding that, despite the economic disparity between rich and poor, all were equal before the law.

5.6 The English, the Scottish and the Irish People: Differences

England, Scotland and Ireland were treated as separate countries by both Itisam al Din and Abu Talib. Therefore, their history could not be subsumed into English history. Such a consciousness of distinct identity did not seem to exist among those who did not have the opportunity to visit Britain.

Itisam's acute consciousness of the social differences between the English and the Scottish people seems to have been inculcated by his host, Captain Swinton, with whom he travelled on ship and later stayed for sometime in his house Edinburgh. Such a consciousness was even greater in the case of Abu Talib, whose extensive social contacts with the British in India and, later on, in England gave him certain awareness of the social conditions living of the three British regions. Itisam knew from his understanding of the British historical past that it was in the sixteenth century that Scotland was united with England. More than his knowledge of Britain's historical past, it seems that his awareness of distinct identities were inculcated by his host, Captain Swinton.

While Itisam explained the topography of Scotland to his readers, he noted that it was situated in the extreme north of England as the boundaries of the two countries

were contiguous. Scotland's extreme north was called "highland". Since the ancient times, Scotland had its own kings who issued coins in their names — the main prerogative of a sovereign state before it was absorbed into England. Its capital was Edinburgh, but its major historical monument, the Edinburgh castle, was described as devoid of any magnificence.¹⁰⁴

Itisam explained that the people of Scotland were called "Scotchmen" (*Iskajman*), in a manner similar to the people of England who were known as "Englishmen" (*Inglishman*), while the inhabitants of France were called "Frenchmen" and the inhabitants of Holland "Hollanders". Because Itisam had no Persian equivalent for these terms of national identity, he simply transliterated them. Alluding to the historical past of Scotland, he wrote that the country had experienced discord, hostility, and occasional warfare with England until the death of the last Scottish monarch, when with the consent of the clannish chiefs it was merged politically with England. Itisam explained that both the English and the Scottish people were Christians, and that this was one of the reasons they gradually unified. Therefore, now, politically speaking, Scotland formed an integral part of England.

Itisam opined that the unification of England with Scotland, was of immense advantage for the latter. Scotland's economy, since then, had considerably improved. There were signs of urbanization, as new towns were coming up. Scotland was a hilly region, only very thinly populated, where the majority of the people were poor and only a few were prosperous. Nevertheless, there were visible social changes in the life in Scotland and Itisam could discern some favourable changes in its material prosperity. This prosperity was, according to him due to two reasons: first, the Scots were entering in the royal services since their having been united with England. Second, they had

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 92ab.

joined the services of the Company and were engaged in trade and commerce. The population of Scotland was increasing and its wealth augmenting.¹⁰⁵

Apart from the economic differences, there were some specific social characteristics which distinguished Scots from their English fellow-countrymen. The people of Scotland were distinguished for virtues like bravery and courage, but the English considered themselves superior on account of their knowledge, learning, intellect, and wealth, and regarded the Scottish people on lower ladders. Itisam added that the English called them "low low"(*lui lui*). There existed but little difference in the language of the two countries, as both spoke English (*angrezi*) except for few terms (*lughghat*), an allusion to Gaelic.¹⁰⁶

Itisam's close social interaction with Swinton and his family gave him an idea of the distinct social traditions and customs of the region. He came to know about Scottish preoccupation with clannish lineage, and how the Scots recorded their family histories in order to preserve their brave past. Even Swinton's family-name was derived from the past. One of his ancestors, distinguished for his bravery, had killed a white boar — a swine, and since then the family was known with the title of Swinton. In a similar manner the upper classes of Scotland had their own family titles engraved upon their carriages and books, which showed their clannish lineage (*qabila*). Consequently, the Swintons got inscribed pictures of a white boar to trace their clanish lineage with their ancient ancestors. Because in the contemporary era the clan was divided into separate sub-clans, due to increase in the size, and the new sub-clan had to invent new signs, gradually the sub-clan itself become distinct clan. The Swintons had also recorded their

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 92a-93a.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 93b.

family name in their family- history to record their distinct historical past.¹⁰⁷ Itisam noted that numerous families of rather obscure origins had risen to power and accumulated wealth and, therefore, were having claims to higher social status. To Itisam's surprise, many Scottish clans happily identified themselves with their family-professions, like that of shoe-maker, cotton-dresser, barber, and goldsmith; despite the fact that these were lowly jobs.¹⁰⁸

Itisam also formed some idea on the social values of the Scots and had some comments on the inner social life of the Swinton's family. He narrated how Swinton's father in his old age became a spendthrift and that his sons, namely John Swinton and Archibold Swinton, complained in court against him for prodigality in expenditure. According to the usage of the country, the court decided in favour of the eldest son, being the heir of property, but fixed a maintenance-fee in favour of the old man. Swinton's father, in spite of his old age, spent time in painting as a pastime. Such episodes, for the Indian traveller, were the proof of increasingly loose familial bonds in the contemporary Scottish society.¹⁰⁹ Itisam also observed that the criteria for marriage in Scottish society were different: while the man (like any other society) was expected to be educated with a respectable profession, the women would be expected to be well-educated, elegant, witty, and beautiful as well as rich. Partly due to this, Itisam found that Swinton's sisters could not be married, for, although they were beautiful like the majority of European women, possessed no wealth.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 94a-95b.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 95a.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 95b.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 93b-94a.

The Swinton family consisted of Swinton the father, his two sons, John and Archibold Swinton, and three unmarried sisters. It was Archibold Swinton who was of main interest to our author. Captain Archibold Swinton studied medicine (*tibb*) in his own country. When he attempted to study human physiology by dissecting an old man's body and the man died in the process, Archibold had to leave his country and go to the Malay peninsula and Pegu. There he worked as a physician and surgeon (*kar daktari*). Later he came to Madras, attached himself to Robert Clive (*Sabit Jang Bahadur*) and fought against Nawab Sirajuddaula. He distinguished himself by rendering military services to General Carnac and he also fought against Qasim Ali Khan along with Major Adam at Monghyr and Azimabad. Subsequently, Swinton joined General Carnac in battles against the combined forces of the Mughal emperors Shah Alam, Shujauddaula and Mir Qasim. Finally, following the defeat of the Indian forces and the subsequent treaty of Allahabad, he came to England as messenger for Shah Alam to the British monarch accompanied by Itisam.¹¹¹

Itisam had some observations about the life in the Scottish highlands. He noticed significant geographical and economic variations within Scotland itself. Though the Scottish people had at their disposal two sets of historical referents for their past, both as Scots and as members of a wider British community, there existed economic disparity within the province itself. Itisam explained that Scotland's further extreme north was called "highland", a mountainous region with little population and most of its land not cultivable, because of continuous rain and snow-fall.¹¹² Even the sheep in the highlands were weak due to the excessive cold and very little wool could be obtained from their bodies. The animals were weak largely because of lack of green fodder.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 95b-96a.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, f. 95.

Itisam described the dress of the highlanders meticulously and also narrated popular anecdotes about them by concluding that every country had illiterate and ignorant people and the villagers could be the same everywhere. It has to be understood that Itisam's narration of the life of the highlanders was free from any pejorative tone. He, rather, described the situation of an area which, especially in the 1760's, when Itisam lived there, was a "region of poverty". Agricultural production was pitifully low and many of the highlanders could speak only Gaelic. As pointed out by Adam Smith, the Highland villagers still used pebbles or nails as their major form of currency.¹¹³

Abu Talib described Ireland as a separate country with a capital and a separate house of parliament. He described Dublin's historical monuments and buildings, Dublin College, Christ Church, the parks and squares, the means of entertainment, the exchange and custom houses, the means of transport and the roads, the markets, and everything else, with the same graphic and copious detail as London, capital city of England.¹¹⁴

Ireland's picturesque landscape charmed Abu Talib's senses. Its greenness, tidiness, the fresh air, the elegant houses and the romantic cottages could never vanish from his memory, even in comparison to the Bay of Genoa and the straits of Constantinople which he saw on his return journey. From the Irish port town of Cork to Dublin, Abu Talib passed through the towns of Fermoy, Clonell, Kilkenny and Carlow. Like for other poets, these were for him sources of poetic inspiration and he composed verses in Persian to express his feelings.¹¹⁵ He gave vivid and graphic

¹¹³ Cf. Adam Smith, *An Enquiry into the Nature and causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R.H.Campbell and A.S. Skinner (Oxford, 1976), I.iv. 3 and I.vi. 15; quoted in John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in late Eighteen- Century Scotland*, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 36b-49b.

¹¹⁵ For a vivid and lively description of the Irish towns of Cow, Cork, Kilkenny, Clonell, Fermoy and Carlow, all towns which the author visited on his way to London, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 31a-35b.

description of the houses, their interior decorations and the shops with their window displays with listed prices of various items.

Many of the houses were built of stones and it looked as if no plasters were used in their construction, the stones were well and neatly fitted into each other, but the majority of the houses were built of bricks and mortar, neatly laid together. The bricks were of large size and the mortar appeared as white border on their edges. All the houses in the street were of the same height, and the uniformity of appearance was delightful. [...] These houses were tastefully decorated from the inside and painted with white as well as other colours as was the fashion throughout Europe. Most of the houses had four storeys. The basement was used for the kitchen, for the keeping of utensils, china dishes and coal, and for washing purposes, while the ground floor was appropriated for dining and as a living room; the first floor had rooms for reception and entertainment of ladies, whereas the second floor had bed-rooms and the dressing room. The third floor was kept in a rudimentary state or used by the servants for sleeping.¹¹⁶

Abu Talib then described the typical arrangement and decoration of the house, windows, carpets, furniture, fire-place in vivid and illuminating details. Various material objects found pictorial representation in Abu Talib's account:

The windows had curtains of velvet, silk or beautiful chintz hung from inside, every house having a fire place of brass or iron highly polished and ornamented and surrounded by white marble from outside, upon which during summer they placed flowers and during winter it was used as fire-place.¹¹⁷

The night illumination of Dublin was equally charming, something which the visitor had never seen in his life before, until he came to see the metropolis of London, lighted in similar way.

What enabled Abu Talib to provide intimate and graphic description of Ireland and its inhabitants, apart from his own perceptive acumen, was his extensive social contacts with a number of the British who had served in India and at the time were living in Ireland. Apart from Lord Cornwallis who was serving as the royal representative in Dublin, there were others with whom the author was well-acquainted. Captain Baker was a noted resident who had earlier fought against Ghulam Muhammad- the Rohilla chief, along with Abu Talib, when the British army and the forces of the Nawab of Awadh had together invaded the Rohilla territory. Abu Talib saw the aristocratic life-style of Baker

¹¹⁶ For a description of a typical gentry house of Ireland, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 36b-37a.

¹¹⁷ *Op. cit.*

when he visited his country-house, where the gardens and the kitchen impressed him in particular. The kitchen was fitted with modern equipment, such as a meat mincing-machine operated by a dog, and the supply of water to wash the utensils. Captain Baker lived a care-free life, he enjoyed the produce of his farm and needed nothing from outside except for clothing and wine. The captain had little to pay to his twelve member strong labour ^{force} who worked on his farm which he had bought for twenty thousand rupees. Abu Talib calculated that in India, a British official earning more than hundred thousand rupees, could not provide such living for himself.¹¹⁸ Another person, with whom Abu Talib met, was George Shee who had spent a considerable time in India, as in-charge for payment to the army (*bakhshigiri*) at Farrukhabad. At the time of Abu Talib's visit to Dublin, he was serving in the treasury of Ireland with Cornwallis. George Shee not only provided warm hospitality to the visitor but also acted as an interpreter between Abu Talib and Cornwallis.¹¹⁹ Another intimate friend of Abu Talib was Colonel Wombell, who had served as army- paymaster at Lucknow for several years and therefore could speak Persian with ease. The colonel also had an Indian wife, who had died in a ship-wreck.¹²⁰

Apart from those whom Abu Talib already knew, he socialized with the Irish literati, among whom General Vallancy, who was keenly interested in Hebrew, Arabic and Persian, informed the visitor that there was considerable similarity between the "Hindustani" (*zaban i Hindi*) and Irish languages.¹²¹ While in Dublin Abu Talib visited the library of the ^{Trinity} College ^{Dublin} on invitation of the college provost. There he saw the

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 33b-34a.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 55a.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 55b.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, f. 58b.

elegant manuscripts of *Khamisa i Nizami* and *Shahnama* and some other Persian books in the language-collection of the library, totalling more than forty thousand volumes. While at the College he met Doctor Hall and Doctor Brown, the latter a member of Parliament and a great favourite of the people in Dublin.¹²²

Abu Talib describes the social life of Ireland in a way similar with the English. He was aware that the Irish were often in revolt against the British monarch, as one of the revolts was suppressed by Cornwallis. Socially, too, there existed differences among the two nations. The majority of the Irish were Roman Catholics, i.e., followers of the religion of the Pope (*millat i pope*), while some were dissenters and philosophers (*kharji wa failsuf*) like the English. Nonetheless, in matters of Christianity, the Irish were far from being immoderate as the English, nor were they as austere and bigot as the Scots. The Irish were people of balanced views, far superior to the English and Scots in bravery, determination and military ardour, hospitality, generous disposition and kind treatment towards strangers, liberal predilections and open heartedness. As Abu Talib noted in literary and scientific acumen, the Irish were considered inferior to the English, nonetheless they were quick in comprehension. In Ireland, in spite being a newly arrived person, he was warmly received and his landlady could follow his broken English, while in London, where he had spent more than two and a half years, still the English people could not follow his English.¹²³ The Irish were less prosperous compared to the English and the Scots, because they spent their money on their friends in need and, moreover, led a somewhat carefree life. The Irish did not have the desire to amass riches and luxury, unlike the Scots, and they endeavoured less for knowledge and high offices

¹²² For a description of the Dublin College and Museum, cf. *ibid.*, f. 41b-42a.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, f. 49.

in government. They consumed enormous quantities of whisky produced in Ireland.¹²⁴ Ireland, like England, had a stratified society reflected in its food habits and living. The Irish upper classes emulated the life-style and the fashion of the English upper classes, and they were not much different from the English in table-manners, entertaining the guests and social values.¹²⁵

However, apart from personal observation, Abu Talib's preconceived notions on cultural differences found support when he came to see the English magazines containing the pictures they called caricatures. The caricatures, an expression of the bourgeoisie realism, seem to have amused the observer immensely. He sought to delineate the characteristics of the English, the Irish and the Scots as they were depicted in the said cartoons. When a Scotsman decided to seek position and fortune he left his country and went towards the urban areas, where he served as postman and delivered letters from village to village. Later, he moved to London itself where he was employed as steward by an affluent person. Thus, through industry and sheer hard work he would acquire some money which he would lend to his employer on interest. Later, he would marry an English rich widow. Subsequently, he entered into the finance services, where he acquired skills. Having achieved progress by degrees, he was finally shown seated on the position of minister of state.¹²⁶ The career of an Irish man, as understood by Abu Talib and depicted in the caricature, was less chequered. After an initial struggle the Irish would serve as a soldier in the Royal Army and on account of his bravery he would gradually rise to the position of General. He would drink heavily and would have brawls with other officers, and in many cases would die from a bullet in a duel. An

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 50a. Abu Talib cites the example of his Irish host for excessive drinking.

¹²⁵ For a detailed description of the Irish family life, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 57b-58b.

¹²⁶ For a description of caricature, cf. *ibid.*, f. 51.

Englishman was portrayed as a fat bull and named as John Bull and, like the bull, would eat heavily and drink freely.¹²⁷

Abu Talib sought to discard various views of the English about the Irish. The latter sought to discard prevalent notions about them, like the one about heavy drinking. Such views were, he thought, baseless. At the same time, he did not seem to have favourable views about the Scottish people. He thought that the main characteristic of the Scots was lack of trust and fidelity among them. He mentioned that in England he had more Scottish than English friends, such as George Johnstone, who served as paymaster (*Bakhshigiri*) of army at Lucknow, and Blain, in whose company Abu Talib assisted Colonel Alexander Hannay in Awadh. Blain acquired sufficient wealth with Abu Talib's assistance and working knowledge of Persian. He had another friend, Richard Johnson, his ship-mate. All were from Scotland and Abu Talib had expectations of being entertained by them during a trip to Scotland, but none came forward with such an offer. Only Blain several times invited the author for dinner. Nevertheless, this example cannot be generalised. Lady Winfriend Constable, a Scotch^{lady} not only invited Abu Talib for dinner and in route parties but offered him a trip to Scotland where she had a house to spend the summer. But, to Abu Talib's regret, his generous host passed away while he was still in England, and consequently, his desires to visit Scotland remained unfulfilled.¹²⁸

Abu Talib had some comments on the Irish peasantry. This is remarkable because it was only in Ireland that he seemed to have observed peasant life. Otherwise, during his stay of two years and five months in London, he was mainly in contact with the upper and upper-middle classes. Upon his arrival in the British Isles, and while on his

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 51.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 89b-90a.

way from Cork to Dublin, Abu Talib passed through the Irish countryside where he observed the rural life. He noted that these villages were sparsely populated and each one of them did not consist of more than ten or twelve house which, like Indian houses, had straw and hay roofs. The villagers were so poor that their counter-parts in India appeared rich. Many could not afford shoes for themselves and their feet were exposed to the cold climate of the region. Some of them could not eat bread and meat and subsisted on potatoes alone. In the house of the rich peasants, sheep, dogs and other livestock lived under the same roof with the owner. On the roads, poor people ran along with the coach, in hope to get a piece of bread. Nevertheless, Ireland had well-cultivated soil and produced such crops like wheat, turnips, peas, barley and potatoes. In case the potato crop failed, the poor faced a hard-time. Potato was the famous product of Ireland and was supplied to London. Rice from Bengal and America was an expensive commodity. A rice-dish was a luxury served only to the guest. Their main diet consisted of wheat, barley, meat and wine. The poor peasants had to subsist on boiled barley and potatoes. They fed their animals dried barley crops, but in winter, when snow fell, they fed their animals with turnips. Some parts of the Irish soil were not cultivable, and it produced a kind of fuel which was utilised as a substitute for coal. The poor peasants could also use it in their fire-place during winter.¹²⁹

It seems that Abu Talib's poverty index on Irish peasantry was largely based on their food habits. For Abu Talib potato was probably a poor man's diet. He wrote that potato was also available in Calcutta called *alu*, although he had never tasted it there.¹³⁰ In general, the commentator discovered two reasons of Irish peasantry's

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 35b-36a. Abu Talib was perhaps referring to peat.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 32a.

poverty: high prices of provisions and the quantity of clothes and fuel required to keep them warm in cold seasons; and, on a different level, the large number of children.¹³¹

5.7 British Life in Calcutta

In the foregoing pages, we saw that a detailed account of the British socio-cultural life came from the pen of those who had the opportunity to observe it in Britain, namely Itisam al Din and Abu Talib. Both of them had a sustained interest in cultural aspects. The accounts of the other visitors to Britain, including Mir Husain, did not contain anything substantial on British society. Murtaza Husain Bilgrami and Ghulam Husain, in spite of extensive contacts with the British officials in India, did not evince much interest in the British social life in India.

Nonetheless, during the last three decades of the eighteenth century, Indian observers began to make occasional comments on the Europeans' life-style in the coastal towns of India, like Calcutta, Hugli, Serampore and Chandernagar. Abd al Karim noted it on his return from Haj when he stopped at the town of Chandernagar. Innumerable tradesman and professionals of various crafts had come from Europe to settle in these towns. A number of people from Bengal had learnt these crafts from them as apprentices. He found the European houses extremely pleasant and delightful and the gardens planted around the houses exceedingly pleasant and refreshing. To him, so many gardens existed due to the European custom of a separate house-hold for each family. They maintained life-styles similar to those in their own countries. In their churches they performed regular service congregations.¹³²

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 32a and 35b.

¹³² Cf. Khawaja Abd al Karim Kashmiri, *Bayan i waqi*, Bodl. MS. Ouseley 276, ff. 90a-b.

Mahabbat Khan, writing in 1772, dealt in greater detail with the development of the city of Calcutta from a village into a commercial entrepot. He noted that Calcutta was a village prior to the foundation of a factory by Job Charnock, when he was granted *farman* by Emperor Aurengzeb to carry on trade, free from custom duties, but on payment of a fixed sum of three thousand rupees as *peshkash*. It was to be presented to the *bakhshi* of the port and permission to build the factory was granted.¹³³ Mahabbat Khan dealt with the topography of the city and its damp climate, which was the reason to build multi-storied houses, as the ground floor was not appropriate for living. Calcutta was inhabited by business enterprises and men of commerce of diverse origins, English, Bengalis, and Armenians. The multi-storied neo-classical buildings were equally objects of admiration. Yet, it was not in a position to match Delhi, of which it was said that "there was no city in India (*Hindustan*) which is comparable to *Shahjahanbad* [the classical name for Delhi]".¹³⁴ Nevertheless, Calcutta represented a unique spectacle to the beholder as a specimen of China and Europe, its buildings, heart-throbbing and delightful, an example of ingenuity and craftsmanship of European artists, its markets displayed wonders and curiosities of the world products. Mahabbat Khan sought to express his emotions of wonder and delight by composing verses in Persian.¹³⁵

It was Abd al Latif Shushtari, among all the authors we have been concerned with, who provided some account of British social life in Calcutta where he lived for more than a decade. Latif's case was unique in the sense that he did not have direct exposure

¹³³ Cf. Nawab Mahabbat Khan, *Akhbar i Mahabbat*, B.L. Or. 1714. The work contains a brief, but succinct account of the founding of the factory by Job Charnock. He is the same Charnock who founded the city of Calcutta in circumstances that led to his being granted a royal order (after a brief clash with the Mughal authorities); cf. *ibid.*, ff. 213b-14b.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 215b.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 216. The extracts related to the foundation of the city by Job Charnock and the Persian verses in praise of Calcutta were translated by Elliott. Cf. Elliott and Dowson, *History of India*, vol. viii., pp. 376-93. For a similar, but brief reference to Calcutta, cf. *Farhat un-nazirin*, Bodl. Caps. Or. C.5. f. 575a.

to the West, but still could pen something about the British life back home and its manifestations in Calcutta, where he had the opportunity to observe it directly. Latif had something to say about the life in London, its landscape being dotted with numerous colleges, hospitals, churches, and places of entertainment, such as the play-, opera- and coffee-houses. Latif specifically mentioned the lighting arrangements of the British capital, its circumference, paved roads, drainage, means of water supply and revenues which accrued as a result of its being a port city. He also had something to say on the cultural life of the metropolis, such as the printing press and the Royal Society of Great Britain. In other words, the author sought to provide his readers with a miniature portrait of the metropolis.¹³⁶

Latif's portrayal of London is evocative and precise, but it does not add anything significant to what had been furnished by Abu Talib in his voluminous eye-witness account. Similarity in the themes may lead one to suppose that his informant might have been Abu Talib. The two were in regular correspondence and exchanged opinions during Abu Talib's sojourn in England. Nevertheless, Latif had something original to his credit. The information provided by him is strikingly up-to-date, such as his reporting of the British census of 1801. Latif describes graphically the categorisation on localities with each house being given a number. And in each of these localities there resided a royal representative who carefully noted every birth and marriage in that locality. It enabled the British monarch, his bureaucracy and aristocracy to know valuable details about the population, as, for example, their age-groups. In case of any natural calamity they would know the exact number of casualties. This was one of assets of the laudable system, as

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For information on the circumference of the city, its buildings, style of architecture, drain-system, its roads and travelling-facilities, the printing-presses and the learned societies, as well as the only existing newspaper, cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, ff. 130b-33a.

was concluded by the author.¹³⁷ Latif was aware of the immense growth of population in most of the European cities, which led him to think that the Europeans had devised various means of travelling in order to facilitate the movement of people from one place to another. The carriages were either private or ran by people on small charges, which were generally fixed.¹³⁸

To Latif, Calcutta represented a different type of city: it was unlike the cities he had seen in the country of his birth, Iran, and it did not have a similar appearance to any other towns of India he had visited. "Calcutta was one of the largest cities in Bengal, the most flourishing port in the whole of India and administrative capital of the English",¹³⁹ commented the observer. Before the British occupation of Calcutta, Hugli and Chachra were the two port-towns of Bengal, since they had been bereft of splendour. Calcutta owed its growth to its being adopted as the developing commercial centre of the British. Latif noticed the flourishing mercantile community in the city, consisting of businessmen, tradesmen and entrepreneurs. The British residents constructed delightful, splendid and spacious buildings. Latif obviously did not identify the neo-classical style of architecture. Approximately five thousand houses, double- and triple-storied delighted the observer. Looking towards space, these were like "pieces of ivory-stone". Latif noted the elaborate arrangements made to keep the city clean and tidy. He admired the drainage system and the well-paved streets. During the night, the houses were illuminated with white wax-candles giving an extremely pleasant effect¹⁴⁰. Latif produced an eye-witness account of the Calcutta fort, where the British maintained

¹³⁷ For census, cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, ff. 145b-6a.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 146.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 194.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 194b-95a.

their arms and ammunition. This, he noted, was built on a European model. He chanced to visit this in the company of an English friend.¹⁴¹

Latif also commented on the nature of the soil and climate of the city, which he found unhealthy, but extremely productive. The rice of Bengal was of high quality. Apart from it being the staple diet of the people in Bengal,¹⁴² it was also exported throughout the world from Calcutta, including America and China.¹⁴³ Silk was another product which was sent to other parts of India, China and Europe. According to Latif, the city's white cotton had no parallel in the entire world. The Indians were especially proud of a special product, a kind of silken cloth (*parcha alfi*) which they called *Monga*. Products from other countries were also available in Calcutta. In fact the province of Bengal was known as the paradise of India (*jannat ul hind*). The roads were safe and ships of large sizes visited Calcutta from different parts of the world including Europe, China and the New World, loaded with valuable items. The city imported varieties from other countries including satin, velvet, china- and glass-ware, as well as paintings from Europe. Latif noted with surprise that Muslims dined freely with Hindus, while they did not eat with the English — the People of the Book, Muslims, were extremely cautious to dine with them.¹⁴⁴ Briefly speaking, what the observer noted as unique about the city of Calcutta was its thriving commercial life which gave the city an appearance of commercial entrepot.

Serampore, another town, was mainly inhabited by the Danes and Latif made an adverse comment about it. To him, it was a strange abode where European, Muslim and

¹⁴¹ For a description of the British arsenal at Calcutta, cf. *ibid.*, f. 195.

¹⁴² For a detailed description of the social life of Calcutta's inhabitants, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 194b-9b.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, f. 196b. He also gave some account of the prices: two mounds (Indian) were sold for one rupee and were exported to Europe and Arabistan.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 198a.

Hindu criminals and thieves found protection. The Danes gave shelter to these anti-social element in return for money. The British, in spite of being aware of such mal-practice, did not take any measure against the Danes. But Serampore's weather was more healthy and vigorous than that of Calcutta. Therefore, the majority of the affluent people, the business elite, whether British or the inhabitants of Calcutta, including the Armenians of Julfa, got their houses constructed in Serampore. Such was an Armenian, Khwaja Sarkesh, son of a priest from a well-born family of Julfa near Isfahan, and one of the wealthiest merchants of Calcutta, a close friend of Latif. Khawaja Sarkesh's son, Khawaja Awanus, carried the business of his father and had a magnificent house constructed on the bank of the River Hugli where he spent his leisure time away from the unhealthy climate of Calcutta.¹⁴⁵

Latif's high diplomatic office as *Wakil* for the Hyderabad state enabled him to have direct access to and intimate contacts with the high-placed British administrators. He had a natural inclination to cultivate scholarly relations with the British scholars and scientists who resided in the city. Latif's high-placed acquaintances included Lord Cornwallis, the then Governor-General of India, and John Shore and Wellesley, with whom the writer claimed close personal relations. In his characteristic style, Latif sought to discover the social origins of these officials as well as their position in the traditional hereditary aristocracy of their own country, and their relations with their own royalty. While commenting on Cornwallis, he observed that "lord" was an illustrious title like *Khan* and *Beglarbegi* and such titles were customarily bestowed upon the members of the aristocratic families. In the case of his friend, the title had become hereditary in the family, which had been known with this title for four hundred years. All areas, from Calcutta to the regions around Shahjahan^abad (Delhi), Madras, Bombay and Surat, were

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 207.

under the political domain of Cornwallis, who ruled with utmost regard to peoples' feelings and "with justice and benevolence". Cornwallis ruled India for a brief period and upon his return to England was appointed royal representative in Ireland, a rank which he occupied with the princes — an allusion to Cornwallis's peerage.¹⁴⁶

Lord Cornwallis was succeeded by Sir John Shore. "Sir" was also a title, explained Latif, "granted to aristocracy in Britain although in rank Sir was lower than Lord, and John Shore was his name". Shore was a philosopher, a scholar and an experienced person. During his stay in India, he acquired knowledge of the customs and manners of the people and also spoke Persian, a fact which enabled Latif to seek intimate contacts with the Governor. In fact, Latif lauded John Shore for his literary taste and love for Persian literature. Latif is reported to have discussed Persian works like the *Nimat Khan i Ali* and the compositions of Shaikh Ali Hazin with him.¹⁴⁷ Addison, another high official during the Governorship of Shore, was also a close friend of the author. He was in charge of public affairs of the people of India, a well read and cultured person, a lover of mathematics and music.¹⁴⁸ Latif had a very good relation with Welleseley, who was a Marquis, a title usually bestowed upon the aristocracy and people of noble lineage (*ashraf*), and definitely above the rank of Lord. Welleseley's clan was Mornington. An illustrious person, advisor of the king of Britain and distinguished for his administrative skills.¹⁴⁹ However, for Latif it was not so much the administrative and diplomatic skills of the British ruling elite that impressed him, but their intellectual and scholarly outlook. The author enthusiastically reported that Calcutta was the

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 199b-200a.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 222a.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 222a.

¹⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*

melting-pot and a rendezvous for scholars from Europe. There lived another accomplished scholar, the famous and learned (*fazil azimush shan*) William Jones, chief Judge in Calcutta's court. Latif reported to have corrected Jones' Persian composition, a commentary on the *Qasidah Lamiya Hazin*. Latif wrote approvingly that "it was very well written. In Arabic and Persian, Jones was unique and in philosophical questions (*ulum i hikmi*) an incomparable scholar".¹⁵⁰

Another well-known contemporary scholar was William Chambers, judge in Calcutta's judicial court, but hierarchically below Jones. Chambers could speak Persian fluently and correctly as an Iranian and had a magnificent collection of books in Persian and Arabic on history, as well as dictionaries in these languages.¹⁵¹ Another English scholar was Burrows, specialist in scientific subjects like mathematics, geometry, and natural philosophy. Tafazzul Husain studied the above subjects with Burrows in Calcutta.¹⁵²

Latif took note of the daily living of the British in Calcutta. He noticed the British dress-style and mentioned the wig, without mentioning the actual term. Shaving the beard off seemed to him strange, probably because he was used to the opposite. He also sought to describe the male attire, waist- coat and trousers. Similarly, he wrote about the female dress but without naming it, the bodice and the elaborate skirt which almost touched the ground and was taken care of from two sides by servants, sometimes like the dress of the Turkish ladies.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 206a.

¹⁵¹ For William Chambers and his collection, cf. *ibid.*, f. 206. Latif benefited from Chambers' collection of Gospels. Chambers was interested in comparative religion and translated the Gospels into Persian (Matthew 1-5, from Greek, Calcutta, 1795). Cf. T.H. Darlow and M.F Moule (Compilers), *Historical Catalogue of the Printed Edition of the Holy Scriptures in the Library of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, vol. 2 (The Bible House, 1911), p. 1202.

¹⁵² Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 207a.

Latif found the European method of eating on table and chair somewhat similar to that of the Turks. He conjectured that this was a particularly Mongol and Turkish practice which spread in Europe since Chingiz Khan conquered a great part of it. He also noted that the British did not eat with their fingers, but used spoons and forks for food like rice and bread. Latif further reckoned that in old Persian the word *mezban*, which stood for 'host', was a derivative from *mez*, the table on which Europeans ate their food.¹⁵³ Other customs of the British, such as paying respect to the monarch by bowing half down, were somewhat like that of the Turks. Latif also noticed the style of British ladies while paying respect: they put their hands across their waist and bowed down a little. He found the style charming and attractive.¹⁵⁴

Latif had some perceptive remarks about the British attitude towards education of children. To him, as well as to other writers, the law of primogeniture was known. For the family life it was purposefully formulated to avoid any conflict among the brothers concerning the family property besides keeping the family property intact and undivided. Latif thought that whatever amount the British parents spent on the upbringing and education of their children, this was paid back when the son reached a high position. The parents and guardians would usually pay something like an amount of twenty thousand rupees to the (East India) Company, and the Company in turn employed the son for four hundred rupees per month. Having there learnt various jobs as apprentice, he would be sent to Hindustan or America where he endeavoured to earn promotions by his talent, finally reaching to the position of governor, and sometimes even higher than that, to that of the prince.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, ff. 134b-5a.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 135a.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 141b-2a.

Latif went into details on such British customs as the duel, boxing-matches, gambling and state-lotteries, but only to describe them as bizarre social practices of an alien culture and to condemn them as evil for healthy social life.¹⁵⁶ Other social evils, according to Latif, were the tobacco-smoking, small-pox and syphilis (*abela i farang*) which he thought were specifically of American origin. From the New World they had reached Europe and from there spread to the entire world. "Otherwise four hundred years ago," writes Latif somewhat disparagingly, "these two diseases as well as tobacco-smoking were ^{not} known to the world. The very word *Tanbaku* for the tobacco was of American origin".¹⁵⁷

Latif also noted the manifestations of European influence through the establishment of Freemason lodges in Calcutta and informed that a number of Muslims became members. He thought that Freemasonry was a specifically French custom. Etymologically, the word mason (*mesan*) meant the builder and architect, but technically it stood for a group of people. Contemporary Persian-speaking Indians called them *faramushi*. He further explained that the reason as to why the Hindustani and Persian-speaking people called them *faramush* was that whatever question was being put to them, they replied that, "it was not in my memory".¹⁵⁸

Abu Talib attended a Freemasonry function in London and described it as a colourful gathering. He also explained that 'mason' in English meant "builder" and the

¹⁵⁶ For the practice of gambling, which Latif reported was prevalent in Calcutta, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 150b-2a. Latif similarly described the practice of duels and thought that it was a specifically French practice; cf. ff. 127a-8a. Abu Talib also described duels, which he saw during his sojourn in London; cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 129. He noted that the upper classes fought with pistols and swords and the lower classes with their own hands.

¹⁵⁷ For the above comment as well as comments on other "social evils" that became prevalent in Europe, cf. *ibid.*, f. 134a. Such "evils" were, for instance, the practice of social intermixing of men and women that began after the discovery of America. It quickly spread to France and later on filtered through to the rest of Europe.

¹⁵⁸ For comments on Freemasonry, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 128a-9a.

word 'free' meant *azad* i.e., free from religious affiliation. Abu Talib dilated on the historical origin of the sect, relating it to Prophet Solomon, who, for the foundation of the *Masjid i Aqsa* at Jerusalem, gathered a number of builders mainly from Europe. The people of Europe being desirous of commemorating the occasion, founded this peculiar religion and regarded themselves unique in the world.¹⁵⁹ Latif found somewhat inappropriate resemblance between the Freemasons and the Janissary Corps (*Yankcharyan*) of the Ottoman Empire. He could guess that either the Ottomans (*Rumyan*) had adopted these customs or the Freemasons followed the Turks. Abu Talib described how the Freemasons carried their proceedings in a magnificent building, a large hall which was called the house of wisdom (*bait al hikma*). Every new member was welcomed and philosophies and principles were unfolded before him, such as not to indulge in an undignified act and not to disclose the mysteries of the sect to any outsider. Abu Talib emphasized the secret nature of the sect by noting that even in England people were curious about its mysterious activities, for which there existed wide-spread suspicion. Both writers briefly alluded to some main characteristics of the sect. That the members helped each other in distress, and treated each other with equality. They had strong ties of brotherhood and finally they did not oppose any religion and anyone could join the lodge irrespective of one's own religious convictions.¹⁶⁰

Latif had some interesting comments on another social phenomenon, the inter-religious marriages between Englishmen and Indian women — Hindus and Muslims —, which the commentator did not see in favourable light. Strangely enough, Latif showed great concern for the children born of such an alliance. He commented that the sons

¹⁵⁹ For Abu Talib's eye-witness account, cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 87a-8b.

¹⁶⁰ Abu Talib narrated several stories as to how people in England sought to discover the secret proceedings of the order. Cf. *ibid.*, ff. 87a-8b. Latif reported that a similar suspicion prevailed in the people's mind in Calcutta, who sought to discover the secrets of the Freemasonry lodges. Cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, ff. 128a-9a.

were being sent to England from the age of four, while the daughters were left with their mothers so that she could inculcate her own values and norms. When the daughter became mature, she would be married to a Muslim male. She would be provided with some kind of employment for her maintenance and also given some of the family inheritance. Even those girls who were born in England and were Christians by faith, if desired, could marry any Muslim male. Daughters as well as sons who reached a certain age of maturity were free to follow any religion they preferred, neither the parents nor the law givers interfered in this regard. But Indian wives were not allowed to migrate to their husbands country as the British argued that this prohibition was imposed to safeguard purity of their own lineage. Latif had to conclude that the British paid little respect to their Indian wives.¹⁶¹

It is not clear on what basis our author made the above comment, since he did not provide any example to support his contentions. On the other hand, Abu Talib mentioned Indian ladies who married British men in Britain along with their children. One such Indian lady was the wife of Ducarell, who resided in India for a long time and, for some time, served as *amaldar* in Purnea. He had married a female from an upper class Indian family. They had several children who were receiving education in England. Mrs. Ducarell had lived in England for more than twenty years and had white complexion, spoke English and wore English dresses; therefore, noted the acute observer, it was difficult to distinguish her Indian origin.¹⁶²

Another such lady was Nur Begum, whom Abu Talib visited at her residence in London. Nur Begum, too, appeared European in her dress and conversation, as well as

¹⁶¹ Cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, ff. 153b-4a.

¹⁶² Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 99b-100a. Abu Talib does not mention anything about the earlier life of Ducarell's Indian wife, but according to the translator of the *Masir i Talibi*, Charles Stewart, she was a Hindu whom Ducarell saved from the funeral pyre of her husband and subsequently married, having converted her to Christianity. Cf. the English translation, *Travels of Mirza Abu Talib* pp. 267-8.

in other respects. General De Boigne, her husband, had a second marriage with a French lady of his own status, and gave Nur Begum a separate house to reside and fifteen hundred rupees per month for her maintenance. Nur Begum had a son and a daughter of about fifteen and sixteen years of age and both were at School, but spent the holidays with their mother in London. Nur Begum apparently belonged to a Muslim family of Lucknow, as she requested Abu Talib to deliver a letter to her mother in Lucknow. Abu Talib reported that Nur Begum was pleased to meet him in London and requested him to pay occasional visits.¹⁶³ However, a reverse scenario also took place. Din Muhammad, is such a case-study who originally belonged to Murshidabad, but had been brought up by Captain Baker's brother in his house at Cork in Ireland and was admitted to school. After having completed his education, Din Muhammad married a British girl of his own choice who had studied in the same school. Abu Talib reported that at present Din Muhammad had his own house-hold, had beautiful children and also possessed some wealth. Din Muhammad also compiled a book of his own life and on some of the customs of India and published it.¹⁶⁴

There were some other aspects and manifestations of British life in India and particularly in Calcutta which were noted by Latif. He recorded the introduction of the postal system (*dak*), which Latif appreciated as an admirable English tradition for the delivery of their own official letters as well as for other peoples in any country where

¹⁶³ For Nur Begum and the author's visit to her house in London, cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 100a. Another British, named William Palmer, had married Bibi Faiz Bakhsh, as depicted in a Calcutta painting of 1786. The painting by Francisco Renaldi is preserved in the India Office Library and reproduced in Rozina Visram, *Ayahs Lascars and Princes Indians in Britain, 1700-1947* (London, 1986).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, f. 34. Abu Talib does not mention the name of the book by Din Muhammad for the obvious reason that it was in English; it is, however, the *Travels of Dean Mahomet, A native of Patna, Bengal, through several Parts of India while in the service of the East India Company* (Cork, 1794). Din Muhammad had been the subject of numerous articles; for details and references to these articles, cf. *Ayahs Lascars*, pp. 64-6.

it was possible to reach. Latif went to a great length in describing graphically the actual working of the postal system in India.

On the distance of two leagues (*farsukh*) or less, on the roads, they had constructed wooden houses where they had appointed few messengers and a writer. The letters were put into a leather bag, sealed and handed over to the messenger who delivered it to the next station and then the letters were distributed by the messenger by beating drums to call people.

Thus, Latif evocatively described delivery of postal bag from one station to the next. In a single day and night approximately forty five leagues were being covered by various messengers. The same task was accomplished by horse-drawn coaches in England, added Latif. Horses were changed on appointed places, as it was beyond the power of a single one to do the entire work. The charges on the postage were in accordance with the distance and weight of the letter being sent. Two and half *misqal* was charged one *ana* and the slightest increase in weight was charged accordingly. But the Company's letters were sent free of charges. Nevertheless, they had eased a difficult task for people and earned profit out of it for themselves.¹⁶⁵

The British officials received news from different parts of the country and carefully followed them to plan the development of the regional states. By effective means of communication, the British had reduced the ruling elite of Hindustan (*farmandahan i Hindustan*) to a position of no significance (*nachiz*), was Latif's view.¹⁶⁶

Latif also took note of the effective use of manpower by the British officials in India. He wrote that in case the high officials of the Company had to reach somewhere in time, they travelled in a litter. This litter was carried by eight men, and two others were employed as helpers to carry food and clothes and other provisions while one more person carried the light. These people usually covered about two leagues (*farsukh*) per

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, f. 135. *Misqal*, a gold coin weighing a dram and three seventh *ana* was an Indian currency of that period.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 136a.

day. The manpower in India was in such abundance that there was no necessity to keep the litter on ground, it was carried on shoulders. The British officials travelled almost like the postage-bag. The wages for such work were hundred rupees per day. In case they wanted to travel more quickly, a number of people were added and in that case the wages would be raised. The company spent almost on hundred thousand rupees a year for this arrangement, Latif recorded in his study.¹⁶⁷

As has been pointed out earlier, those who did not have a direct exposure to the West, did not evince any interest in British social life. Nonetheless, there are some instances of occasional discussion and queries. Such a conversation occurred in India between Murtaza Husain Bilgrami and his employer Jonathan Scott, when the latter enquired Murtaza as to which cities in India were well-populated and flourishing. Murtaza replied the "Awadh and the Lucknow". But this could not satisfy Scott, as to him these were nothing but utterly desolate cities. Murtaza added Gujarat and Ahmedabad as other prosperous cities in India, but neither this could satisfy Scott, who explained to Murtaza that he wanted to know of a flourishing city would have no beggars, like London. Murtaza was curious as to why and how the British cities did not have any beggars. Scott explained that the law-giver had required the artisans and soldiers to contribute a certain fixed amount to the state treasury. The king and the nobility also contributed from their incomes towards these funds, and the merchants shared their profits into it. On a particular day the beggars and poor would assemble at a place. From among them, those who were healthy were employed for various physical and manual jobs, but those who were unable to earn due to old age or a physical handicap were given money for one year from the collected fund. "In our country", maintained Scott, "people did not provide wrong information to receive more than they

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 135b.

were entitled for. In case someone represented a false case, he was liable for strong action. Murtaza replied that Islamic law also made provision for the poor and needy, and the believers had to pay one fortieth of their income every year as *zakat*. "This amount was to be distributed amongst those who could not earn themselves", reports the author. At present, the difference between the Indians' and the British (*saheban*) was that the formers' king was not a good administrator who could have regulated the state and government in every respect by making to pay their share to maintain equality in the society.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸For the above discussion, cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 613-4.

6 EDUCATION AND ORIENTALISM

Itisam al Din, Muhammad Husain and Abu Talib saw Europe as a place where various arts and sciences flourished, and men of intellect devoted their lives in pursuit of knowledge. Britain in particular was viewed as a preeminent place for such diversified activities. As these Indian visitors often travelled to England via France, they were also able to formulate opinions on the French intellectual life. Especially Itisam drew attention to the superiority of the French tradition in learning.

6.1 Education in Britain

All three writers highlighted the role of the printing-presses as the vehicle in disseminating ideas and learning. According to Itisam, printing effectively promoted literacy in the British society; it made available books on every subject for schools and colleges at inexpensive prices. Itisam found it far easier than copying a manuscript. Thus, in the British society, education had filtered down to various sections of society. Abu Talib appreciated the fact that the printing-presses had made it possible to publish newspapers (*kaghaz i akhbar*). He was aware of the fact that newspapers promoted political consciousness among the British, in addition to providing information on minor routine things.¹

Muhammad Husain provided an intellectual portrait of Europe and emphasized that apart from advancement in scientific and technical knowledge, the Europeans were

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Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 111-2a.

attempting to preserve their ancient cultural heritage. "Every European nation was assiduously cultivating linguistic sciences (*ulum i lisaniya*) which included their ancient literature such as Hebrew, Greek and Latin (*zaban i Rumi*)".² In Europe, new discoveries and ideas were quickly spread among the (educated) population and books were swiftly translated from one European language to another. As a result of this framework, a large number of people devoted their lives to the cause of learning. In fact, writing itself had become a source of acquiring wealth and riches. As authors did not need to rely on hand copying (*kitabati*), several thousand copies could be prepared from the manuscript within a short period. Since it cost less than copying a manuscript, books were also relatively cheap, but the profit reached the author almost directly. Muhammad Husain pointed out that the technique of book- printing, a wonder of art and craftsmanship, had been prevalent in European countries over the last three hundred years. He also admired the uniformity of the printed editions, and how various editions were the same in shape, size and character.

Muhammad Husain came to know about the growing Western interest in the arts, culture, religion and languages of Asia and Africa. He writes:

Europeans were not unaware of Islamic languages namely, Arabic, Persian and Turkish. In these languages, too, they had written valuable works. They had laid down rules for learning of these languages. Few years ago, a man known as Sale had attempted a translation of the Holy *Qur'an* into English (*zaban i English*).

The author added that Sale had succeeded in translating the Holy *Qur'an* with reasonable lucidity and eloquence. Sale had also written commentaries upon difficult verses of the Holy Book in the light of famous exegetical works like *Baizawi* and *Kashshaf*. Sale sought to compare his own religious texts with the Holy *Qur'an*.³ He spent around seventeen years in Arab countries, where he pursued various exegetical

² Muhammad Husain explained that *zaban i Rumi* was called Latin (*Letin*) by the Europeans. Cf. *Risala*, ff. 4b-6a.

³ At one place, he said that the Ascension of Christ did not take place from the cross.

works in Arabic.⁴ Thus, Muhammad Husain came to know of the growing trends towards the comparative study of religions in Europe.

Nevertheless, emphasized Husain, Europeans were more interested in scientific subjects like natural philosophy (*hikmat i tabi*) and mathematics (*riyazi*). They had introduced new methods (*aslub i jadidah*) to the study of these subjects. But, to him, they were not exploring any new vistas in logic (*mantiq*) and they seemed to have discontinued the study of metaphysics (*hikmat i ilahi*). According to our analyst, the underlying lack of enthusiasm in the cultivation of logic and metaphysics was due to the European perception of these subjects. They believed that logic was embedded in human disposition, somewhat like grammar and prosody, and if an individual did not possess such a mental make-up, he would not be able to cultivate other branches of learning and entertain the realm of higher thought. The reason for neglecting the study of metaphysics was this:

God the Almighty was the most high and all powerful; with limited human intellect, it was impossible to search for His essence, and the reality of His qualities.⁵

Itisam al Din paid considerable attention to the system of education in Britain. He spent considerable time at Oxford, where he visited the University's astronomical observatory and the School of Anatomy which he briefly described.⁶ Most of his other comments were largely concerned with the primary and secondary levels. He described the various stages and methods employed to impart elementary education. He thus describes the teaching methods in schools:

First they taught the alphabets to the children, and then gradually introduced them to grammar and taught the beginner how to construct a correct sentence. Later on, they added story-telling

⁴ *Op. cit.* George Sale (c. 1697-1736) made the first accurate translation of the Holy *Qur'an*. Cf. G. Sale, *The Koran* (London, 1734).

⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 6b.

⁶ For a description of Oxford University and its buildings, which according to Itisam had stood the test of time, cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 84b-5b.

which amused the learners. After about two years of such preliminary training, the learner was taught subjects considered useful in earning livelihood, like mathematics. Then the student read other subjects, such as theology, law and justice (*adalat*), philosophy, natural sciences and medicine. In fact, learning had been so eased, the student faced little difficulty in understanding. Owing to the printing-presses the books were so easily available in England that, if one desired, one could easily procure ten thousand books of one subject from a single book-shop. Persian works like *Shahnama* costing one hundred and fifty rupees in India could be procured for ten or twenty rupees in England.⁷

Itisam could clearly perceive that in Britain education was a symbol of social status as well as a means for upward social mobility. The upper classes paid great attention to the education of their children. In fact, in British society, any person who did not possess the graces of education, and did not have training in such arts like music and dancing, was looked down by other people as belonging to a lower social strata. It was difficult to marry into the higher echelons of society without proper education and training.⁸

The French education system was immensely admired by Itisam al Din. He felt that such was the popularity of French education, that the British aristocracy sent their children to France to receive education and even to train in sports and skills like horse-riding and music. Moreover, he reported having seen numerous French who were training the sons of British aristocrats in the cities of London and Edinburgh.⁹

Itisam's sensitive mind could perceive that the British class-structure was reflected in the education system as the poor strata could not afford to send their children to those schools where the children of aristocracy and middle-classes alone were admitted. The affluent sections of the British society sent their sons to boarding schools where they enjoyed every facility for education and social life. On the other hand, the poor ones sent their children to nearby schools in their home towns or villages. There were

⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 151b.

⁸ *Ibid.* f. 152b.

⁹ *Ibid.* f. 153a.

separate provisions for the education of boys and girls. The fees of these schools for the poor was usually (equivalent to) a rupee per week.¹⁰ Despite this, in Britain the poor people (*qaum i ghurba*) were not wholly devoid of the graces of education. They could read and write, and knew something of useful subjects like arithmetic. It was only in the extreme cases that parents could not even afford this small fee for the education of their children that they remained illiterate. When the sons of the poor completed their education, they usually sought employment in industry or they learned various trades, such as goldsmiths, ironsmiths, shoemakers or tailors. Thus, in spite of reflections of social stratification in the British education system, which for Itisam clearly represented elite-mass dichotomy, there existed no differentiation on social hierarchies in the adoption of a trade or a profession. Itisam appreciated that the British attitude towards various professions was extremely healthy. Unlike India, there were no cast barriers in the adoption of a particular trade in British society. For instance, if a man had four sons, all of them were free to choose any profession they wished. Such an attitude was totally different to the one prevalent in Hindustan, where each caste and group remained strongly entrenched in its own particular profession which accordingly reflected different castes.¹¹

Itisam observed an increase in British trade and commerce overseas, largely owing to the joining of forces: a number of people set up a particular industry and such a joint venture was called company (*kampany*). They employed people to work for their business concerns and manufactured different kinds of artifacts, rare pieces and wonders of art (*sanai'i badai*), which they then sold abroad and divided the profit.¹²

¹⁰ Itisam seems to have carefully observed such school, probably in Scotland, as he describes the scene of the class-room in graphical detail. Cf. *ibid.*, f. 153a.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 153b-4a.

¹² *Ibid.*, f. 154a.

Itisam noted that the teenagers belonging to the poor sections of British society were often employed in various industries (*karkhanjat*) as apprentices. There, they received training in various arts and crafts and their maintenance was provided by the owner of the factory. Upon the successful completion of their apprenticeship, they were promoted to better paid positions. Sometimes, they moved to other industries where they received salaries commensurate with their skills and training for a particular job. The British youths, on gaining financial independence, got married and would set up a separate household from that of their parents. Itisam did not hold a very high opinion of those contemporary British who were serving in India. To him,

the white men (*gorhai wilayat*) in the service of the Company were often from the deprived sections of British society. Some of them were those who lacked skill and appropriate qualifications to find employment in their own country; some were rather ignorant and inept, while others were criminals, who in order to escape punishment had come to India or became sailors on a British ship.¹³

Itisam specifically mentioned the role of the state and charitable institutions in the establishment of poor-houses in Britain and France for the needy and the orphans. There were doctors, teachers, cooks, supervisors etc. appointed to look after these poor-houses. In these asylums the children were taught the basics in reading and writing and later on were trained to perform industrial work. There existed separate houses for girls and boys. Eventually these trained youths were absorbed in various industries, such as the shipping industry, or were inducted in the military service.

Some became sailors, while others joined the cavalry and received full maintenance by the state. In old age they were employed to police various areas of towns and cities.¹⁴

Itisam also offered some comparative comments. He admired the European middle-class for their life-style and efforts at comprehending the wider world through researches and explorations. On the other hand, he was dismayed to find that the Indian

¹³ *Ibid.*, f. 154b.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 155b.

aristocracy and rich people lacked such cultural values and outlook on life. The Indian aristocracy was indifferent towards acquiring education, and, consequently, was sinking into inertia and apathy leading it towards decadence and retrogression. It aspired to luxury and comfort without creating any basis for it. Itisam also criticized the Indian aristocracy's attitude towards education, and particularly the practice of calling the teacher at home instead of the children attending the *madrsah*. The Indian upper classes thought that sending the child outside might expose it to evil influences. Moreover, the aristocracy regarded those government-supported educational institutions as charitable and lowly; it, hence, employed private tutors to instruct the children at home. But, as a matter of fact, Itisam's criticism was directed not so much against the system of education or lack of opportunities in India, it was more a verdict on the attitude and ethos of the Indian Muslim potentates and other affluent sections. He exhorted the latter to cultivate British middle-class values (without employing any word for "middle-classes").¹⁵

Like Itisam, Abu Talib was equally appreciative of the British education system and its boarding schools with their efficient regulation. He wrote extensively about the moral and social education of the British youth from an early age till the time they were capable of earning their livelihood independently.¹⁶ Abu Talib could see the role of charitable institutions for public welfare and that of the state in establishing schools, colleges, hospitals and poor houses which were found in almost every British city. Innumerable colleges (*madrsahs*) dotted the landscape of the country. Two cities in particular, Oxford and Cambridge, were wholly devoted to the cause of learning. There numerous colleges and magnificent libraries existed. In these two towns one could meet

¹⁵ For confirmation of his appreciation of the British boarding schools, cf. *ibid.*, f. 152b.

¹⁶ Cf. the chapter on "Society" in the present work.

only those who were engaged in pursuit of knowledge. The two together had sometimes more than three thousand students receiving maintenance while acquiring education.¹⁷

Both Oxford and Cambridge became subject of versification in Abu Talib's poetical collection.¹⁸ He visited Oxford and was highly impressed with the University. During his three-day short visit to Oxford, he visited Oxford's astronomical Observatory, the Bodleian Library and the department of Anatomy. He was fascinated with every sight of the university town, including the buildings and the beautiful gardens laid out with taste. The visitor evinced special interest in anatomy, received a book on physiology as a token of remembrance from Padre Waughan Thomas, and met Sir Christopher Pegge, the Regius Professor of Medicine at the University.¹⁹

Abu Talib described Oxford as the famous seat of learning (*dar ul ilm*) and centre of studies for all the noble and higher sciences and arts (*ulum i sharifa*). There were twenty three *madrshs*, each called a "college" (*kalij*); the association of these was called "University" or "perfect assemblage of all knowledge" (*majmua-i kamil*). Obviously, Abu Talib had no exact Islamic equivalent for "university"; therefore, he transliterated it into Persian while the colleges of Oxford were *madrshs*, the equivalent for the English word "college". Philosophy and sciences (*falsafa wa hikmat*), Abu Talib commented, were extensively pursued at Oxford. The university was endowed with a magnificent library where books on every subject and in every language were found. This collection had a large number of books on Islamic learning (*ulum i Islami*), both in Arabic and Persian.²⁰ Abu Talib specifically noted that, apart from financial aid from

¹⁷ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 109.

¹⁸ For verses in praise of Oxford and Cambridge, cf. *Diwan i Talibi*, f. 115b.

¹⁹ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 109.

²⁰ For a description of Oxford University, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 68b-70a.

the British government, which the state itself received in the form of revenues, the Oxford and Cambridge universities were primarily supported by generous individual contributions. The wealthy British (*ahl i dault*) supported learning by establishing land-endowments, bequests for pious and charitable purposes (*auqaf*) and liberal donations in the form of cash, thus preserving their name for posterity.²¹

6.2 Perception of Orientalism

In the late eighteenth century, the period of our enquiry, the idea of the "Orient" had emerged in Europe. This period is regarded as the formative phase in the evolution of Orientalism in Europe in general and in England and France in particular. Interestingly enough, for our purposes, the Indian scholars visited England just at a time when this phase was beginning, when the European scholarly world was turning its attention towards the "Orient". Therefore, one obvious question might arise, whether our observers were able to discern the beginning of such a phenomenon in the countries of their sojourn.

All of our writers were quick to perceive a growing British interest in India's cultures, languages and religions. During the course of their sojourn, Itisam al Din ^{and} Abu Talib had the opportunity to observe closely the desire of the British to learn Persian. All of them had informally instructed either Company employees or friends. Itisam al Din also taught the elements of Persian grammar to Captain Archibold Swinton during the voyage. Itisam specifically mentioned that Swinton, his ship-mate, read the *Kalila wa dimna* under his tutorship and that he also translated and copied the ten rules of the Persian grammar from the *Farhang i jahangiri* for Swinton. Upon reaching England,

²¹ *Ibid.*, f. 109. Also, cf. *Diwan i talibi* f. 115b for how the British wealthy people contributed to the cause of learning by endowing bequests and cash to the university.

Itisam was introduced to Professor Thomas Hunt (1696-1774), the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford²² and the famous Orientalist Sir William Jones. In Oxford, Itisam copied the epilogue of *Farhang i Jahangiri* for a certain Doctor Walker who was a teacher in one of the Colleges of Oxford.

Itisam was shown the great Oriental collection of the Bodleian library, its Arabic, Persian, and Turkish books and manuscripts. There he saw the translation of the *Kalila wa Dimna*. Itisam also claimed to have deciphered a certain royal communication from Turkey to the British monarch. He succeeded in explaining the meaning and purpose of the above communication to his British colleagues.²³ But, more significantly, Itisam claimed to have made a permanent contribution to the study of Persian language and literature in England. The author specifically mentioned that, while on board, he copied the epilogue (*khatima*) of *Farhang i Jahangiri* for Captain Swinton. Upon reaching London and later while staying at Oxford, he copied out the same for William Jones, who, as Itisam further informs us, he rearranged and gave the title *Shakaristan*. This work was published by Sir William Jones in collaboration with Swinton who earned a fortune by its sale.²⁴ Itisam also observed that *Shakaristan* was being regarded as the most authentic and accurate work on the subject.²⁵

²² Thomas Hunt belonged to the first generation of scholars in England who promoted the study of the Arabic language. Hunt delivered two lectures at Oxford on the importance of Arabic studies: *De antiquitate, elegantia, utilitate linguac Arabicae* (1738, printed in 1739), and *De usu dialectorum orientalium, ac praecipue Arabicae* (1748, printed in 1748). Cf. *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. X, p. 279.

²³ Sir William Jones' manuscripts belonged to University College before being given to the Bodleian Library. They contained some papers in Turkish. Cf. Bodl. University College, MSS. Nos. 197, 199-203.

²⁴ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 85b-6a. Itisam specifically mentions that while he was at Oxford he met Sir William Jones, the same Jones who was in India serving as judge in Calcutta when the author was writing his account after 1785.

²⁵ *Op. cit.* Sir William Jones is generally regarded as the founder of the oriental studies in England and one of the leading figures in the history of modern linguistics. This was the period when the famous orientalist was beginning his researches in Persian studies. His earliest published works included
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Itisam further claimed that he was asked by his British hosts, namely Captain Swinton, and Doctor Fullarton to prolong his stay in Britain for about three or four years. During this period he was asked to instruct those British who were eager to learn Persian. Itisam added that the reason he was asked to stay in Britain was that there was hardly any British scholar capable of teaching Persian, though such an interest was growing unabated. Itisam explained that after the conquest of Bengal the British had become immensely interested in learning Persian. Nonetheless, he could not accept the offer because of excessive homesickness.²⁶

²⁵(...continued)

translations of Persian and Arabic historical works, poetry and several important treaties on Indian law, such as the *Al Sirajiyyah* or the *Mahommedan Law of Inheritance*, English trans. (Calcutta, 1792); also *A History of Nadir Shah* (London, 1770); *The Moallakat, or Seven Arabian poems, which were suspended on the Temple at Mecca*, tr. by Sir William Jones repub. by J. Ghose (Calcutta, 1877); *A History of the Persian Language, and an essay of the poetry of the Eastern Nations*, Repub. by J. Ghose (Calcutta, 1877); *A Grammar of Persian Language* (London, 1771). It was one of his earliest works and is the earliest printed grammar of Persian in English which provided the basis for subsequent works by famous orientalist, such as George Hedley, Robert Jones and Francis Gladwin. Jones' grammar was quickly recognized as an important and indispensable work and was reprinted nine times up to 1828, including a French version which appeared in London in 1772. As to Itisam's contribution in Jones' researches, and specifically his help in preparation of this grammar, no explicit mention exists in the introduction to this work, although Jones acknowledges General Carnac for supplying a valuable manuscript "on every branch of eastern learning". And besides, Jones notes that "a very learned Professor at Oxford has promoted my studies with that candour and benevolence which so eminently distinguish him, and many excellent men that are the principle ornaments of that university have conferred the highest favours on me, of which I shall ever retain a grateful sense; but I take a singular pleasure in confessing that I am indebted to a foreign nobleman for the little knowledge which I have happened to acquire of the Persian language; and that my zeal for the poetry and philosophy of the Asiatics was owing to his conversation, and to the agreeable correspondence with which he still honours me". The first person acknowledged by Jones was Professor Hunt, and perhaps the "foreign nobleman" was our author, Itisam. See pp. XVI of the first edition. Although in the subsequent editions of this Persian grammar the editors identified this foreign gentleman as Baron Reviski. Cf., for instance, in the third edition (1783), p. xiii; the fourth edition (1797), p. xiv; the sixth edition (1804), p. xiii; the seventh edition (1809), p. xiii; and the ninth edition (1828), p. ix.

A close perusal of the text clearly indicates that Itisam helped Jones in preparation of his grammar. Such internal evidence is furnished by the Persian title of the book, *Shakaristan*, and a naive Persian equivalent of William Jones' name, *Yunus Uksfordi*, i.e., Jones the Oxonian. These seem to have been Itisam's innovations; cf. the title page of the work under discussion. Perhaps any direct reference to Itisam in the preface of this work would have required some introduction of the assistant and, more importantly, the reasons of a foreigner's visit to England. Therefore, Sir William Jones chose not to mention Itisam by name, but acknowledged his help indirectly when the work was published for the first time in 1771. The Bodleian library has the first edition of Jones' Grammar, presented by the author with his signature. Henceforward, references are made to this first edition.

²⁶ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 12b. Perhaps Itisam's comment, that there was hardly any scholar of Persian when the author resided in Britain in 1767-9, is not far from the truth. In the whole of Europe, the study is regarded to have begun in the mid-seventeenth century with Meninski his great *Thesaurus linguarum orientalium*, originally published at Vienna in 1680. A Dutch Biblical scholar, Lodovicus de Dieu, had
(continued...)

Abu Talib visited England during the opening years of the first decade of the nineteenth century, when the British scholarly world was showing increasing signs of interest in Indian cultures and history. Abu Talib not only taught numerous British youths, but also had the opportunity of meeting some of the well-known Orientalists of the first generation. In fact, Abu Talib was able to earn a large portion of his living expenses in Britain by teaching Persian. Among his pupils, he specifically mentioned George Swinton. In Swinton, Abu Talib found an intelligent, regular and dedicated student who sometimes even missed his breakfast to get to the Persian lessons in time. Abu Talib expressed his great satisfaction on the progress of his favourite pupil, who was even capable of following delicate Persian verses.²⁷ Finally, Swinton was successful in getting a position with the Company's administration in India. There seemed to have developed a lasting teacher-pupil relationship between the two. Swinton also prepared a copy of a revised version of the *Khulasat al afkar*, an earlier literary work of his teacher.²⁸

While in Britain, Abu Talib met British scholars such as Sir William Ouseley, Charles Wilkinson and William Jones. Jones was known to Abu Talib from India. ^{according to Ouseley} to Abu Talib, was deeply interested in Persian language and literature. He was largely a self-taught scholar who had developed considerable skills with the aid of Persian grammars and dictionaries available in English. Abu Talib noted that while Ouseley could translate from Persian into English, he was unable to converse in

²⁶(...continued)

published his *Rudimenta Lingua Persical* as early as 1639. In Britain, perhaps, Jones' Grammar was the earliest attempt for a systematic study of Persian language and literature.

²⁷ Cf. George Swinton, *Poems of Mirza Abu Talib Khan* (London, 1807).

²⁸ For Abu Talib's mention of his pupil George Swinton, cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 101. Also *Khulasat al Afkar*, IOL NO. 2692, which bears a note from George Swinton mentioning the details of his copying the manuscript and Abu Talib's revision of his work. Swinton paid an emotional and respectful tribute to his teacher long after the death of his tutor; the letter attached to the above mentioned manuscript is dated August 29, 1857.

Persian. Ouseley's interest could be gauged from the fact that he called his son (presumably Gore Ouseley) *Hafiz*. Ouseley's Persian works were popular among the British reading public and were in great demand, on account of his reputation as a Persian scholar.²⁹

Abu Talib also met Charles Wilkins and described him "as the first European Sanskritist". Wilkins had resided in India for considerable time, and was perhaps the first British scholar who learnt Sanskrit and contributed on the subject. Wilkins had some acquaintance with Persian as well, but it was Sanskritic studies which remained the main area of his enquiry.³⁰

Sir William Jones was well-known to Abu Talib, from their days in Calcutta. Jones' *Persian Grammar* came under the severe criticism of Abu Talib as being inaccurate and erroneous. The reason of criticism seemed to have been the fact that it was one of the earliest attempts by Jones to write something about Persian. Given the pioneering nature of the work it had its own weaknesses.³¹ Later on, due to his duties as Supreme Court Justice at Calcutta, Jones could not revise it. Subsequent editions were published by other scholars. One of the first republished edition was brought out by John Richardson (1741-1812)³². In the preface, Jones admitted his inability to revise

²⁹ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 93b.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 85b-6a.

³¹ For criticism of Jones' Grammar, cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 151. For an early English critique of the same, cf. *Critical Researches in Philosophy and Geography* (Glasgow, 1824). Contemporary reviews are found in *Monthly Review*, XLVI (1772), pp. 36-43, 81-92; and the *Critical Review*, XXXII (1771), pp. 241-9.

³² John Richardson (1741-1812) was one of the pioneering scholars who stimulated interest in the culture and the languages of the Islamic world during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Although a lesser figure than his contemporary Jones, he also made significant contributions. His earliest publication was a translation into English (with historical and grammatical notes) of poems by the great Persian lyric poet Hafiz (1774). This was followed in 1776 by the Arabic grammar entitled *A Grammar of the Arabick Language in which the rules are illustrated by authorities from the best writers, principally adopted for the service of the Honourable East India Company*, by John Richardson, F.S.A of the Middle Temple and of Wadham College, Oxford (London, 1776). In the following year he
(continued...)

the work owing to his other pressing official responsibilities.³³ Another reason seems to have been the fact that Jones turned his scholarly attention more towards India's ancient past, Hindu mythology and Sanskritic studies rather than Arabic and Persian. Still, Jones did not wholly give up his first interest and Latif, who was well known to Jones, mentioned his commentary on Shaikh Ali Hazin's poetry as an erudite piece of scholarship.³⁴ It seems that Abu Talib's criteria concerning Persian literature, his own field of special interest and scholarly researches, was too high. Even the new trends in Persian in contemporary Iran were disapproved by him. The new literary trend towards simplicity which came to be known as *bazgasht* in the history of Persian literature, popular in Iran in the eighteenth century, was considered as a decline of literary standards by our critic. Before undertaking his journey to Europe, Abu Talib was fully aware of the British eagerness to learn Persian language. So he brought a good collection of books with him to England, for his personal study, including some dictionaries and lexicons as teaching aids. According to the author, the British interest in learning Persian was of such magnitude that they sent their children to "most ignorant pretenders" (*ustad i jali*) and willingly paid at the rate of half a guinea each lesson; each lesson lasted for about one and a half hour. In order to cater to this growing demand, Abu Talib proposed to open a Persian Academy in London. The author mentioned in his

³²(...continued)

produced his *Dictionary, Persian, Arabic and English*, which was largely an adaptation of Meninski's great *Thesaurus linguarum orientalium* as mentioned earlier. In the same year (1777) he issued separately his *Dissertation on the languages, literature and manners of the Eastern Nations*, which had been prefixed to the *Dictionary*. Richardson's Grammar was reprinted in 1801 and again in 1811.

³³ Cf. the note attached to the second, third, and fourth editions of Jones' Grammar that read: "my professional studies having wholly engaged my attention and induced me not only to abandon oriental literature, but even to efface, as far as possible, the very traces of it from my memory, I committed the conduct and revisal of this edition of my grammar, and the composition of the index to Mr. Richardson, in whose skill I have a perfect confidence, and from whose application to the eastern languages, I have hopes that the learned world will reap no small advantage", second and third edition (London, 1775), p. xix; of the the fourth edition, p. xx.

³⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 206a.

travelogue that it was his aim to learn English (*ilm i English*) and in turn instruct desirous English people in Persian.³⁵ Accordingly, the author approached the people in authority (*arbab i hal*) with a proposal for the establishment of a college (*madrsah*) for the cultivation of Persian with the help of two or three young British scholars who were well-versed in Persian and were to be appointed on a permanent basis. The author himself proposed to further train these young scholars. Since he was not acquainted with the English language, he also aimed to develop his own linguistic skills in English for the fruitful execution of the proposed experiment. Abu Talib had some definite ideas of how to develop the proposed academy. He planned to prepare a Persian grammar (*nahw*) into English, a treatise which the author had already written in Persian while on board on way to Europe. Along with grammar, Abu Talib also aimed to prepare a comprehensive English-Persian lexicon (*lughat*) based on sound rules of lexicography.³⁶

The author believed that through these efforts Persian would gradually spread throughout the British Isles. The author claimed that his proposal initially received wide acceptance. Nonetheless, the plan could not succeed due to two reasons: first, the commercial approach of the Company towards everything and their complete disregard for public welfare (*nafah i jumhur i am*) forbade any encouragement from their side. Second, the royal ministers who otherwise were free from such commercial interest in public affairs were preoccupied with the war with France.³⁷

Later on, just before the visitor was about to leave Britain on his home-bound journey, he was invited by the British monarch to establish two colleges: one at London and another at Oxford, with a handsome salary of six thousand rupees per annum along

³⁵ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 65b-6a.

³⁶ *Op. cit.*

³⁷ *Op. cit.*

with the title of Persian Professor.³⁸ But Abu Talib did not accept the proposal because of homesickness, but promised to come back later and take up the assignment; a promise which never materialized. There were two reasons for his loss of interest: first, the lack of proficiency of the teachers; Abu Talib made three one-month long attempts with three persons who were considered good scholars of Persian and Hindi, i.e., Hindustani/Urdu. He found that they all lacked a sound basis of Persian, for their knowledge was based on the grammar and lexicons of Persian written in English, which according to the analyst, were not always correct. Therefore, nothing fruitful could be achieved. The second reason was the prevalent ignorance and apathy among the Muslims, the upper classes as well as the common masses. Due to this attitude, his efforts could not culminate into a long lasting achievement.³⁹

On his return journey, Abu Talib had the opportunity to meet the French Orientalist Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), a Professor at the *College de France* and the founder of modern Islamic and Arabic studies in his country, whom he presented with his four *ghazals*. According to Abu Talib, the French scholar translated and published them in a French newspaper. Silvestre de Sacy and Langley (another French scholar mentioned by the author) were not acquainted with Persian as such. But they could recognise Persian alphabets and characters because of their knowledge of Arabic, its grammar and vocabulary. With the assistance of the poet, "the French scholar produced a far more satisfactory translation than Persian-knowing scholars in Britain".⁴⁰ Abu Talib also met the German Orientalist, J.Von Hammer Purgstall (1774-1856) when the

³⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 109ab. In his account of higher education in Britain, Abu Talib again mentions the royal offer to teach Persian at Oxford with the title of Persian Professor with a salary of three thousand rupees per year.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 66a.

⁴⁰ For the meeting with Silvestre de Sacy in Paris, cf. *ibid.*, f. 178.

latter was serving as the ambassador at Istanbul and Abu Talib spent some time in the Turkish capital,⁴¹ and he also presented him with his poems which the latter translated into English.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the libraries of the British Isles had accumulated a good number of works related to the religion, languages and culture of the Oriental world — the first obvious signs of Oriental studies. Itisam al Din, Muhammad Husain and Abu Talib all were invariably impressed with the collections at the British Museum, the Bodleian Library and Dublin College. Abu Talib also discovered that British civil servants who had earlier resided in India had rich private collections. He was introduced to a certain Dowse, a man of a legal profession, in the house of Sir Joseph Banks. There, the visitor saw a large collection of paintings by Indian and Iranian painters. Abu Talib informed that these paintings originally belonged to the Indian aristocracy, but during the political vicissitudes they had fallen into the hands of the English and finally found their way to Europe. To the observer "these paintings were examples of the superiority of the Indian artists and their arts over those of the famous paintings of Europe".⁴²

Besides, British artists themselves were using their brush to paint Indian scenarios. The celebrated British artist Thomas Daniell (1749-1840) had his own collection of paintings of Indian buildings and historical monuments. Abu Talib specifically mentioned Daniell's painting of the Awadh court: the meeting between Asafuddaula and the Governor-General Hastings as well as the other audience in the court. In London,

⁴¹ For the meeting with Hammer Purgstall, cf. *ibid.*, f. 206b. Purgstall spent some years as official of the Austrian embassy in Istanbul, and, after he returned to Vienna, published works on Ottoman history and on Arabic, Turkish and Persian poetry which had an influence on Goethe and other German writers of his time. Cf. *Islam in the European Thought*, p. 34. Hammer Purgstall translated Abu Talib's poem in praise of the beauty of Lady Elgin into English; cf. E. Sachau, H. Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, Part I (Oxford, 1889), p. 1130.

⁴² For collections of Indian paintings in London, cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 98b-9a.

at Daniell's house, Abu Talib saw paintings and drawings of famous historical monuments of India, such as the Taj Mahal.⁴³ Abu Talib showed these paintings to his British friends who did not have any direct experience of India, and therefore, assumed that India possessed nothing worth seeing. This, he hoped, would change their pre-conceived notions about India.⁴⁴

Of special attraction for Abu Talib was the presence of such historical epics as the *Khamisa i Nizami* and the *Shahnama*, considered by the British as exotic treasures from the East. Abu Talib found that the *Khamisa i Nizami* was written in an elegant hand in addition to being illuminated. About this particular copy of the *Khamisa i Nizami* Abu Talib recalled that its original owner, Nawab Sher Jang, whose seal was engraved upon the back of the manuscript, treasured it as his most valuable possession and never parted with it. Similarly, illuminated copies of *Shahnama* and other such Persian works were seen with Warren Hastings and Sir Frederick Eden. The visitor saw Indian art works being kept by British aristocracy in their houses as show-pieces. It served as a warning for the observer as how things could change in this transitory world.⁴⁵

Abu Talib also visited the Royal library in London where he was shown collections of manuscripts illuminated with paintings by Indian and Iranian painters. This collection also included the famous copy of *Shahjahannama* which was illuminated during the reign of the Mughal emperor Shahjahan and the special portrait of the formal *darbar* setting of Shajahan's court, prepared by famous painters of his court. With the decline of the Mughal empire and the political vicissitudes to which the royal capital

⁴³ For Thomas Daniell's collection, cf. Mildred Archer, *Early Views of India: The Picturesque journey of Thomas and William Daniell 1786-1794* (London, 1980).

⁴⁴ Thomas Daniel was acquainted with Abu Talib when the former spent time at the court of Asafuddaula where Abu Talib also served as *amil*. Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 99a.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, f. 98b.

Delhi was subjected, this copy of *Shahnama* fell into the hands of Nawab Asafuddaula, who kept it with him as a valuable possession. Later, Sir John Shore, the then Governor of Bengal, requested the Nawab for this work and subsequently presented it to the British monarch.⁴⁶

Growing European interest in the societies and culture of India and the Islamic world was felt by those who were witnessing the growth of British power and influence in India. Abd al Latif could see it in the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and the efforts of the pioneering Orientalist William Jones.⁴⁷ Ahmad bin Muhammad observed that whenever Europeans visited any country, they not only recorded their personal experiences, but also described the "wonders of creation" (*ajaib al makhluqat*). Usually, whenever they returned to Calcutta from their foreign jaunts, they published their travelogues, often illustrated with sketches and paintings.⁴⁸ These writers not only earned name and fame through the publications, but even handsome fortunes from the proceeds of the sale of their books. Ahmad also noted that along with the original compilations, British scholars were also translating books. Like Muhammad Husain, Ahmad also specifically mentioned the translation of the Holy *Qur'an*, though without naming the translator George Sale. In this way, noted Ahmad, the British were broadening their awareness of Islam and other religions.

The British had acquired such a vast amount of knowledge concerning the customs and manners (*raftar wa kirdar*) of other countries like Iran and Turkey [not only India], perhaps even more so than the natives. The maps of different countries exhibiting the boundaries of various nations were also prepared by this group and sold in the markets.

Ahmad added that the British believed that explorations into the wider world lead to enlargement of the human intellect and mind and it broadened the mental horizons.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, ff. 98b-9a.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 131b.

⁴⁸ Ahmad noted various printing processes which proliferated in India, especially in Calcutta. Cf. *Mirat al Ahwal*, f. 152a.

Ahmad summed up his observations with a note of appreciations, that they had "well understood this aspect".⁴⁹

6.3 Conclusion: A Critical Approach

One obvious question concerns the views of these writers and whether they could be placed anywhere in the ongoing debate on Orientalism. First, it was the post-colonial intellectuals who pointed out the imperialist undertones of those studies that lumped together a large part of the globe into disparate subjects, including a region loosely defined as non-Western and characterized by some sort of Western colonial influence, but which the West could study and understand.⁵⁰ But it was mainly after Edward Said published his book *Orientalism* that the very term which traditionally stood to mean the study of oriental matters in general has been invested with value-loaded connotations. The pejorative usage of the term among some of the modern scholars is a consequence of an assumed inevitable linkage between Western comprehensive interest in the Oriental societies on the one hand, and the phenomenon of colonization on the other.⁵¹

At the outset, it should be stated that our writers had no equivalent of the term *Orientalism* to denote the Western scholarly interest in their part of the world. They did not even have the "opposite" term *Occidentalism*. From what we sought to narrate above, it is fairly clear that our writers, both those who visited Europe as well as those who observed various facets of the British rule in India, were quick to perceive the growing British interest in Persian language and literature. But the British attempts to establish academic institutions and learned societies, and their interest in learning the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 152a.

⁵⁰ A brief account of the intellectual debate can be found in M. Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (London, 1988), pp. 76-80, 93-8.

⁵¹ Cf. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1985).

contemporary Indian languages and culture, raise another question. Whether our writers were even partially aware of the underlying motives of the British endeavour in these directions? Were their perceptions of European Orientalism in any way nearer to Said's?

Concerning the degree of British scholarship regarding India, their views varied. In Abu Talib's estimate it was not of high order. In spite of all the British efforts described above, Abu Talib expressed reservations. He first made a clear distinction between the cultivation of the arts, sciences and technical inventions as perceived in Britain by its scholars for the progress of its people on the one hand, and their approach to and interest in the culture and languages of other nations for its own sake. The second aspect, Abu Talib argued, was superficial and devoid of any insight since the British passed judgements without full knowledge of the civilisation, art and language of other societies. The British scholarship regarding Greek and French languages, too, was of the same level, he thought. To him, upon acquiring some knowledge of any language or civilization, British people made remarks in printed form in the belief that that they knew adequately. But, to our commentator, such publications spread erroneous views and misconceptions.⁵²

As we have argued earlier, Abu Talib's criticism, has to be treated with caution. It related to what we might call the "first phase of Oriental scholarship". A later commentator, Abd al Latif, lauded both Jones as well as John Shore for their interest in the Persian language and literature. Also Ahmad admired European scholars' efforts to comprehend the wider world.

As for the perception of any linkage between Orientalism and colonial domination, there seemed nothing clear in our writers analysis to warrant that they ever thought on these lines. And yet, they did seem to have had some embryonic notions about the

⁵²

Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 145-52.

connection between knowledge, on the one hand, and power, on the other. Itisam's understanding that the British were seeking to learn Persian following their conquest of Bengal, indicates the possibility of such a linkage. Abu Talib could also appreciate that the British were studying Persian to obtain employment under the Company, ultimately for administrative purposes.

More complex questions, as, ^{was} for example, Orientalism the cause or the consequence of European conquest and domination over the Afro-Asian world in general and India in particular, may not be given a satisfactory answer, considering the nature of our data and perhaps the specificity of the period under study.

It would not be out of place to know what William Jones himself thought about the state of Oriental learning in Europe and the motives of the European Orientalists. His *Persian Grammar*, for the compilation of which Itisam claims to have assisted the author, the same grammar which was severely criticized by Abu Talib as being inaccurate, contained an erudite, learned and profound commentary. Had our critic Abu Talib been able to explore the preface of the same grammar, he would not only have abstained from such open comments, but, hopefully, would even have admired this well-versed and well-informed discourse. This commentary was perhaps an early indication of future Orientalist writings. In this thoughtful commentary, Jones deeply lamented the lack of study of the Persian language and literature in England in particular and in Europe in general, and dealt in detail with the reasons for this neglect, including the unavailability of books, the lack of patronage and the lack of deep scholarly insight.⁵³ Jones specifically mentioned earlier Orientalist endeavours to cultivate Oriental learning and the lack of recognition for these efforts:

Gentius, who published a beautiful Persian work called *The Bed of Roses* with a useful, but inelegant, translation, lived obscurely in Holland, and died in misery. Hyde, who might have

⁵³

For the above discussion, cf. the Preface to the *Persian Grammar*, pp. i-xxiv.

contributed greatly towards the progress of eastern learning, formed a number of expensive projects with that view, but had not the support and assistance which they deserved and required. The labours of Meninski immortalized and ruined him.⁵⁴

M. d'Herbelot received the most splendid rewards for his industry when he was patronised by Ferdinand II, Duke of Tuscany, upon whose death he was invited by Colbert to Paris.⁵⁵ Jones took into account the indirect presence of the East in eighteenth century Enlightenment, particularly in the thought of philosophers like Voltaire who was interested in Persian literary writings and attempted to compare Sadi's verses with those of Petrarch.⁵⁶

Although Jones continues to receive the lion's share of attention by scholars, a few other fine Orientalists were already at work in Calcutta when he founded his innovational Asiatic Society there in 1784. As he stated in his discourse,

A few men of parts and taste, who resided in Bengal, have since amused themselves with the literature of the East, and have spent their leisure in reading the poems and histories of Persia; but they found a reason in every page to regret their ignorance of the Arabick language, without which their knowledge must be very circumscribed and imperfect. The languages of Asia will now, perhaps, be studied with uncommon ardour; they are known to be useful, and will soon be found instructive and entertaining; the valuable manuscripts that enrich our publick [*sic*] libraries will be in a few years elegantly printed; the manner and sentiments of the eastern nations will be perfectly known; and the limits of our knowledge will be no less extended than the bounds of our empire.⁵⁷

The above passage leaves no doubt about the scholarly motives of Jones and his need to create a scholarly tradition to study the East and especially India. The two themes, political domination of India, and the need for a scholarly tradition to investigate the past history, society, customs, traditions by mastering the languages and literature of this newly acquired dominions, seem to have been intertwined. This enlargement of the horizons of Europe in the eighteenth century was the result of travel and trade through the oceans of the world. This ability to look at the world in a new way sprang from the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. ix-x.

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. v-vi.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. xii-xiii.

confidence which Western Europe derived from the expansion of its military power and its commerce. India was the first country which went through full colonial domination.

Jones' learned discourses reflects what Albert Hourani called

a new kind of curiosity, a desire to study the infinite variety of the human and natural world, and to study it without fear, and with freedom from the kind of judgement which limits curiosity. As in the natural science this intellectual curiosity found expression to a great extent outside the Universities; Sir William Jones in the British East India Company's new colony of Bengal was the leading figure of this first phase.⁵⁸

Jones's own learned commentary classified the reasons of scholarly interest in India.

By one of those revolutions, which no human prudence could have foreseen, the Persian language found its way into India; that rich and celebrated empire which by the flourishing state of our commerce has been the source of incredible wealth to the merchants of Europe. A variety of causes, which need not be mentioned here, gave the English nation a most extensive power in that kingdom: our India Company began to take under their protection the princes of the country, by whose protection they gained their first settlement; a number of important affairs were to be transacted in peace and war between nations equally jealous of one another, who had not the common instrument of conveying their sentiments; the servants of the Company received letters which they could not read, and were ambitious of gaining titles of which they could not comprehend the meaning, it was found highly dangerous to employ the natives as interpreters, upon whose fidelity they could not depend; and it was at last discovered that they must apply themselves to the study of Persian language, in which all the letters from the Indian princes were written.⁵⁹

Perhaps Jones himself had answered the questions at which the writers under study unconsciously hinted.

⁵⁸ Cf. Albert Habib Hourani, "Wednesday Afternoon Remembered", pp. 63-4, in *Islam in European Thought*.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Persian Grammar*, pp. xi-xii.

7 SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE

The scientific advances of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries rank among the greatest changes in the world history. The Scientific Revolution ushered a new kind of scientific organisation and at a more profound level it initiated a view of the universe that for all its affinities with the past in point of detail, marked a vast and unprecedented disjunction in human thought: it reshaped man's view of the universe and his own place in it. The expression *Scientific Revolution* is a phrase sometimes used to encapsulate the train of events from the *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* of Copernicus (1543) to Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* and Galileo and Kepler's contributions, including such events as Gilbert's pioneering researches into magnetism (1600), Harvey's discovery of the circulation of blood (1628), the work of Robert Boyle in chemistry and of Robert Hooke in microscopy, the mathematical advances of Leibniz and Descartes and a vast amount of scientific observations and experimentation. Within the seventeenth century this greatly expanded sphere of human activity became institutionalised, especially in England and France, with the creation of the Royal Society of London (1662), and the French Academy of Sciences.

7.1 Europe's Scientific Heritage

Modern science is the achievement of the West. Its echoes began to be felt by the non-Western societies as early as the second half of the eighteenth century. The Indo-Persian

literature till the mid-eighteenth century does not provide many instances of interest in Western scientific thought. It was only after the British conquest of Bengal and the subsequent intensification of British political domination in various parts of the Indian sub-continent, when a direct relationship was established with the European world, that scientific ideas of the West also began to stimulate the minds of the educated Indian elite. This development manifested itself initially in the questioning of existing notions. The Graeco-Arab scientific thought was subjected to criticism, and the achievements of Europe in the domain of sciences became a subject of discourse. Of course, the writings of these scholars were confined, understandably, for the most part to the study of astronomy, since this was the main field of European scientific revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nonetheless, other subjects were also not neglected.

The writers who are the subject of this study were attracted towards Western scientific ideas and inventions when they came to realise that Europe had advanced in this field far beyond anything they could imagine. It had already witnessed a revival of Greek learning, and now, subjects like science, natural philosophy, mathematics, and geometry were no more a vocation of a few intellectuals, but of numerous curious persons. In 1793, Abu Talib, before his visit to Europe, duly notes in the synopsis of his projected scheme of world history:

Europe was witnessing the birth of the great philosophers (*faiisuf-i-izam*) to the degree that even a great number of common people (*awam un nas*) had developed philosophical disposition. The Europeans were seeking to relate themselves with the Greek philosophers, as if the Greeks themselves had become part of Europe's soil.¹

Among the most important European intellectuals the author included Christopher Columbus, the discoverer of America, Copernicus and Isaac Newton for their contribution to scientific learning. He provided brief life-sketches of Greek and Islamic

¹ Cf. *Lubb us siyar*, f. 393a.

philosophers as he believed that they constituted the heritage of the learned world.² Abu Talib's perception of the Scientific Revolution in Europe was not a belated observation; it was in 1759 in Europe when the French mathematician Jean Alembert (1717-83) described the revolution that the latter saw taking place in the field of natural philosophy.

Medieval science was largely speculative in nature, a logical explanation of the behaviour of the matter. Mastery and versatility rather than originality and specialization were the hallmarks of scholarship. Muslim scientific thought, admittedly, owed a great deal to the Greek scientific tradition which had been widely translated into Arabic under the Abbasids in Baghdad. In fact, Arabic science might be regarded as the continuation of the Greek tradition itself, which had been preserved under the Muslim rule. Although the Indian and Persian influence also came into it as a result of early translations from Sanskrit and Pahalawi it was the Greek philosophers who dominated Muslim scholars' thought for centuries. Like other branches of science medieval Muslim astronomy was predominantly Greek in character. It was the great astronomer of antiquity Claudius Ptolemy's sophisticated and powerful methods, as they had been expounded in the *Almagest*, which quickly and permanently dominated Muslim reasoning. The name of the treatise, *Almagest*, "the greatest", was given to it by Arab scholars as an indication of respect.

In India, too, like other Islamic countries, astronomy remained one of the most popular subjects. In the mid-eighteenth century various observatories were established in Delhi, Jaipur, Banaras, Ujjain, and Mathura, and *Zij i Muhmmad Shahi*, the astronomical tables of the reigning emperor Muhammad Shah (1719-48) were compiled. The compiler Raja Jai Singh Sawai and his assistants used age-old Ptolemaic concepts.

² *Ibid.*, ff. 393a-394b.

The observational astronomy largely remained divorced from the theoretical developments of the West.³ It was not only that *Zij i Muhammad Shahi* was embedded in Ptolemaic concepts, the entire discipline of astronomy attuned to traditional theoretical notions remained fixed in the esteem of Indian scholars. Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to state that Ptolemy not only dominated Muslim astronomical and geographical activities, but their entire *Weltanschauung* for ages.

While India like other parts of the Islamic world remained immune to the developments in the West, nevertheless at the same time, at the turn of the eighteenth century, European ideas were beginning to diffuse among a limited number of members of the intelligentsia. A host of treatises which survive today in the libraries of the Indian sub-continent demonstrate that astronomy was a topic of wide-spread interest in the literate culture.⁴ In the late eighteenth century Latif reported that Mir Masiullah, a man originally from Shahjahan^apad (Delhi), then a resident in Murshidabad, capital of the regional potentates, possessed a copy of *Zij i Muhammad Shahi*, and he was so devoted to the pursuit of this subject that he possessed no other worldly treasures except his knowledge on astronomy.⁵

Obviously, the contents of scientific education as imparted by the Islamic *madrsahs* was, too, strongly embedded in the Ptolemaic world-view. The syllabi of these institutions included rational subjects based on Aristotelian philosophy. The well-known books on astronomy were those written in the Islamic world, such as the *Risala*

³ Cf. *Zij-i Muhammadshahi*, Aligarh Muslim University, University Collection, no. 11, f. 14. One obvious reason why the Copernican theory did not appeal to Indian scholars was that they sought to achieve precision in preparing a calendar. Their aim was pragmatic and, therefore, limited; they were least concerned with theory. As stated in the preface of *Zij i Muhammad Shahi*, the main purpose was to work out a solar calendar as an alternative to those in vogue.

⁴ Two libraries, Aligarh Muslim University's and that of Hyderabad are particularly rich in the above subject as well as other traditional scientific branches of the medieval period.

⁵ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 209.

Qushjiya of Alauddin Ali bin Qushji (d. 1480), the *Sharah i Chaghmini* of Muhammad bin Umar, and the *Tashrih al Aflak* of Bahauddin Amuli (d. 1623). Popular books on mathematics were the *Khulasat al Hisab*, again written by Bahaudin Amuli, and on geometry the *Tahrir i Uqlidis* of Khwaja Nasiruddin Tusi (d. 1273), a treatise based on Eukleidean principles. In the Islamic system of education there existed a clear cut distinction between the scientific subjects and the literary ones. The former were called *Ulum i aqlia* and the latter *Ulum i naqliya* and more often *Maqulat* and *Manqulat*. Subjects like mathematics, geometry and astronomy, were part of the rational subjects. Although, in the Islamic scientific terminology, there existed no such sharply drawn line between those scholars who were concerned with the cultivation of art and literature and those who were specifically pursuing those subjects which may fall in the domain of sciences. The term *hakim*, literally "doctor", was indiscriminately employed for all those who were concerned with the acquisition of higher domains of learning literary or scientific. Nonetheless, a careful perusal of contemporary Persian sources reveals that those who distinguished themselves in scientific subjects were specifically referred to as *hakim* and were distinct from those who perused non-scientific subjects. Arguably, medieval Muslim scientists such as Ibn i Sina were referred to as *hakim*. Similarly, the Greeks were referred either with their individual name along with the title of *hakim* or collectively they were called as a school of philosophers *milliyun*. The modern European scientists like Copernicus and Newton were also called *hakim*, along with their personal names such as *hakim Neutan*, Newton the philosopher. Use of the uniform term *hakim* for the scientist is an indicative of the nature of sciences in pre-modern period.⁶

In Europe also the modernisation of sciences occurred during the Enlightenment. The creation of new scientific discipline was a contribution of Enlightenment. The

⁶ The term *Hakim* stood for a learned man, a savant, a philosopher as well as an equivalent for scientist.

changing categories of science during the Enlightenment was a reflection of the changing view of nature. The eighteenth century was the period of transition from old to new. It was to this period of transition in scientific learning that our authors views are related

Among all our writers, those who visited Europe and those who came into contact with European administrator-scholars had something to say on this important subject.⁸ Two of our writers, namely, Itisam al Din and Abu Talib, whose writings are most detailed and extensive, were not so intensely interested in sciences, as their major preoccupation was the modern British society and culture which they sought to portray in their travelogues.

Itisam spent a considerable period of time in Oxford, where he visited the Observatory and the Faculty of Medicine which he called "the school of the astronomy" (*madrshah i hayyat*) and "the school of medicine" respectively (*madrshah i tibb*). He described the Observatory (*imarat i rasad*), its library, and noted the use of the

⁷ Cf. Thomas L. Hankins, *Science and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1985). Hankins shows that somewhat similar was the case in the West. The medieval categorisation of sciences did not correspond to the modern classification. During the eighteenth century, sciences in Europe were organised into fields that were quite different from those we know today. What is called "science" today was more commonly called "natural philosophy", still a part of philosophy, struggling with philosophical questions such as the existence of the soul, the activity and passivity of matter, the freedom of will and the existence of God. What today are regarded as questions extraneous to natural sciences, formed part of natural philosophy. For instance "physics" at the beginning of the period of Enlightenment was the science that taught "reason and causes of all effects that nature produces", including both living and non-living phenomena. Medicine and philosophy as well as the study of heat and magnetism were part of physics. Moreover, much of what we would call now Physics was called "mixed mathematics" in the eighteenth century. Mixed mathematics included astronomy, optics, statics, hydraulics, gnomics (concerned with sun dials), geography, horology (concerned with clocks), navigation, surveying, and fortification. Chemistry was largely practised by the medical doctors who saw it as part of their field. Because it included the science of minerals, chemistry overlapped with natural history, the science that described and classified all forms in nature; chemistry also blended indistinguishably into physics, because the study of heat and gaseous states was in its domain. The modern science of zoology and meteorology were used with slightly different meanings, but were familiar. Biology was the name and field that was created in the nineteenth century. During the late eighteenth century, all these categories began to shift into the arrangements that are familiar to us today, but it was a gradual process.

⁸ Murtaza and Ghulam Husain, although primarily concerned with contemporary politics, were aware of the new astronomy.

telescope, to observe the celestial objects, and also briefly alluded to some of the ideas of modern astronomy. But he was not a man of great taste for sciences.⁹

Similar was the attitude of Abu Talib who also visited the Oxford University's Radcliffe Observatory as well as the Greenwich Observatory in London where he noted the use of the telescope in observational work.¹⁰ But he did not feel any particular attraction towards the subject. Nevertheless, he was aware of the major ideas and principles associated with the new astronomy, which he sought to describe. When in London he saw an orrery, that is the mechanical model used for showing the movement of the planets round the sun. This mechanical model revealed to him the mysteries of the new astronomy and also gave an accurate configuration of the solar system.¹¹ If Abu Talib did not write greatly on the subject there were numerous curious intellectual friends who upon his return to Calcutta specially requested him to unfold his knowledge of modern astronomy (*hayyat i jadid*) of Europe. Therefore, Abu Talib composed an astronomical treatise which contained most recent, up-to-date, and fresh discoveries on the subject.¹²

⁹ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 88b-9a and 90a. The construction of the Radcliffe Observatory did not begin until 1772 and was not completed until 1796. But Thomas Hornby, who became Savilian Professor of Astronomy in 1763, was allowed use of the room in the tower of the schools' quadrangle for teaching purpose. It isam perhaps visited the above place.

¹⁰ For his visit to the Oxford Observatory, cf. *Masir i talibi*, f. 68b; and for the Greenwich Observatory, cf. f. 86b.

¹¹ For a succinct account of the fundamental principals of modern astronomy, cf *ibid.*, ff. 107b-8a.

¹² This treatise was written on the request of Khwaja Farid al Din Ahmad, the maternal grand-father of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. It was perhaps the last scholarly work of Abu Talib before his death in 1806. It seems that three copies of the above treatise exist: one in U.K., the other two in India. Cf. *Miraj ut tawhid*, Aligarh Muslim University, Maulana Azad Library, University Collection; and *Farsiya Ulum* Nos. 18/3 and 18/4. The 18/4 seems to be a revised version of the former. But it differs in certain details. The title is also different: *Ahwal i Sayyasat ba-muijjab Hayyat i jadid angrezi*. Both treatises belonged to Farid al Din Ahmad and were deposited by Sayyid Ahmad Khan to the College's Library. The other extant copy of the above manuscript is in the Library of the Edinburgh University. Cf. M.A. Hukk, H. Ethe and E. Robertson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscript in the Edinburgh University Library* (Hertford, 1925), pp. 70-1.

Among all our authors Muhammad Husain's case was unique. He was a person with considerable aptitude for the exact and pure sciences and his visit to Europe was motivated by his wish to acquaint himself with Western scientific advances in the domain of astronomy and anatomy about which he came to know from British administrators and scholars in India.

During my long social interaction and discourses, meetings and conversations I discovered about new thought, (*aqwal i jadidah*), and fresh discoveries (*tahqiqat i taza*), about celestial mechanics, heavenly bodies, the nature of the terrestrial globe, and life on earth, discoveries of innumerable, hitherto unknown islands in the southern quarter of the globe, New World of America. Therefore, I attempted to elaborate upon some of these, such as the nature of the fixed stars (*harkat i sawabit*) and of the nature and shape of the planets etc. At first sight, this knowledge might cause immense amount of bewilderment, especially to those who were steeped in Greek traditions of philosophy (*falasafa i yunani*), and Greek cosmology (*hayyat i aflak*) the rules of which were embodied in the *Almajest* (*Kitab i almajesti*).¹³

While Muhammad Husain's knowledge of the western sciences was based on direct access, facilitated by his ability to translate English scientific works. But Abd al Latif could also provide a lucid exposition of modern astronomy from Copernicus' revolutionary idea of a revolving-earth to Newton's synthesis of the physical world.

What were the sources of information in the case of Abd al Latif, the most prolific writer? Presumably, he had Muhammad Husain's brochure at his disposal, and perhaps, also benefitted from the learned Tafazzul Husain. Therefore, before attempting to explore the vistas and categories of their knowledge of European sciences, it seems imperative to examine what formed their opinions on the subject. The question becomes an important one, given the fact that Europe's scientific literature was in its own language, while these Indian writers were educated in their own. Let us explore, how and through what channels of communication, were the scientific ideas passed on.

7.2 Sources of Information

Indian Muslim interest in Western sciences could be traced to the Mughal period. During the closing decades of the seventeenth century Mutamad Khan Rustam bin Diyanat Khan Qubad Harithi Badakhshi, a bureaucrat of emperor Aurengzeb (1659-1707) went to Portugal, where he learnt Latin and translated Clavius's *Eight Books of Gnomics* into Arabic.¹⁴ However, it was during the second half of the eighteenth century with the British conquest of Bengal, that a new chapter opened and a contact of a new kind started. It offered an opportunity to Indian scholars and stimulated some to learn Western language and sciences. The earliest among such scholars was Tafazzul Husain Khan (1727-1800). Tafazzul was born in the third decade of the eighteenth century in the historic city of Lahore, in a family that had served the Mughals as administrators. His grandfather Karamullah Khan was serving as Wakil, the representative of a Mughal grandee and enjoyed *Jagir* along with a salary of a high placed Mughal bureaucrat. When Tafazzul was fifteen or sixteen years of age, the family moved to Delhi. He studied books on rational subjects (*Maqulat*) from Maulana Wajibuddin, a pupil of Mulla Nizamuddin, founder of *Dars i Nizami*. Tafazzul studied the mathematical subjects (*riyazi*), with Mirza Muhammad Ali son of Mirza Khairullah, a famous mathematician of Delhi. Later, when the family moved to Lucknow, Tafazzul

¹⁴ Clavius (1537-1612) was a Jesuit mathematician of Rome, responsible for the final computation of the Gregorian calendar. He was also a friend of Galileo and was the first among the ecclesiastics who accepted Galileo's discoveries. The Arabic translation of Clavius' books by Mutamad Khan survives until today. Cf. O. Loth, *A Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 2 vols. (London, 1877); cf. the reference to *Kitab ul Maqais*, in vol. 1, No. 764. There is no preface to this work, since it is a rough copy of the translation, as stated in a note which was written in the first leaf by the translator's son, Mirza Muhammad. The title and name of the author of the original, however, occur at the commencement of each book (*Maqala*), clearly written on a flyleaf apparently by R. Johnson: *Upon Dialling a work of Clavius in Latin, translated into Arabic by Matemed Khan, who went to Portugal in the time of Aurengzeb. This is the original foul copy of the translation in the hand of the translator*. The copy deposited with the India Office Library belongs to the Richard Johnson Collection. There also exist a fragment of the same in the British Library, cf. *Catalogus Codicum Manucriptorum Orientalium qui in Museo Britannico Asservantur, Pars Secunda, Codices Aribicos Amplectens, Londini: impensis curatorum musei Britannici*, MDCCCLXXI, p. 443. no. DCCCCLXXV.

had an opportunity to study at Firangi Mahal itself, where with Mulla Hasan Firangi Mahali he studied books on logic, such as Mir Zahid's *Sharah i Mawaqif*. As Tafazzul possessed a sharp intellect and always raised difficult questions to his teacher, it became increasingly difficult for Mulla Hasan to satisfy his inquisitiveness. At the end, Mulla Hasan had to ask Tafazzul not to come to his *madrasah*. From that time on, Tafazzul studied on his own, and within a short period mastered the difficult works by Ibn Sina, like *Shifa*.¹⁵ At Benares Tafazzul attended the lectures of Imam Shaikh Ali Hazin, the distinguished philosopher (*faiisuf i azam*) poet and *mujtahid*. Being a scion of a bureaucratic family and an intelligent person himself, Tafazzul Husain attracted the attention of Shujauddaula, the Nawab-wazir of Awadh who appointed him as mentor and tutor (*ataliq*) of his second son Sadat Ali Khan. Such a position not only served as a means of political advancement for an upper class intellectual, but also allowed him leisure to engage in his favourite scholarly pursuits. Tafazzul accompanied Sadat Ali Khan to Allahabad in 1769, where the young noble was vice-minister to the Mughal emperor, Shah Alam. Tafazzul engaged himself in discussion (*mubahisa*) concerning some logical issue (*ilm i mantiq*) with Maulawi Mir Ghulam Husain Deccani, a pupil of Maulawi Barkatullah Allahabadi. The method of disputation was the traditional Muslim way of exchange of ideas.¹⁶ Tafazzul become an instrumental factor in the

¹⁵ For details of his scholarly biography and family, cf. Ghulam Ali Naqvi, *Imad as Sadat* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishor Press, 1897), pp. 155-7; also M.A. Kashmiri, *Nujum al asma*, pp. 323-28; Rahman Ali, *Tazkirah i Ulama i Hind* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishor Press, 1914), pp. 36-7; Muhammad Riza Ansari Farangi Mahali, *Bani i Dars i Nizami* (Lucknow: Nami Press, 1973), pp. 126-7; Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Sirat i Faridiya* (Agra: Mufid i am Press, 1896), pp. 7-9. An intimate view of the person and his mind is given by Abd al Latif, who was on close terms with Tafazzul, a neighbour of his in Calcutta; cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, ff. 201b-204a. Also an elegy on the death of Tafazzul, written by Abu Talib during his sojourn in London, where the composer compared Tafazzul with Copernicus and Newton; cf. *Diwan i Talib*, ff. 121b-123b.

¹⁶ The two disputants, Tafazzul Husain and Ghulam Husain Deccani, did not meet directly, but communicated their ideas through their pupils with questions and answers. Maulawi Deccani was also a well-read person who received education from Maulawi Muhammad Alam Sandilawi and Mulla Barkatullah Allahabadi. Both employed Maulawi Dildar Ali, who later became important Shia Mujtahid, (continued...)

court politics of Awadh, as his advice was sought in every crucial diplomatic move by the British. He served on various administrative positions as *wakil* and *naib*. But Tafazzul had the true characteristics of a scholar, rather than of an administrator, "for the *Allama* solution of a philosophical question was more desirable than the sovereignty of whole of India (*Hindustan*)".¹⁷

In spite of all political upheavals and instability at the Awadh court, Tafazzul could find time to devote himself to his favourite intellectual pursuits. Hastings utilised his services for conducting negotiations with the local Rajas of Gohud, where Tafazzul accompanied Colonel Palmer as an assistant. He was again recommended by Hastings to accompany David Anderson for negotiating with the Maratha chief Mahadji Sindhia, where Tafazzul succeeded in concluding the Anglo-Maratha treaty of 1782. He remained a close advisor of the British governors on Indian affairs and drafted crucial diplomatic letters in Persian to be presented at the courts of mainly Maratha chiefs.¹⁸ However, it is not with Tafazzul's diplomatic career and the services rendered to the British that we are concerned here, but his contribution and efforts to the scientific learning in India.¹⁹

In his capacity as *Wakil*, the diplomatic representative of Asafuddaula, Tafazzul resided in Calcutta, the capital of the East India Company, and enjoyed direct contact

¹⁶(...continued)

to exchange their questions and answers. Dildar Ali was a pupil of Tafazzul, whom the latter taught the elements of astronomy. Cf. *Imad us Sadat*, pp. 154-6.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*

¹⁹ For an account of Tafazzul's political career apart from the sources cited earlier, also cf. *The Asiatic Annual Register or the View of the History of Hindustan and the Politics, Commerce and Literature of Asia for the year 1803* (London, 1804). This contains an obituary to Tafazzul, entitled "An Account of the Life and Character of Tofuzzel Husain Khan, The Wakil or Ambassador of Nabob Vizier Asof-ud-dowlah, at Calcutta during the Government of Marquis Cornwallis", pp.1-8. The account contains an interesting letter of David Anderson which demonstrate an in-camera discussion between the regional powers representatives and Tafazzul who acted on behalf of David Anderson (pp. 2-4).

with high British officials with whom he exchanged opinions on various diplomatic matters. On the other hand, and more significantly perhaps, it was at Calcutta that he could advance his own scholarly interest in the company of British scholars and administrators who served the Company in various capacities. At the same time he enjoyed close relations with Muslim scholars. He knew Abu Talib and Abd al Latif, as the latter resided in Calcutta as the *Wakil* of the Hyderabad state. Tafazzul's scholarly concern was so strong that he could find time to pursue his interest in camp-life while negotiating with the Marathas on behalf of the British. According to David Anderson whom Tafazzul accompanied as an assistant:

During intervals of these tedious and vexatious negotiations, Tofuzzel Hussein delighted to pass his time with my brother Mr. Blain and myself in conversing on the different laws, customs and manners of Europe and of Asia on Persic, Arabic and Hindu literature, and above all on the science of mathematics and astronomy in which he had made a considerable efficiency, derived partly from his study of Arabian authors and partly from his communications with the learned Mr. Broom. These conversations he always enlivened by occasionally intermixing sallies of wit and pleasantry. He became at this time anxious to learn the English language and my brother took great pains to teach it to him, he did not then make much progress, but he continued to pursue this study with such arduous and application that he was some year afterwards, able not only to read but to write English with accuracy.²⁰

Anderson concludes:

In all my intercourse with the natives of India, I never knew any man who combined in so eminent a degree, great talents for public business, profound learning, and the liberal ideas and manners of a gentleman.²¹

Tafazzul resided in Calcutta from 1788 onwards in his capacity as *Wakil* of Asafuddaula, where he was exposed to Western scientific thought and:

²⁰ For the letter of David Anderson to the Editor, cf. *The Asiatic Annual Register*. Tafazzul's relations with Anderson proved to be long lasting and intimate. Both remained in regular correspondence with each other, even when Anderson left India and resided in Edinburgh. The topics of correspondence between the two ranged from the issues of indigenous politics. They exchanged views on the wars and peace-treaties between various regional states and the Company, on the the Company's policies towards various Indian powers and especially the Marathas, who constituted the most formidable rival to Company's bid for supremacy in Indian politics, but also on purely intellectual matters: Tafazzul was trying to procure textual sources of Hindu astronomy from the Brahmins of Benares and Nadia for transmission to Anderson in Edinburgh.

²¹ Cf. *The Asiatic Annual Register for 1803*, pp. 2-4.

cultivated the society of Sir William Jones and Lord Teignmouth (then Mr. Shore), and where, at the hospitable mansion of his friend Richard Johnson,²² at Russipughilee, he had every facility afforded him of pursuing his favourite studies of mathematics and astronomy; and had also an opportunity of availing himself of the instruction of Mr. Ruben Burrows, the celebrated mathematician; by which means he acquired the knowledge of the philosophy of Newton. And with a view of combining his study of the languages with that of the sciences, translated the *Principia* from the original Latin into Arabic.²³

In his literary and scientific endeavour, it seems Tafazzul was greatly assisted by Ruben Burrows²⁴ as the latter informs Sir John Shore that:

Tofuzzel Hussein continues translating the *Principia* of Newton, and I think we shall soon begin to print it here in Arabic:- my notes and explanations are to accompany the translation. He has likewise translated Emerson's *Mechanics* and a Treatise on Algebra (that I wrote for him) into Arabic. He is now employed in translating Apollonius de Sectione Rationis. The fate of this work is singular; it was translated from Greek into Arabic, and the Greek original was lost; it was afterwards translated from Arabic into Latin, from an old manuscript in the Bodleian library; the Arabic of it is now totally lost in Asia. I translated the Latin version into English and from the English Tofuzzel Hussein is now rendering it into Arabic again.²⁵

²² Richard Johnson (1753-1807) joined the Company's services in 1770 as a writer in the Bengal Civil Services. In 1772 earned a promotion and became assistant to the Governor Warren Hastings and resided in Calcutta. For Richardson's biography, cf. T. Folk and M. Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library* (London, 1981), pp. 13-29. Johnson met in Lucknow "a cultured Muslim, Abu Talib, Tafziul [misspelt] who was later to become Asaf ud-Daula's agent in Calcutta. On Johnson's return there this friend was to come regularly to his house to study mathematics, astronomy, English and Greek". *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²³ Cf. *The Asiatic Annual Register for 1803*, p. 4. According to a note of the editor, "the translation was complete yet not printed, and we believe Mr. Burrows never added the annotations he mentioned".

²⁴ Ruben Burrow (1747-1792) the mathematician joined the Company's service in 1782. Before that he served on various positions in England, including the editorship of "Ladies and Gentlemen's Diary", or "Royal Almanak". He had a keen interest in ancient geometry and studied the works of Apollonius as well as ancient Indian mathematics. He contributed to the researches of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and died in India at Buxar in 1792. He published *A Restitution of Geometrical treatise of Apollonius Pergaeus on Inclinations; also the theory of Gunnery or the doctrines of Projectiles on a non-resisting medium* (London, 1779). Burrow's contribution to the Asiatic researches, vols. I and II, included essays on mechanical friction and one on "Hindoo knowledge of the Binomial Theorem". For the biography of Ruben Burrow, cf. *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. II, pp. 448-9.

²⁵ For the letter of Ruben Burrows to John Shore, cf. *The Asiatic Annual Register*, p. 7. The Arabic Manuscript of Apollonius's work referred to above was the manuscript now preserved in the Bodleian Library; MS. Marsh 667 (Uri Arab. Moh. 943) Apollonius Pergaeus: K. Abulluniyus fi al makhrutat, i.e., the Conica in the version of Hilal b. Abi Hilal al-Himsi (bk. 1-4) and Thabit b. Kurrah (bk.5-7), revised by Banu Musa and with marginal glosses of Nasir al Din Tusi (dated 1070 A.D.). The Latin translation of bk. 5-7 of the above, by E. Halley, is: *Apollonii Pergaei Conicorum libri tres posteriores, ex Arabico sermone in Latinum conversi, opera et studio Edmund Halleii, Oxonii, 1710*. Tafazzul Husain's translation of the above work is extant; cf. *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Arabic and the Persian manuscripts in the Edinburgh University Library*. David Anderson's and James Anderson's collection contained Tafazzul's translation of Makhrutat i Abluniyus No. 28. Another extant copy of this translation is in the India Office Library. Cf. A. Loth, *op. cit.*, p. 218. For another copy of the same, cf. "A Hand-list of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Bankipur Library entitled Miftah ul Kunuz compiled by Abdul Hamid", *Risala fil Makhrutat*, No. 2033.

Tafazzul Husain enumerates his own wide-ranging scholarly preoccupations in a letter to his close friend Anderson:

You ask me if I continue my studies as usual, or if my employment in public business has diverted my thoughts from literary pursuits. Some times ago I employed myself for a few months, in reading the history of England, chiefly with a view of acquiring a complete knowledge of the language. I have since given it up and have been engaged in translating the *Principia* of Sir Isaac Newton, Thomas Simpson's book on Algebra, Emerson on *Mechanics*, Apollonius de *Sectione Rationis* translated into Latin by Doctor Halley, and a work on Conic Section by Del Hopital, a Frenchmen.²⁶ All these books I am translating into Arabic, besides several short treatises on Logarithms, curve lines, etc. etc. Some of them I have already finished, and some more of them will soon be brought to conclusion. In short, I continue to devote my leisure hours to these pursuits.²⁷

Abd al Latif enjoyed close contact with Tafazzul and both resided in the same neighbourhood in Calcutta. The former did not attend any formal lectures of Tafazzul, but considered him a compassionate mentor and gracious colleague. He immensely benefitted from Tafazzul, on so many philosophical questions (*masail i ilmi*) and any abstruse subject of learning related to the rational and traditional learning. To him, it was beyond his verbal expression even to acknowledge his gratitude and intellectual debt to Tafazzul Husain Khan.

Latif also felt that it was:

philosophical subjects (*hikmiyat*) and metaphysics (*Ilahiyat*) in which Tafazzul was a Plato (*Aflatun*) and Aristotle of his age. [...] He possessed a high degree of knowledge in science, philosophy, physics, medicine, all of which fall in the domain of rational subjects.²⁸

Tafazzul was well-versed in classical Islamic languages, Arabic and Persian, and could read and write Greek (*Yunani*) reasonably well apart from English and Latin (*Rumi*), the latter being the language of scholarship in Europe. Latif further explained that the status of Latin in Europe was somewhat ^{similar} to that of Arabic in the Islamic world since

²⁶ The Marquis de l' Hopital (1661-1704), author of *L'Analyse des infinimens Petits*, belonged to that French intellectual circle in France which was responsible for the introduction of the Calculus. Marquis de l' Hopital and Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715), a member of the French Academy of science, were also the first in France to accept Newton's law of Universal gravitation and the first to appreciate his Optical experiments. Hopital made Newton into a supreme rationalist whose laws of motions were *a priori* deductions.

²⁷ For the letter of Tafazzul Husain, cf. *The Asiatic Annual Register*, pp. 6-7.

²⁸ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 201b.

non-Arabic speaking people also employed Arabic as a medium of expression in their scholarly writings.²⁹ By translating the scientific literature of Europe into Arabic instead of Persian, Tafazzul was attempting a task of imagination and originality, since it Arabic remained the language of science in India and other parts of the Islamic world.³⁰

Latif claimed that Tafazzul translated a number of the European philosophical and scientific works into Arabic in addition to his completing his own writings. Among the distinguished works of Tafazzul Husain was a commentary on the conic section (*makhrutat*) of Apollonius and two treatises on algebra (*jabr wa muqabala*). One of these was especially related to algebraic solutions and the other on problems of algebra and geometry (*jabr wa hindisiya*). He also wrote a commentary on the conic section of Del'Hopital and of Simpson, contributed a number of discourses (*mubahisat*) on works related to the *Hadith*, the Traditions of the Holy Prophet and Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) and on Islamic philosophy and sciences (*hikmiyat i Islami*); these studies were so numerous and varied that something of their kind had rarely been attempted by other scholars. However, Latif did not include *Principia*'s translation by Tafazzul amongst the latter's works, but himself provided extensive and up-to-date discourses on astronomy, which he could not have derived from other works except from the translations by Tafazzul.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 202a.

³⁰ Arabic was the international language of scientific subjects. A large number of such works in Arabic, encompassing various subjects such as natural philosophy, logic, mathematics, arithmetics, geometry, astronomy, dialectics (*adab al bahas*) physics, metaphysics, geography, cosmography, original works by the classical Islamic scholars, commentaries as well as glosses had survived. For instance, cf. O. Loth, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 130-62, 208-11, 212-26, 226-31, etc. This collection of scientific works which belonged to different periods of history included the translations of the Greek works into Arabic, as well as the original works of the medieval Islamic scientists, such as Nasiruddin Tusi and Ibn Sina, works of *Ikhwan us Safa* (Brother of purity) and that of Indian scientists/ philosophers like Mulla Mahmud Jaunpuri. These were preserved by the Indian Muslim literati and when the displaced service elite went to Calcutta in search of employment, these were probably carried with them. Later on, these were either presented to or were bought by the British officials, such as Warren Hastings and John Richardson.

Abd al Latif was not acquainted with any European language. Latif wrote that the Allama's teacher in these subjects was Burrows (*Mister Barloo*), who was an accomplished scholar of mathematics, geometry and natural philosophy and was known in England for his knowledge on these subjects. Tafazzul studied European sciences with Burrows.³¹

Tafazzul possessed the true characteristics of a gentleman-scholar, but also considered his administrative responsibilities as obligatory. Latif provides us with a closer look at the daily life and the mind of this scholar in order to confirm the earlier portrait.

Tafazzul was respected by the scholars of Europe and people from every corner of the country paid great respect to his excellence. In fact, his merits, scholarship and learning entitled him to a higher status. It required a lifetime to write about his merits. The entire India (*Hindustan*), and its peoples (*Hindiyan*) were proud of Tafazzul and paid high respects to him and venerated him for his scholarly attributes. It has been since ages that a scholar of Tafazzul's stupendous intellect was born. According to Latif, Tafazzul had three passions in his life: the pursuit of knowledge, socialisation with other scholars, and enjoying the melodious voice.

Tafazzul's contemporaries were aware of Allama's contribution to the scientific research in India. Upon his death, Abu Talib composed an elegy where he called Tafazzul "the Copernicus and Newton of his age".³² Sir John Shore provides a sketch of the person, based on their close acquaintance:

Tofuzzel Hussein Khan united in an eminent degree an extensive knowledge of mankind with the deepest erudition. His conversation was polite and instructive; his manners elegant and engaging; his integrity firm; his honour unimpeached. In his situation of minister, under Assof-ud-Dowlah, he proved his disinterestedness, by declining to receive the usual emoluments of a most lucrative office, and by confining himself to the receipt of a salary, barely adequate for his expenses; an uncommon instance of moderation and self-denial. His intercourse with the English was very extensive; and, wherever he was personally known, he was respected and esteemed; particularly amongst those who had the best opportunities of appreciating the qualities of his head and heart.³³

Abd al Latif described Tafazzul in the same rhapsodic terms. He also mentioned that during the last days of his life he was offered the important position of Deputy

³¹ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 202a, 207a. Latif also enjoyed a close acquaintance with Ruben Burrows.

³² Cf. *Diwan i Talib*, ff. 121b-123b.

³³ Cf. *The Asiatic Annual Register*, p. 8.

(*naib*) by Asaf ud daula, a post which he relinquished upon the death of the *nawab* in order to free himself from political and official duties and return to Calcutta. There, he devoted his time to literary and scientific preoccupations until his death in 1800. Towards his last days he suffered from paralytic affliction and melancholy due to excessive study.

Apart from referring to Tafazzul's gentlemanly disposition Shore alludes also to his endeavour for the promotion of the cause of scientific knowledge:

Mathematics was his favourite pursuit; and perceiving that sciences had been cultivated in Europe far more than in Asia, he determined to acquire a knowledge of the European discoveries and scientific developments; with this in mind he took up the study of the English language. He was at this time between forty and fifty years of age but his success was rapid; within two years he was not only able to understand mathematical work in English but also to pursue with pleasure the volumes of our best historians and moralists. The same motives led him to study Latin later, though he did not achieve in Latin the same degree of proficiency; before his death he had made some progress in the acquisition of the Greek language also.³⁴

Tafazzul Husain's endeavour must have inspired his contemporaries maybe including amongst them two of our major authors on the subject, Abd al Latif and Abu Talib. His translations and especially that of Newton's work *Principia* served as a source for their later scientific discourses.

7.3 *The Explanation of Progress*

Muhammad Husain and Abd al Latif hypothesized that the causes of Europe's worldwide ascendancy could be traced to the geographical discoveries made three centuries earlier with the help of improved navigational techniques. Later Europeans set out to explore new countries and colonised (*taskhir*) some of them. Europeans had so perfected the art of navigation and organised their polities in such a way that Muslim scholars had nothing but admiration for them.³⁵ Muhammad Husain claimed that the

³⁴ For the letter of John Shore to the Editor, cf. *The Asiatic Annual Register*, p. 8.

³⁵ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 117b.

success of Europe in the discovery of the New World stimulated its scientists immensely to concentrate on subjects such as astronomy and geometry; the development of such subjects facilitated the discovery of hitherto unknown lands and the exploration of already known parts of the world.³⁶

Our authors were very much interested in the reasons which had brought about this scientific progress in Europe and Britain in particular. Latif identified two underlying factors for these impressive scientific and technological developments, namely the state patronage to the sciences and the specialisation within particular scientific fields. The state provided various social classes with the means to an education. The king and the ruling elites provided patronage to scholars so that the latter could devote themselves to the pursuit of knowledge. Abd al Latif thought that Newton was provided with a state grant (*suyurghal*) for his contribution to the cause of scientific learning. The state provided maintenance to scholars to free them from the more mundane affairs of life so that they could concentrate their efforts on the pursuit of knowledge. Additionally, all ⁿscientists concentrated their efforts on particular fields and did not concern themselves with subjects researched by their colleagues. European scholars were of the opinion that the lifespan of human beings was not long enough to pursue several professions. Thus, many individuals in Europe were considered "the phoenix of their age", whose achievements could not be equalled by others in their specific fields.³⁷

Abd al Latif noted that similar factors operated in the cases of artisans and craftsmen; they too engaged in particular occupations while the government encouraged their efforts by purchasing their products. They all sought to improve their products and expertise so that they could make a larger profit and be rewarded by their monarch.

³⁶ Cf. *Risala*, f. 10a.

³⁷ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 156a.

Inventions and innovations by artisans were reported to the king and whose officials took the necessary steps to diffuse the new knowledge among other artisans and craftsmen. The state provided protection to petty artisans and manufacturers by formulating special rules and regulations to protect the rights of inventors. Apparently, Latif was referring to the practice of patenting.³⁸ Moreover, the government enacted a law whereby those who were engaged in mercantile activities were to spend one tenth of their capital (*sarmaya*) to buy products manufactured by small artisans such as knives and scissors; the reason for the existence of such a law was the protection of petty professionals who were thus safeguarded against extinction.³⁹

Another reason for the flourishing of the sciences in Europe was the great increase in the institutionalization of knowledge. Itisam al Din, Muhammad Husain and Abu Talib visited various educational institutions, societies, museums and observatories; these served as the repositories of knowledge for the benefit of Europeans and foreigners alike. All of our authors regarded England as the preeminent centre of learning in Europe where various arts and sciences were flourishing, and men of intellect plied their vocation in comfort and peace.

It was Abu Talib and Abd al Latif mainly who noted the role of the state in fostering education and the complementary role of the learned societies in promoting learning and facilitating the exchange of scientific and cultural information. During his sojourn in London Abu Talib occasionally attended the meetings of the Royal Society. He reported that such meetings took place on weekends in the house of Sir Joseph Banks, the president of the Society. These societies were crucial in that they provided

³⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 156a.

³⁹ *ibid.*, f. 156.

places for scholars of various subjects to discuss new ideas openly and present new inventions and discoveries to their colleagues. Abu Talib writes:

During these meetings British scholars and scientists (*ulama wa hunarmandan*) displayed their inventions and discoveries to their colleagues. They discussed their inventions (*ikhtaraat*) with each other, sought each others' views and opinions in order to improve their inventions and exchanged ideas on abstruse matters.⁴⁰

Abd al Latif also came to know about the Royal Society and its meetings presumably from his informant, Abu Talib. Latif's description echoes that of Abu Talib when he observes:

They had constructed a huge building where philosophers assembled once a week to teach the common people; the day this took place was called "lecture day" (*Yaum i waz*). One of the scholars would unfold his views and findings relating to any issues he wished to elaborate upon. A discussion would follow which was wide-ranging in scope and included such philosophical questions as geometry, cosmological notions, explanations of celestial mechanisms, heavenly bodies and the planets. These lectures were delivered with the aid of various technical instruments such as, for example, the globe, in order to facilitate the comprehension of rather abstruse ideas.⁴¹

Latif further observed that the British had established such assemblies and printing facilities in Calcutta also; apparently the author was referring to the Asiatic Society in Bengal.⁴² New ideas were disseminated with the use of printing-presses. In the words of Latif:

The results of the meetings of the philosophers relating to various arts and technical advances were printed and distributed throughout the country in the form of manuals (*dastur al amal*).⁴³

Thus, every section of society, emphasised Latif, the learned as well as the common people, were acquainted with such subjects as mathematics, geometry and natural philosophy.⁴⁴ Our authors realised that another factor that contributed to the great scientific developments taking place in Europe was the invention of printing. They all

⁴⁰ For reports on the meetings of the Royal Society of London, cf. *Masir i talibi*, f. 107a.

⁴¹ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 131b.

⁴² *Op. cit.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, f. 131a-b.

⁴⁴ The idea that education had filtered to the mass-level in England was a common view among these writers. Ahmad bin Muhammad expressed a similar view, namely that the elitist subjects like natural philosophy, mathematics and geometry, were no more a vocation of a few intellectuals, but of numerous curious persons. Cf. *Mirat al ahwal*, f. 114.

emphasized that printing was a potent means for the dissemination of ideas and knowledge. With the use of printing-presses texts became readily available in Europe. More significantly perhaps, the invention of printing enabled scholars to present their ideas and the results of their enquiries to those who were engaged in the investigation of similar subjects.⁴⁵

In his search for the factors that had brought about the scientific progress Britain was then witnessing, Abu Talib identified the role of the attitude of British people towards knowledge and their philosophers/scientists. The British continued their efforts to acquire fame and riches as well as knowledge and various skills even when in other people's opinion they had already acquired perfection in their fields. It is interesting to note what British scholars regarded as perfection in their fields. To quote the commentator:

They believed that man through continuous efforts had progressed from being a savage, and cannibal to the high status of the philosopher Newton. It might happen that in times to come man achieved such a high degree of perfection that even Newton the philosopher might [in comparison to the future man] look like a savage.⁴⁶

According to Abu Talib, the attitude of British intellectuals (*uqla, hakim*) towards their society was another reason for the current techno-scientific progress in Britain. British scholars expressed their concern for the common people and desired to effect material change in their lives with the invention of new devices in industry that would facilitate labour. The superior qualities and wisdom of philosophers were greatly appreciated by the common people. The recognition of merit and scholarship by the state had a positive impact on Britain's cultural milieu; it raised the social status of the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 132.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 146b.

scholar among his fellow citizens and in the community as a whole; scholars in their turn enhanced the prestige and esteem of their nation.⁴⁷

Abd al Latif added a new dimension to his discourse and explored the reasons why science and astronomy in particular were witnessing a greater development in Europe. He discovered that the pursuit of scientific research in Europe was gradually becoming a profession in itself. Following Copernicus's revolutionary contributions to astronomy European and British scientists engaged in particular in similar research and were preparing astronomical tables (*Zij*). Astronomy was not flourishing in isolation but was associated with such sciences as geometry and mathematics (*riyazi*). European research in astronomy was based on the application of mathematics and experimentation. The tables compiled by Islamic astronomers had gradually grown out of date and often contained errors and inaccuracies. Consequently, any results obtained from these were not reliable.⁴⁸ In Europe the situation was quite different as no scientific discovery was considered definite but it was always subject to change. European scientists were continuously and regularly updating their astronomical tables. Whenever any discrepancies were observed they were recorded and the existing astronomical tables were re-compiled in order to avoid possible mistakes in future calculations.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 146.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 157.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 209. Latif had read the *Zijj i Muhammadshahi*, and quite rightly commented upon its contents and style that it was written in an extremely complicated way. Even a professional astronomer would take no less than a year to fix the position of a star. But Latif conceded that the compilers of *Zijj i Muhammad Shahi* had successfully corrected the errors of the compilers of *Zijj i Ulughbegi* in fixing the position of Venus.

7.4 Perceptions of Modern Astronomy

All our writers were conscious of the fact that modern astronomy was the result of sustained and intense mental efforts by European scientists, which were still continuing. Our authors knew only two scientists by name, that is Copernicus and Newton. Copernicus, they wrote, came from Poland and his views were close to those of Pythagoras. He was an experienced scholar who was well aware of the subtleties of the science of astronomy. He was a pioneer in his field and his discoveries created an entirely new cosmic system in Europe.⁵⁰ Copernicus's work paved the way for Newton's theories. Our writers were not aware of the theories of Tycho Brahe, Kepler and Galileo; their scientific discoveries were incorporated and discussed generally in the framework of the work of medieval European philosophers/scientists.

It was neither Copernicus nor Tycho Brahe, Kepler or Galileo, but Sir Isaac Newton that our authors concentrated upon. Muhammad Husain, Latif, and Abu Talib, attempted to write short biographical notes on him. They considered Newton the most illustrious and influential of scientists. He was a philosopher, geometrician, mathematician and an astronomer, the most accomplished scholar they had ever heard of and one whose ideas were widely respected by European scholars. Muhammad Husain in particular comments:

Sir Isaac Newton (*Sir Izak Neutan*) occupied an exalted place in the world of scholarship for his research in astronomy. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Nature (*tabiat*) had revealed to Newton the keys to its mysteries (*kalid i hikmat*) and he became the discoverer and the expositor of its secrets (*kashif al asrar*). He offered sound proof and demonstrations in favour of his fresh ideas (*arai i jadidah*) and the new religion (*mazhab i taza*). His philosophy was based on extremely sound and firm laws (*qawanin*). A man of his calibre had not been born in Europe before, neither in the medieval period nor in modern times.⁵¹

Abd al Latif also employs well-chosen adjectives in Persian to express his deep and admiration and respect for Newton:

⁵⁰ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 156b-157a.

⁵¹ Cf. *Risala*, f. 10b.

The great philosopher (*failsuf i azam*) Newton (*Mister Neutan Hakim*) was born in eleven hundred and twenty-eighth Hijra in England. He possessed a stupendous intellect, an excellent scholarly mind, scientific genius, and he was the doyen of the learned. Newton was a most extraordinary scholar, a wonder of his age, and a rarity in the world. It had been decades since a scholar of his calibre had appeared. His ideas on geometry and mathematics were cogent, coherent and perfect. His sayings (*aqwal*) and ideas constituted enduring truths for English scholars; the latter sought to identify themselves with his intellectual lineage and philosophy. Newton was a phoenix of his age and had no parallel in the contemporary world of scholarship. [...] When some time ago his soul departed from this mortal world it left a permanent scar on the heart of the learned world. English scholars continued to pay high tribute to his achievements and assiduously kept cultivating his ideas on nature. It is said that in learning and scholarship he was the successor of Aristotles and Plato and even the Greeks became followers of his teachings.⁵²

Latif believed that respect and regard for Newton's scholarly attributes were widespread.

European monarchs separately fixed stipends and bestowed land-grants (*suyurghal*) and high emoluments on Newton.

The ruling elites of Europe showed such a high degree of respect and veneration for him that even the princes and members of nobility felt envious of his position. Latif concludes rather forcefully:

It was only obvious that wherever such favourable conditions prevailed, scholars and men of letters would appear.⁵³

Let us now concentrate on what constitutes our authors' knowledge of sciences in Europe. Among all scientific disciplines it was the new astronomy which most fascinated them. Most of them were acquainted with the basic principles of modern astronomy as they had been developed in Europe, the new heliocentric world-view as opposed to the geocentric theory of the Greeks. It was Muhammad Husain, Abd al Latif and Abu Talib's accounts which contained reasonably succinct descriptions of the European endeavours in the field of astronomy. Their accounts began with an exposition of Copernicus's revolutionary conception of earth as one of the smaller planets of the

⁵² Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 158-9a. Latif's statement implied that Newton's researches had far surpassed the views propagated by the Greek philosophers.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, f. 159a.

solar system. They included Galileo's findings as well as Tycho Brahe and Kepler's contribution to Newton's great synthesis on the physical world.⁵⁴

The first and foremost concern of our authors was to expound the basic principles of the new astronomy. They presented the current theories on the solar system and the relative positions and distances of the planets. They felt they should explain even the fundamental premises of the new astronomy since such theories were entirely new to traditional Muslim scientific discourses. The information they provided was intended more for the benefit of the common people, the laymen, rather than professional astronomers.⁵⁵ Diagrams of the solar system accompanied the detailed expositions of the fundamental principles of modern astronomy in order to facilitate their understanding.⁵⁶ What was considered most exciting about the teachings of the new astronomy was the realisation that contrary to earlier systems of belief the sun and not the earth was the centre of the universe. Moreover, the planet Earth rotated on its axis. Muhammad Husain, the first to focus closely on this subject emphasised the planetary nature of the earth and the order of the planets moving around the sun. He explained that this system was known as the "solar system" (*solar sistam*). The term 'solar' originated from Latin (*zaban i Rumi*), the classical language of Europe. The commentator provided a Perso-Arabic term for the system (*tartib waz i shamsi*) and informed his readers that the term he provided stood for 'solar system', as *shamsi* meant

⁵⁴ Muhammad Husain and Abu Talib's account contained a similar exposition of modern astronomy, but we chose to give fullest exposure to Latif's writings mainly because of the vigour and clarity of his prose.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 157a-8b. Abd al Latif gave a very lucid exposition of the basic principles of the Copernican system, explaining the order of the planets: Mercury, Venus, the earth, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, revolve around the sun in that order, while the moon revolves around the earth. He provided common-sense proofs to convince his readers that the apparent movement of the stars and the sun were due to the daily rotation of the earth on its axis and to its annual journey round the sun.

⁵⁶ Mir Husain Abu Talib and Abd al Latif's accounts were accompanied with a neatly drawn diagram of the solar system.

"related to the sun" and *tartib* stood for "system" or "arrangement". Copernicus (*Kopernikus*) was the first person to propound such a system although of course the Greek philosopher Pythagoras had also held similar ideas much before Copernicus. The Greek philosopher's views had never been propagated or disseminated publicly. It was to the credit of Copernicus that he provided a well-developed, coherent and satisfactory explanation of the system. In his exposition Muhammad Husain added numerical data to planetary motion, explained the relative distances between the planets in numerical terms and offered a spatial configuration of the solar system with exactitude.⁵⁷ All of the three expositors gave common sense proofs in favour of the heliocentric system. Without naming Ferdinand Magellan, they cited the westward circumnavigation of the earth undertaken by the Portuguese navigator in order to prove the sphericity of the earth.⁵⁸

Our observers noted in general that European scientists had viewed a number of heavenly bodies with the aid of a telescope and had discovered a number of new facts. Thus, they described Galileo's telescopic discoveries without identifying the scientist. Abd al Latif wrote that with the aid of the telescope Newton had been able to name certain planets which had hitherto been regarded as cosmic clouds by Muslim scientists. European scientists observed these and calculated their orbits. They measured their distances like those of the seven known planets precisely. They observed seventy-one stars out of which twenty-one were comets. Mercury was situated nearest to the sun

⁵⁷ Muhammad Husain seems to have culled this data from some English scientific work, as Tafazzul Husain translated Newton's work at a later date.

⁵⁸ Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521), a Portuguese navigator, commander of the first expedition in 1519 to sail round the world.

while the planets of Venus, Earth, the Moon, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn followed in this succession in relation to their distance from the sun.⁵⁹

Latif further propounded that the first planet which had been observed with the aid of telescopes was the moon. Scientists had viewed mountains on the surface of the moon which appeared similar to mountains on the earth; their height was estimated from the length of the shadows they cast. Venus was the next to be observed. Like the moon Venus too had phases changing from a thin crescent to a full orb; Jupiter had four satellites (*aqmar*, literally "the moons") while five satellites orbited Saturn and had phases like the moon. A halo (*halqa*) was observed around Saturn.⁶⁰ The revelation that the moon was composed of material much like that on earth as it too had mountains, valleys and craters and the fact that the latter constituted one of the three elements of the natural kingdom, the other two being animals and vegetation, led Newton and the modern philosophers of Europe to conjecture that there might be life on other planets too. Since Venus showed phases like the moon, it too might possess all three elements of the natural kingdom, namely animals, vegetation and minerals (*mawalid i salasa*). Scientists could not ascertain whether other planets including several comets had similar phases to those of the moon and Venus due to the relative distance of the former. Moreover, a host of stars which had previously been considered as fixed (*sawabit*) were now discovered to be planets and form a separate world in themselves. These also

⁵⁹ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 159b. Latif's interest with Newton was of such great magnitude that he had ascribed the above discoveries of Galileo to Newton. This confusion could be ascribed to his understanding that the telescope was originally invented by Copernicus (instead of Galileo). Later on, it was greatly improved by succeeding generation of European scientists. But he correctly noted the Newtonian reflecting telescope which he termed the "sky reaching telescope" (*durbeen falak farsa*). This invention had enabled the scientists to view the distant celestial bodies a thousand times better than with the naked eye.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 159b.

contained material similar to that on earth, but due to their distance from earth it was not possible to study their nature properly.⁶¹ Latif adds:

Jupiter and Saturn were the largest planets after the sun. As one moon was not sufficient to light these two giant planets, Nature has created four satellites around Jupiter and five around Saturn and perhaps these satellites also possessed the three elements of the kingdom of Nature. A ring was observed around Saturn; since this planet could not receive adequate light from the sun, Nature created this luminous ring like a burning glass around it which lighted the planet.⁶²

Muhammad Husain was more excited by the ideas of the plurality of the universe and the possibility of life on other planets. He held that the issue of the conditions on the other planets of the solar system was a divine mystery and beyond the possibility of human knowledge. He writes:

It was a possibility that God, the Creator of this universe (*alam*) had made the other planets also the abode of Man, animals and vegetation, that is the three elements of the kingdom of Nature (*mawalid i salasa*).⁶³

He remarked that according to the discoveries of modern European scientists, the universe was infinite while each of the planets and the hosts of new stars were worlds in themselves (*alam*) and subject to the same laws of nature as earth. He was equally enthusiastic on the question relating to the sidereal astronomy. He commented that the nature of the fixed stars was a crucial question and had profound philosophical implications for modern science. It was possible that fixed stars spread throughout space and along with their satellites formed one or a series of solar systems. He added that, even with telescopes, it was not possible to view and observe even a portion of the heavenly bodies. Telescopes were nothing more than an aid to human eyes.

⁶¹ *Op. cit.* Our authors referred to the idea of the plurality of the inhabited solar system in the universe, since most of the natural philosophers of the seventeenth century accepted the doctrine of the plurality of the worlds. Tycho Brahe, Kepler and Galileo thought that the planets of the solar system were inhabited.

⁶² *Ibid.*, f. 160. This led Latif to mention some experiments concerning the radiation of light and heat. When the light of the sun fell upon objects such as glass, especially convex shaped which had a greater cumulative effect, its intensity increased. In Europe, scholars had greatly improved upon the ancient burning glasses (*shisha i atishin i muhaddab*), and they even prepared large sizes of these to melt metals as well as to burn the enemy's ships.

⁶³ Cf. *Risala*, f. 19a.

The universe is boundless and infinite; there exists an infinite number of universes (*ghair mutanahiya awalim*). Our planet Earth is limited (*mutnahi*) whereas other planets are unlimited. They reveal the greatness of God, the Almighty Creator of the universe. The new science revealed the wonders of Divine creation. One can admire the power, greatness and magnificence of the Creator of the universe. These are proofs of His power, His omnipresence and the expanse and vastness of His creation.⁶⁴

Abd al Latif observed that comets were not sublunary objects, thus echoing Tycho Brahe's findings on the nature of comets but without naming their originator. He states:

Comets were also planets and so far twenty-two of them had been observed. They moved around the sun and between the planets in elliptical rather than circular paths. They derived heat from the sun like other planets.⁶⁵

Latif added that comets remained invisible because they moved in the outskirts of the orbit of the sun and in an elliptical fashion. They could only be observed whenever they happened to be away from the orbit of the sun and then only their tails became apparent due to their elliptical motion.⁶⁶ Latif continued that "the comets moved so close to the sun that, if during their return to their orbits any planet happened to be in conjunction with the sun, even [supposedly] earth itself, the comet would burn it".⁶⁷ Latif added that according to the *Milliyun* this would be the Day of Resurrection, when the entire universe would burn up and nothing would survive, not even a single living creature, neither human beings nor animals nor any vegetation".⁶⁸

Latif further explained that the above views were in contradiction to the theories of ancient philosophers (*qudama*), who propounded that whenever the seven planets would happen to be in one station, whatever element (*unsur*) would be in that station would move from its original place and the entire universe would be annihilated. This

⁶⁴ Cf. *Risala*, ff. 19a-20b.

⁶⁵ Comets seem to have aroused immense interest. Mir Husain and Abu Talib also paid considerable attention to them. Their accounts contained data about the sightings of the comets and other findings related to this phenomenon. Apparently, their sources of information, especially in the case of Abu Talib, was Tafazzul Husain's translation of the *Principia* which contained information about comets.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 158b.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 158a.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 158a-b.

would be the Day of Resurrection. It was held that, "the situation was similar at the time of Noah's flood when the planets had conjunction in Aquarius (*kurrah i ab*). Only God knows the truth".⁶⁹

Latif sought to provide a scientific explanation for the popular notions associated with the sighting of comets. He discovered the reason why the sighting of comets was associated with draughts, scarcity of food and natural calamities; the comet's excessive heat was considered to have harmful effects on the standing crop and vegetation on earth. Its heat also adversely affected water resources, rivers and fountains and resulted ultimately in draughts and scarcity of food.⁷⁰

Abd Latif also noted that Europeans did not acknowledge the existence of concentric crystalline heavenly spheres and had forwarded a number of arguments in order to prove the non-existence of celestial spheres.

They were of the opinion that this blue-colour convex shaped sphere which appeared to them to spread in all four directions, it was only an illusion. The original colour that emanated from the sun was black and became white upon reaching the earth. The blending of the black and white produced the blue colour they perceived. One of the proofs forwarded for the non-existence of a celestial orb was that since the comets crossed the orbit of other planets, had there been celestial spheres, they would have definitely been torn apart at the time when the comet passed through the crystalline planetary sphere. It seemed inconceivable that the celestial spheres could be torn and mutilated and then reunified, somewhat in the fashion of the movement of a fish in water, when the water seemed to be split by the movement of the fish and was then again reunited.⁷¹

As it was noted earlier in this study knowledge of the new astronomy was common to all the three writers we concentrated on in this chapter. We chose to present Latif's writings in detail mainly because of the vigour and clarity of Latif's prose. Briefly, they all described the planets of the solar system as well as such telescopic discoveries as the similarity of the phases of Venus and the moon, the existence of the

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 158a. Perhaps he was alluding to Edmund Halley's hypothesis submitted to the Royal Society. In this, Halley suggested that the body which we now call Halley's Comet had at one time approached the earth and had raised a huge tidal wave that constituted Noah's flood.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 158b.

⁷¹ *Op. cit.*

four satellites revolving round Jupiter and the five satellites (*kaukab*) of Saturn, the three dark parallel lines on the surface of Jupiter; they also noted the existence of seventy stars in the constellation of the Pleiad (*parveen*) instead of the six or seven normally visible by human eye-sight, the forty stars in the cluster of Praecipe and the Milky-way composed of myriads of heavenly bodies, all "corruptible" and constructed of sublunary matter (*jism i kasif*, literally "dirty and dense") like that of earth and also subject to the same laws of nature as earth.⁷²

In spite of the apparent similarities in the descriptions offered by our observers, there are underlying differences of approach and attitude between them. Thus, Muhammad Husain's account is characterised by a great sense of conviction in the truth of the new discoveries and ideas. His account shows first-hand knowledge and experience on the subject. He openly asserted that modern European astronomy was a complete reversal of traditional Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology. He emphasized that telescopic observations had promoted a new conception of the universe and challenged earlier differences between celestial and terrestrial phenomena. The new astronomy argued that the moon was composed of materials similar to those found on earth and shattered the Aristotelian notion that heavenly bodies were perfect and incorruptible objects composed of unchanging matter. The discovery of a host of new stars that were invisible to the naked eye had brought attention to the size and possible infinity of the universe. Moreover, Muhammad Husain attempted to explain Newton's law of universal gravitation (*jazb*, literally "attraction") with confidence, while Latif, probably due to its incomprehensibility, excluded it from his lucid account of the modern astronomy.⁷³

⁷² Cf. *Risala*, ff. 10b-11a.

⁷³ For an exposition of Newton's law of universal gravitation, cf. *Risala*, f. 16a.

Abu Talib, our third major author on the subject, did not manifest great interest in issues of cosmology. He compiled an account though in order to satisfy the scholarly interest of his friend Farid ud din Ahmad who had asked about contemporary developments in modern astronomy in Europe. The result was a small treatise composed in a beautiful literary style as the title of the treatise, *Miraj ut Tawhid* ("The Unity of Heavens"), indicates. In the words of Abu Talib, it contains:

Opinions of modern philosophers (*hukma-i jadid*) on the fixed stars (*sawabit*), the planets (*sayyarat*), the satellites (*aqmar*), the comets and the celestial spheres (*aflak*), the nature of air and gases (*hawa*), simple and compound ones, the nature of colours, oceans, mountains, the movement of the earth, the reasons for the lunar and solar eclipses as well as the phenomenon of tides.⁷⁴

True to his poetical nature, Abu Talib elaborated on the basic premises and proofs of the modern astronomy in a poetical form. According to him, such an account would facilitate his friend's understanding of the subject since it would be easier to remember comments in verse on a hitherto unknown subject. Thus, every principle of the new astronomy was first versified and then followed by an scholarly commentary in prose. The result is a scientific treatise in a sophisticated literary language. Abu Talib admitted writing it in Calcutta in two months and deriving some of the facts presented in it from an English scientific work with the assistance of an English friend.⁷⁵ The author seems to have made a liberal use of Abd al Latif and Muhammad Husain's works, also since the intellectual orientation, the style of the presentation of arguments and the vocabulary in this treatise resemble those employed by the earlier authors. Still Abu Talib did not simply reproduce earlier writings but manifested a certain originality throughout the treatise. He carefully noted the latest advances in the field and particularly in observational astronomy. He specifically mentioned that apart from the seven known

⁷⁴ Cf. *Miraj ut tauhid*, f. 20b.

⁷⁵ Abu Talib did not explicitly mention the name of the English friend with whose assistance he translated the English book on the subject, but he named his English work as *Geography of Kasini* (Cassini?) which could not be identified. Cf. f. 20a.

planets, another planet had been discovered in historical times called *Sitara jaj*, that is the "Georgium Sidius".⁷⁶ He noted that in the past two years two asteroids had been discovered, called "Ceres" and "Pallas".⁷⁷ Abu Talib persuasively argued in favour of modern astronomy (*hayyat i jadid*). European scientists had further strengthened their ideas and proofs with the aid of modern instruments (*alat*). Theirs was a far more accurate, reasonable, rational and superior system than any systems previously upheld. Abu Talib added that some people raised objections to the premises of the new astronomy; the reason of this rejection was that such people preferred clinging to their old views on the universe for fear of a third rival system which might emerge and then replace the one presently discovered. Our observer argued that such arguments were irrational and unsound.⁷⁸

Abu Talib, like Abd al Latif and Muhammad Husain, emphasized the infinite nature of the universe. Modern scholars (*hukma i jadid*) in Europe regarded the universe (*makan*) as boundless and infinite. According to Abu Talib, God's creation was unlimited (*ghair mutnahi*) and extended far beyond the earth. God is the sovereign of an unlimited universe, the Supreme Ruler of all.⁷⁹ Our observer had his own conclusions to draw from the infiniteness of God's creation. He saw certain far-reaching social implications of the modern science. Like earth, other planets too were the abode of beings and the Creator of all beings was the same one God, the source of life for all creatures. The apparent differences in language, manners, beliefs had no basis

⁷⁶ The Georgium Sidius was discovered by F.W. Herschel (1738-1822) in 1781, who named it after George III. Its discovery won for Herschel a Fellowship and a copley Medal of the Royal Society. The King made him King's Astronomer with a salary of two hundred pounds a year. The planet was later on named "Uranus" by another scientist, J.F. Bode, and its with this name that the planet came to be known.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Miraj ut tauhid*, f. 21a.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 29a.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 28ab.

whatsoever but had simply been created by worldly scholars (*ulama i zahir*). In Islam these differences had been perpetuated by those who had no in-depth knowledge of religion. The same was the case for other religions also, for Christians as well as for Hindus, for example. These differences were nothing but, an obstacle to a healthy social living (*maishat*).⁸⁰

Abd al Latif's attitude on the other hand, was more cautious, careful, discreet and perhaps more ambivalent also. He concluded his detailed account of the scientific and technical progress in Europe with special emphasis on the infiniteness of nature and its creation. Knowledge of nature, he wrote, was beyond human comprehension. Human knowledge was limited and infinitesimal. He remarked that Man had been making continuous endeavours to acquire knowledge from the time of the Greek philosophers, who were sound and profound scholars, to the present scientists. All of them, according to their powers cognition, and mental capacities, attempted to learn about the secrets of Nature and the Quintessence of God. They tried to trace the origins of creation (*haqiqat-i makhluqat*) and recorded the results of their respective enquiries. Nonetheless, it was evident to those who were capable of discernment and had the gift of vision, that these stories and the findings of modern scientists and philosophers were nothing but figures drawn on water. Nature remained infinite and incomprehensible while all scientists' efforts to understand it, had necessarily been limited. Abd al Latif warned that in the future these scientific endeavours would counter further shocks. The more scientists endeavoured to understand nature, the more they would be bewildered and astonished; all such future enquiries were bound to cause further confusion, bewilderment, distress

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 27a-28a.

and amazement. He quoted the Persian poet Rumi's mystical verses in order to strengthen his view that in this world man totally insignificant, nothing but a gnat.⁸¹

7.5 Astrology

In the light of European scientists' ideas on the subject, Abd al Latif sought to dismiss the traditional belief in the pseudo-science of astrology and the influence of the movement of various stars on human destiny. Latif wrote that Muslim philosophers as well as the majority of the Greek sages (*Milliyun*) believed in astrological practices (*nujum*) and held that the sublunary world was subject to the movement of the stars. Their belief was so strong that whatever happened in this world they related to the movement of stars. But ancient philosophers had no proof for their beliefs and practices apart from experience. It was difficult to relate every event on earth to the movement of celestial bodies. Latif asserted that even the Muslim law (*shariat*) denounced astrologers and their attempts to predict the future.⁸²

Latif argued that British philosophers had altogether different views on this matter than the ancient philosophers. British philosophers/scientists did not believe in the prophecies of astrologers and had scant respect for them. They dismissed age-old notions which had been associated with astrology, such as the existence of particular stations

⁸¹ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 161a-b. Abd al Latif cited the following couplets from Rumi:
Miserable intellect: how can it shine
there where Gabriel's wing burns bright?

What is this lofty roof, simple with many patterns?
no wise man in the world knows the meaning of this riddle.

It comes with spring, and dies with winter:
how can the gnat know who made the garden

How long O sage, will you boast of reason? one can not travel this road by thought:
reason will comprehend the depths of this essence when flotsam reaches the depths of the sea.

⁸² Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 5b-6.

(*burj*) as the abode of certain stars, the stipulation of a propitious hour and the association of a particular conjunction to richness or poverty. They regarded such theories as obsolete and believed instead that celestial bodies did have direct effects on the earth and its various elements but in scientifically explicable ways. Latif elaborated further that the sun for example, had an immense influence on human-beings, animals and all life on earth. The importance of the existence of the sun was such that had there been no sun, there would not have been no vegetation on earth, neither would the earth contain rich deposits of minerals and mines.⁸³ He further theorised that the existence of the moon was of similar importance. The moon also influenced the entire globe and its mechanism (*mizam i alam*), its vegetation, fauna, flora, men and animals. The phenomenon of tides testified to the degree of influence of the moon on earth. In order to facilitate his readers' understanding and give additional weight to his opinions, Latif offered first a brief description of the Greek philosophers' theories on the subject. He explained that ancient Greeks believed that the bottom of the sea consisted of numerous rocks and stones and that when the rays of the moon reflected on the sea its water began to boil. Since boiling water takes up more space than cool water, this caused sea-tides (*mad*). This phenomenon continued to occur until the moon had reached its meridian point and the flow of the tides began to recede and finally returned to its original position.⁸⁴

Latif explained that contemporary British philosophers held different opinions on this subject. They claimed that whenever the orbits of two planets of unequal sizes met, the bigger planet would attract the smaller one. On a micro-scale, the same effect could

⁸³ *Ibid.* f. 6b. Latif cited an example which he heard from an English friend: that once an English ship accosted by chance an island situated in the northern quarter of the globe where the sun shone only rarely. The inhabitants of that island were not more than three spans in height, and the reason of this lack of growth was ascribed to the lack of sunlight in that region of the world.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 7. Latif's opinion was based on the writings of Sayyid Abdullah, specifically his *Tilism Sultani*.

be observed in relation to fire and its surroundings, as well as the "movements of water" on earth. As the moon is larger than the areas covered by water on earth (*kurrah i ab*), it attracts the water and thus causes the phenomenon of tides to occur. When the moon passes its meridian phase, the bubbling water begins to recede to its previous levels. This results into ebbs (*jazr*). Abd al Latif favoured the British scientists' theories on the phenomenon of tides, and considered them well-founded, firm, and sound. He thought that the Greek philosophers' ideas on the subject were weak and extremely complex. He forwarded his own argument against the latter: he argued that for all the intensity of its heat, the sun, which was the source of light, heat and energy for all creatures on earth, did not affect the water. It seemed improbable that the water and the rocks in the bottom of the sea would be affected by the relatively weak light of the moon. On the contrary, moonlight had a most pleasant effect during a delightful summer's night. Had the light of the moon been intense, its intensity would have clearly been felt by every living creature on earth as was the intensity of sunlight. Latif attempted to explain the reason for the lack of intensity in the light emanating from the moon. He explained that the moon was spherical and globular-shaped, while it was in the nature of sunlight to concentrate on plain and concave-shaped objects. It could not penetrate effectively convex-shaped objects. It could only be felt lightly on the latter. Since the moon was spherical and convex, the heat of the sun could not concentrate on it. Latif further cited an experiment whereby the concave side of a mirror was placed in the sunlight; such a great amount of heat was concentrated on it, that it could even burn the object. If one held its vault against the sun, the intensity of the heat began to diminish. Modern scientists failed to find a similar intensity in the heat of the light of the moon.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 7b. It is obvious from the above discussion that the author was referring to Newton's theory of gravitation which ascribed the tides to the differential gravitational effects. High tides occurred at every new and full moon, when the gravitational pulls of the sun and the moon acted together, whilst
(continued...)

It seems that Latif was not engaged in a totally futile mental exercise. He sought to find some variations on Newton's law of gravitation. He observed that the ebb and flow of the tides in the Calcutta Sea were very different to those observed in other port cities such as Basrah, Bushire, the port towns of Persia and Mukha and Jeddah. In the Calcutta Sea the flow of tides was so strong that even large ships sometimes sank in the water. The natives had a specific local term for this phenomenon, namely *sir wa ban*. Literally the above term meant "arrow and bow" implying that the flow of the sea tides was so fierce and brisk that even an arrow could not pierce it. In winter, as opposed to summertime and the rainy season, the tides were usually low and sometimes this phenomenon did not occur at all. He notes on the subject that the experienced and mature people of Bengal had told him that:

Seventy years earlier these high tides were never seen in the Calcutta Sea apart from the normal type of ebb and flow similar to that of the other ports. It was in 1140 A.H./1728 A.D. or two or three years before or after this date, as the local records were not very accurate, that a severe draught occurred in Bengal; it was so severe that even the waters of the Ganges, which flow in the opposite direction and fall into the sea, were dried up. The bottom was left without a drop of water and the people searched in the mud. For a while these conditions held until suddenly such a severe storm occurred in the sea that its tumult could be heard in the entire province of Bengal, and the people who were searching in the mud were drowned. The local people agreed unanimously in their descriptions of this strange occurrence in Bengal. It is since that time that these high tides have been occurring in the sea.⁸⁶

According to Latif, there seemed to exist no rational (*aqli*) or other explanation for this phenomenon. He attributed it to some other factors. He noted that Calcutta unlike other port cities did not experience westerly but mainly south-easterly winds. In winter the south-easterly winds were usually strong and the sea due to its location in the south had tides which became strong and swift. Similar observations were made in regard to port cities on the Gulf where the easterly winds created then severe tides in

⁸⁵(...continued)

low tides occurred at the quarters when the pulls tended to neutralise one another. This was also from the *Principia*'s Arabic translation. But we cannot be sure, as Latif himself did not quote the work.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 7b-8a.

comparison to other times. Latif observed that maybe the above story given by the local inhabitants of Bengal was nothing more than a tale.⁸⁷

Our observer employed modern scientific ideas to disprove some of the popular notions associated with astrology. He wrote that his birth-place Shushtar in Persia was a poor and backward town and the cause of its poverty was considered its shape of a falcon, an inauspicious bird. Shushtar was regarded as an unlucky town whose inhabitants had to face extreme poverty, distress and hardship even in their day-to-day lives. Its citizens had to move to other places to earn their livelihood. The majority of the dwellers of the town were beggars, paupers and hardly anyone was affluent. Latif noted that even Hamdullah Mustaufi, a historian who came from the town of Shushtar forwarded similar opinions on Shushtar's non-prosperity.⁸⁸

Our writer argued that the above was an irrational and unreasonable way of thinking. The shapes of cities and their similarity to birds that were considered unlucky could not be the reasons for the prosperity of any place. He proposed other reasons himself and identified various categories of flourishing cities in terms of their source of prosperity. Thus, there were cities which were the centres of great and powerful empires such as the cities of Isfahan, Shahjahanbad, Istanbul and the capital cities of European countries. Such cities enjoyed financial tribute regularly in the form of revenue from all over the country. Their inhabitants profited from this income and the state became stronger. If such a city also possessed mines of gold and silver like Istanbul for example, its people led even more prosperous lives. The splendid buildings in Istanbul testified to the magnificence of the city.⁸⁹ In the second category of flourishing cities Latif

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 8a-b.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 4a.

⁸⁹ *Op. cit.*

included those which enjoyed regular seasonal rainfall in plenty and possessed natural water resources such as rivers, canals and rivulets. The rich soil produced large enough harvests for its own people and there remained a surplus also to export to other countries. As examples of such cities with a flourishing agriculture he mentioned cities in Egypt, Iraq and the cooler places in Iran.⁹⁰ The third category consisted of cities situated in the mouth of large rivers and seas. Such cities had big ports where ships arrived from every corner of the world for commercial purposes. Such port-cities were Basrah, Jeddah and the ports of Persia and China. The fourth category of flourishing cities comprised those where there was plenty of natural rainfall even in the summer. These cities abounded in all sorts of crops, grain, corn, cotton and silk and their products were exported to other parts of the world. Examples of such a prosperity stemming from a flourishing agriculture were Hindustan and the Windward Islands where the majority of the people were affluent. Thus, the reason for Shushtar's poverty was not the fact that it was falcon-shaped but rather its lack of natural resources.⁹¹

7.6 Medical Advances

Although astronomy was the major area of all our authors' interest in scientific progress in the West, new developments in other disciplines also came under discussion, albeit cursorily. Abd al Latif and Abu Talib considered developments in anatomy, physiology and the medical practices. During his sojourn in England, Abu Talib visited the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Oxford. He observed carefully the use of human as well as animal skeletons in the study of modern physiology. It seems that Sir Christopher Pegg (1765-1822), the Regius Professor of Medicine at the University

⁹⁰ *Op. cit.*

⁹¹ *Op. cit.*

(1801-1822) provided him with a brief explanation of human anatomy. He was given also given a book on physiology as a gift from Padre Waughan Thomas (1858).⁹² Our observer offered a brief but careful and accurate description of various organs of the human body and their functions. He specifically noted William Harvey's discovery that the dynamic starting point of the blood is the heart and not the liver, but he did not acknowledge the scientist whose findings he quoted.⁹³

Abd al Latif became exposed to the new medical practices in Calcutta and noted the changes in the methods of diagnosis and treatment that European physicians practised. People in Europe had an immense faith in medical practitioners whose diagnosis and prescriptions they regarded as divine revelations (*wahi*).⁹⁴ Our observer pointed out that the new methods of diagnosis and treatment were completely different to those of the ancient Greeks. He writes:

They had their own methods and usually prescribed simple medicines. They did not follow the practice of writing prescriptions. The medical practitioner (*tabib*) himself supplied the medicine. Upon positive results in the treatment the physician charged whatever he considered appropriate. The doctor's decision on the charges could not be challenged. He charged according to his own estimate.⁹⁵

Instead of midwives doctors were employed to deliver babies and in times of war it was doctors again who took care of the wounded soldiers.⁹⁶

Our author came to know of the new methods in the efficient clinical training that prevailed in Europe. Beginners and learners of medical practices were not admitted as medical practitioners until they had themselves discovered new methods of diagnosis or

⁹² Waughan Thomas, son of John Thomas of Kingston in Surrey, matriculated at the University of Oxford in 1792, and took the degrees of B.A. and M.A. in Divinity in 1800. He was the Vicar of Yarnton in Oxfordshire and Stoneleigh in Warwickshire and Rector of Duntsover in Gloucestershire.

⁹³ For a lucid exposition of the new anatomy, cf. *Masir i talibi*, ff. 68b-70a.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, ff. 154b. Abd al Latif explained that in their language the physician (*tabib*) was called doctor (*daktar*).

⁹⁵ *Op. cit.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 154b-155a.

treatment. He had to be recognised as a qualified doctor by an established physician and was only then included in the list of practising physicians. The king paid medical practitioners a fixed salary for the benefit of the people. Each doctor in Europe maintained a register where he noted the details of the cases he attended, including prescriptions for individual patients and any related developments in their treatment. Physicians assembled on certain days to discuss their registers with other practitioners and elaborate on matters such as the nature of particular diseases. If a slight discrepancy in the treatment administered by a doctor was detected, the physician could be deprived of his practice and have his name struck off the medical register.⁹⁷

Latif realised that the medical profession in Europe was highly respected by the king and the nobility. Whenever a physician discovered some new medicine and had its usefulness tested, he sent it to other practitioners to try on their patients. If the effectiveness of some medicine was proved, it was purchased by the Court. Medicines for the cure of serious diseases were bought in bulk while those for diseases that could be treated more easily were purchased in smaller quantities. The king duly rewarded physicians who had discovered new medicine as successfully tested drugs were purchased in bulk.⁹⁸ Latif specifically mentioned a medicine, a kind of syrup, for the treatment of leprosy.⁹⁹

Our writer appreciated the skills of Europeans in the art of healing. He commented that the degree of their skilfulness had brought about results almost equal to those of the white hand of Moses and Christ the Messiah in saving lives. He claimed that in surgery

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 155a-b.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 155b-156a.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 156a. Latif clarified that first they had tested this medicament in Europe. Later on, they sent it to India. If the disease was not more than two or three years old, it could be treated well, while an old disease could be treated only inadequately.

(*jarrahi*) in particular, one of the branches of Medicine (*funun i tababat*), Europeans had no equal. The various instruments that were used in the practice of Medicine and for surgical purposes were so sound and well-made that their close observation would cause nothing but bewilderment.¹⁰⁰ Latif knew of the use of special instruments such as clinical thermometers in the course of diagnosis and treatment. In Calcutta he was exposed to experiments in electro-therapeutic treatment and described them in graphic detail:

One of the elegant instruments, a medical wonder, was a wheel (*charkhi*) that was employed in the treatment of such diseases as phlegmatic ones, paralysis, tremors, distortion of the mouth and other kinds of paralysis. It was a unique and wonderful invention, a masterpiece of human intellect. Had the intelligent British physicians not explained the purpose of this instrument to the Indians who lacked any powers of discernment in their majority, the Indians would have taken for something magical. The instrument in question was a wheel made of glass somewhat like the machine used for separating cotton from the seeds.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 154b.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, f. 162. Latif described: "It had a cover of glass over it, and was made of a metal like iron. In measurement, it was two cubic feet and its width was nine inches. It had a chair supported by the glass pillars that a man could be seated upon or even could stand over. But the height of the chair was not more than one span, and a polished iron chain, not more than four cubic feet in length, was attached to it. They seated the patient over it. The patient was given the chain into his hands through which heat passed into his body. The physician administered the (electric) therapy to the patient for as much as he thought was required. This therapeutic treatment was given to patients for about forty days. The strange thing about it was that the patient, who was holding the chain with one hand, and if his other hand was held by other person and the latter's hand by another person, and thus a chain of the human-beings was made even up to one hundred men standing in unbroken continuity, all would feel this artificially created heat. In the physique of those who were healthy the shock of the heat was felt, and even the sounds of the sparks could be heard by those also who were present to see this strange phenomenon. If any other person would touch their body, the person would become senseless due to sudden shock. It would burn the gun-powder also. What was strange, that if anyone was to touch the deflector the person would have a severe shock. They placed the chain into the hands of the patient, to control the temperature; in case more heat was required, they moved the wheel. From the movement of the wheels, its cover also became hot, and looked like the natural lightning in the sky. The lightening passed into the wheel through the various screws and intricate curves." In London, James Graham of Edinburgh established an "Aesculapian Temple" for electro-magnetic treatment. It contained a "celestial" bed supported on the glass pillars and decorated with the magnets and some electrical hocus-pocus. It was perhaps to this innovation that Latif was writing about. Cf. A. Wolf, *A History of Science Technology and Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, 1962, p. 494.

7.7 Scientific Instrumentation

Whether in the applied or the pure sciences, our observers realised that the chief characteristic of all modern science consisted in the use of scientific instruments. All of our writers rightly emphasised that what distinguished modern science was the fact that it was based on practice, observation and experiments. Instruments were employed for various functions and were the most important aid of modern European scientists unlike earlier science which had but the simplest kind of instruments at its service. The new instruments enabled scientists to observe better and perceive things that would have previously remained imperceptible.

Abd al Latif in particular, described important scientific instruments that were invented in the seventeenth century and had been put to significant use. Telescopes, thermometers, barometers and air-pumps were some of the implements he concentrated on. Telescopes were regarded by all our writers as the most crucial instruments, which had revolutionized the study of astronomy. Muhammad Husain writes that, "Telescopes (*durbeen*) were of two types: one for observing material objects from a distance, another for viewing the heavenly bodies and the position of the planets".¹⁰² He emphasised that telescopes enabled astronomers to view distant celestial bodies far better than the naked eye would have allowed, if indeed such bodies could have been discerned at all without the aid of telescopes.¹⁰³

Latif described other instruments also, in a graphic and evocative manner because our writer was not aware of the names of the objects he was writing about. He notes:

A unique innovation was the air-pump (*hawakash*). It was used to study the properties of air. It contained three hundred pieces of wood and glass arranged together. Whatever was placed before it, could be sucked by this instrument including small pieces of glass were placed that

¹⁰² Cf. *Risala*, f. 10b.

¹⁰³ The telescopes were known in India from the early eighteenth century and were already used by Jai Singh Sawai in his observatories in the mid-eighteenth century.

could be sucked within half an hour and even straws and pieces of silver. If it was mishandled, it could break with a bang. If a living creature was placed before it, only its body structure would remain within half an hour.¹⁰⁴

He describes the barometer and its use in a similar fashion:

This was an instrument for the measurement of temperature. It was used to gauge the degree of heat or cold in a particular place at a particular time. Daily variations in temperature were also recorded by means of this device. This small glass-instrument could be employed in any remote corner to measure the temperature.¹⁰⁵

According to Latif, this new device presented certain important advantages as it was by means of this instrument that scientists could record the climates of various countries. On the basis of the climate they then studied the nature of the inhabitants of that particular place and the physical characteristics of the people. They concentrated on such traits as the differences between black and white people and various human virtues and vices such as bravery, courage and cowardice.¹⁰⁶ Our author added that in Britain where the weather was excessively cold, the king as well as the aristocracy used this instrument in their hot-houses and gardens where they grew varieties of fruit and vegetables.¹⁰⁷

Latif also took notice of the mercury clinical thermometer which he must have seen in Calcutta. To him it looked exactly like a toy.

One side of it was filled with mercury and it was placed against a board on two sides with inscribed numbers and degrees upon it. The rising of the mercury indicated the temperature in the atmosphere. Excessive cold in the climate was indicated by the concentration of the mercury

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*. The air pump was invented by Otto Von Gueicke about the middle of the seventeenth century in order to enable the physicist to study the properties of the air in a logical and systematic way. The two notable English scientists Robert Hook and Robert Boyle, both prominent members of the Royal Society, performed important experiments with this device. Supposedly the author was alluding to the numerous experiments performed by Robert Boyle and Hooke with it, including the one where an animals suffocated in the partial vacuum of the receiver.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 163. The barometer was invented by Evangelista Torricelli, a pupil of Galileo, in the early seventeenth century. With the help of this instrument it became possible to observe and measure the variations in the air -pressure.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 163a. Perhaps, Latif was echoing the views held by Bodin in 1577 and Montesquieu in 1748, that the geographical location or the climate of a region in which a nation lived determined its national character. The men of the north tend to be vigorous, but not very intelligent, whilst proceeding southward, men became cleverer, but more feeble. Mankind could not avoid these things, for they were external determination laid down by the environment.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 163a.

inside the device on the freezing point. Living creatures could not survive in places of such low temperatures. Excessive heat was reflected in the rising of the mercury to the highest point in the scale and could even cause the glass to break with its intensity. Such hot places were equally inhospitable to life. This instrument was also used to measure the temperature of the human body and blood. If it was put in the hands of a person suffering from fever, the level of mercury would rise according to the temperature of the patient's body. It reflected any fluctuations in the temperature of the human body through the expansion or contraction of mercury according to the rise and fall of the body temperature. This device was also employed to assess the climate of various places as well as variations in the atmospheric pressure. Variations of temperature affected the position of the fluid inside the tube.¹⁰⁸

Apart from the scientific instruments described above, Latif also observed devices such as electric conductors. The British had installed throughout Hindustan polished iron rods on the tops of buildings.¹⁰⁹ One side of the rod was installed in the back of the house's terrace while the other end of the conductor was buried in the ground in the backyard of the house. If a house that possessed a lightning conductor was struck by lightning, the lightning would be attracted by the conductor and the electric shock would pass through the conductor to the ground, where it would be absorbed. With the aid of lightning conductors houses and the people in them remained safe and experienced no damage or loss by lightning. It had been tested and proved that lightning would not fall anywhere but on the conductor in an area that contained one.

Our observer reported two other measuring devices he saw in Calcutta. Again without actually naming the device, he alluded to one of these instruments as an apparatus "used for measuring the distance, the leagues and parasangs" between two places, either in a fort or a circular place.¹¹⁰

It was made up of two wooden wheels, somewhat like a cart. The wood was fixed between the two wheels or was carried by the horses. In long journeys or during a campaign they carried one

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, f 163. For a similar description of the barometer and the thermometer, cf. *Mirat al ahwal*, ff. 150.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 162b. Lightning conductors were placed at St. Paul's Cathedral in 1768.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 163b. Latif described: "It was a casket, a hookah, having hands like in a watch. Its backside had two holes. They placed these holes opposite each other in a way to see the position of a locality between the two places. When they pressed it, it produced a sound like a clock *kook kook*, and they viewed through these two holes. It seemed apparently that the two places moved from their location. They immediately noted the measurement minutely, otherwise it might move to next destination and the two would be mixed."

or two instruments. Like a clock it made a sound of "kook kook". It was drawn on the road and after a mile had been covered, they would close it and continue their journey.¹¹¹

Our author presented next a nautical instrument, again without providing any name or a Persian equivalent word for it. Nonetheless, Latif knew that this instrument was an improved version of the earlier astrolabe (*asturlab*). He writes that European scientists

had devised an instrument to be carried by seamen in order to measure the altitude of the sun. They could use it to estimate even the first moment of the setting of the sun. It was a vastly improved version of the astrolabe but with the astrolabe it was not possible to measure the setting of the sun (*zawal*) until it had fully set. It had the shape of a half circle or a semi-circle; it was elliptical and had holes and pieces of glass of varying shapes, some convex, some flat and some like a vault, were placed upon it. Degrees and the hours were inscribed upon it. Through the holes they could see the position of the sun. When the intensity of the sunlight became less effective, they could view the orbit of the sun. The viewers could see the sun rising gradually into the celestial heavens, its various phases and, finally, its decline and alighting into the water. In case they wanted to see the setting of the sun from a plain, they dropped it into the water and viewed it. Even an uneducated person could see the declining sun by means of this device.¹¹²

Our writer depicted graphically the eighteenth century invention of hot-air balloons in the field of transport, an invention which he reported in Bengal. Again Latif did not mention the actual word hot-air balloon but at least he provided this time a Persian equivalent for it (*jahaz i hawai*). He wrote that scientists had engaged assiduously in its improvement though it had no practical use and was merely a plaything.¹¹³

Our author was also aware of one of the outstanding aerial feats of the eighteenth century, a remarkable series of balloon ascents in various parts of England from 1784

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, f. 164a.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, f. 164a. Perhaps it was a sextant.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, ff. 165b-166a. Latif delineated: "It was made of two anchors and a helm of a ship and a rudder which could be placed in any desired direction. The helm could also fly in any direction with the movement of the wind, but not in the opposite direction. It looked like a common vessel. It had a mast like a ship, of conic shape, somewhat like an arch and placed in the middle of it. Its length, from below was about half cubit and from above five cubit; its length would be five cubit in similar way it varied. Various chains were fastened from the side of the ship as well as the mast to save it from any accidental bending. Underneath the mast, they lighted a lamp and poured some wine over it. The steams which were generated, took it off from the ground. It rose into the air according to the energy generated by the steams. Whenever they wished to land on the ground, they lessened its heat. If they desired, they could remain hung up. The mast of the ship was hollow, near the mouth they had fixed a kind of handle which they used to block the way of the fountain head, and would not let the steam out more than required. There were numerous hot air balloons in India. They were used for nothing [important]... It was so far nothing more than a plaything, but the European scientists were seeking to make it useful for practical purposes".

onwards. Such ascents had been effected by James Sadler, the first British aeronaut as well as an American physician, John Jeffries and a French professional aeronaut, J.P. Blanchard, who crossed the English Channel in a balloon on 7th January 1785. Latif did not mention the date or the names of the aeronauts but his description suggests that he was alluding to these flights.¹¹⁴ He learned about the attempts of European scientists to explore the possibilities of the balloon as an instrument for scientific investigation.

Balloons were used in the study of the properties of air and famous scientists flew in them. They made an ascent of about forty leagues in the balloon without leaning on either side. They flew in heights where the temperature was so excessively cold that even the fire was almost extinguished and whatever provisions they carried on board became hard and solid. There was nothing but air. The scientists were in a distressful state for a few days. They were in danger of consuming harmful gases and even saw the lightning of clouds. Two days later they landed on the ground, but their landing took place far away from the place they had taken off.¹¹⁵

7.8 Technical Developments

European scientists, according to our observers, were not indulging in mere flights of fancy, but were seriously applying the results of their research to the benefit of the common people. Modern science was harnessed to the service of man and became the science of society. Along with the cultivation of the pure sciences Europe was witnessing a high degree of technicalization.

Itisam our first Indian visitor to Britain was primarily interested in socio-cultural issues rather than the technical aspects of British society. Perhaps, the process of industrialization was also not so apparent when Itisam visited Britain in 1767-9. Nonetheless, he could still clearly discern some signs of mechanization in the day-to-day

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 166a.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 166. In the course of a balloon flight towards the end of 1784, Jeffries obtained specimens of the upper air which were analyzed by Cavendish, who found that the chemical composition of the specimens did not differ appreciably from that of the air of the ground level. Perhaps Latif was referring to these.

life of the country he was visiting.¹¹⁶ Itisam briefly mentioned the use of wind-mills and water-mills to press the oil and grind the corn, which he had also found in Calcutta. He appreciated that through such devices European scientists had greatly eased the life of the common people (*rifah i khalaïq*). He commented that with the aid of one wind-mill (*asiya i bad*) and water-mill (*asiya i ab*), one hundred and fifty mounds of wheat grains could be grounded in one day alone. People from villages brought corn to these mills for grinding and paid a certain fee for this service. There were separate places for the pressing of oil ~~oil-seeds~~. Another innovation in the silk industry this time was a wheel (*charkha, karkhana i resham*) moved by one person. Perhaps sixty such wheels (*charkhi*) were placed in a sequence and thread was prepared by moving them.¹¹⁷ Probably it was a reference to James Hargreaves' spinning-jenny, which enabled its operator to work on a number of spindles.

Itisam also noted the production of barley beer (*ab-jo*, literally "barley water") on a large scale, mainly for consumption by the poorer strata in the British society. He came to know that it was digestive and its consumption created temporarily a feeling of joy. He also noticed the methods of its production and described how reservoirs were filled with water with the aid of water-wheels (*dol ab*) and about two thousand mounds of barley were left to soak in them. He noted the use of animal power and particularly the use of horses for various purposes.¹¹⁸ Itisam felt at a loss to describe these "wonders" (*sana i badai*) of England. He admitted his inability to write about all the wonders and curiosities he had seen there and observed frankly that another volume

¹¹⁶ The use of a dog for moving the wheel of a neat roasting machine was a strange scene for Itisam. Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 180a-b.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 180b.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 181a.

would be needed, if he were to record them all.¹¹⁹ Itisam concluded that all these industries (*karkhanjat*) could also be found in Iran and Turkey, and that these were the innovations of philosophers of the past and he had heard and read about them in books, but it had been in England alone that he had seen them with his own eyes.¹²⁰

Abu Talib, however, realised that the things he was observing in Britain were in various respects far more advanced than those he had seen in his own country. He felt a strong desire to communicate his knowledge to his countrymen and provided a fairly comprehensive account of the industrialization process in Britain. He attempted a fairly detailed description as he had had the opportunity to observe the new technical achievements during his sojourn in London. His observations related to the initial phase of industrialization in Britain. Other observers were also aware of the changes that were taking place in the field of technology. Their attention concentrated mainly on qualitative improvements, and the new ways of production, the new machines, the factory system and the greater use of various devices and instruments in it. At the same time the major result of industrialization, namely mass production in relatively low prices, had not escaped their notice as we show in the discussion that follows. Abu Talib intended to supplement his textual descriptions of British technical innovations with pictorial representations, namely drawings of inventions that he knew to be unknown in India. He believed that visual representation would greatly facilitate his readers' understanding of his subject, since what he described was entirely new to his intended readers.¹²¹ He pointed out the use of these "wheels and the tools" (*charkh wa alat*)

¹¹⁹ *Op. cit.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 181b.

¹²¹ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 118a. Abu Talib did not have any exact equivalent for the factory system, but he used the word *karkhana* which was equivalent to "industry". For technical inventions and devices, the term *alat wa charkha* was employed which literally meant "wheels and tools"; the word machinery (*mashinha*) was also used, but there existed no proper equivalent for a "factory system".

which were the reason of the high quality of the arts and crafts (*sanat*) in Britain and a main reason for the inexpensive prices of various commodities.

Abu Talib ascribed conventional reasons for the technical changes in Britain. The British were endowed with a natural passion for technical innovation. They possessed inventive skills and preferred to perform even minor routine jobs with the aid of mechanics rather than manually.¹²² They had such great passion for the use of technical instruments that they would not perform certain tasks unless the necessary instruments were at their disposal. Such a desire was not felt among the French who were not affected by the unavailability of these devices. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Abd al Latif identified another two reasons for the technical progress in Britain: the emphasis on craft specialization, and the state patronage to artisans and craftsmen.¹²³ Latif also pointed out the differences between earlier scientists and modern European scientists in terms of their attitude towards scientific knowledge. In his opinion, the endeavours of European scientists in the field of mechanics, that is the mathematical study of motion and the forces that produce it, testified to the major difference in attitude between them and medieval Islamic philosophers.¹²⁴ He commented, "The science of mechanics (*jarr i saqil*) was one of the profound philosophical questions (*masail i ilmi*), was popular among the common populace

¹²² *Op. cit.*

¹²³ Cf. the introduction to the present chapter for elaboration of the two reasons which Latif thought lay behind British scientific and technical progress.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 164b. Latif compared the Muslim scientists' attitude with that of the European scientists' by citing the example of Ibn i Sina. The commentator elaborated that he read in a certain book that Ibn i Sina (*hakim, shaikhur rais*) or some other philosopher claimed that had there been a place outside the earth to stand on, he would have made the earth move by using his knowledge of mechanics (*jarr i saqil*). Latif added that he had heard about such demonstration on festive occasions in Isfahan, performed with the aid of mechanics which were mere displays of ingenuity. Of course, the principle was first stated by Archimedes who was the first to demonstrate the scientific principles of levers. Latif apparently did not know.

(*awam*) [of Britain] and various works were performed with its help".¹²⁵ Latif provided proof of the application of the principles of mechanics for the facilitation of labour in industry. He reported to have seen such a practical application of the principles of mechanics at a blacksmith's in Calcutta where new methods were employed to lift such heavy objects as the anchors of ships effortlessly; similar methods were used to load equally heavy items on ships. In the port towns of Arabia and Persia on the other hand, such tasks like moving a small ship into water required the effort of "rulers and subjects together and many even perished just to bring the ship into water."¹²⁶ Latif regrets:

Those [medieval] scientists who claimed skill and knowledge of the subject never tried to teach people so that common people (*awam*) and shopkeepers would have become their followers and would have used this knowledge to earn their livelihood. This was in complete contrast to the attitude of European scientists who sought to teach craftsmen and artisans the new methods that would facilitate their tasks.¹²⁷

Abu Talib discerned certain deep-lying causes for this phenomenon. He emphasised that one of the causes of mechanization in Britain was the absence of cheap labour which led to the introduction of various labour-saving devices in place of the expensive human force. The fact that even the fodder was not in plenty to maintain the animals traditionally used in labour led them to rely more on the power generated by water. The expositor explained that rivers were used for transportation ^purposes in Britain. This contributed to the low prices of various commodities as the wages for human labour and the cost of food and fodder for animals in England, were so high that had there been no ships to transport such goods through water as wheels and mechanical devices for heavy work, prices of commodities would have risen excessively. Two thirds of the work which in other countries was performed with the use of human and animal power, was carried out in England with the aid of water (*harkat i ab*), wind (*bad*) and steam

¹²⁵ *Op. cit.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 164b-165a.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 164b.

(*bukhar*) at no expense; the rest of the work only was performed through animal or man power and that because it was impossible to use machines for certain tasks anyway.¹²⁸

The efforts of European scientists to use their knowledge for practical purposes was most evident in one industry, that is the ship-building industry and the development of various navigational techniques. This was an industry which had been witnessing transformations since the sixteenth century. All our observers noticed the technical changes in this industry. Itisam al Din, the first literate Indian known to have undertaken a long oceanic voyage, assessed that ship-building was the first industry to undergo technical improvement. Europe's expansion overseas was the result of their continuous efforts to improve seamanship and the navigational instruments which facilitated distant voyages. According to Itisam, such improvements belonged to the period which came to be known as "the Age of Discovery". He acknowledged the fact that the Portuguese were the first to reach India after the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope route. In that period it was the Portuguese monarch who occupied a predominant position among the kings of Europe, unlike now when that position was occupied by the British monarch.¹²⁹ It was the Portuguese monarch (an allusion to Henry the Navigator), who sponsored long distant voyages and employed the skills and knowledge of his mathematicians and scientists in order to improve sea-faring.¹³⁰ Itisam mentioned various improvements in navigational techniques and instruments, which he seems to have carefully observed during his journey to England; such improvements regarded the compass (*portolani*), directions for coastwise passages from place to place, pilot-books and marine charts. Itisam described extensively how European navigators used their

¹²⁸ Cf. *Masir i talibi*, f. 112b.

¹²⁹ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 14b.

¹³⁰ *Op. cit.*

experience, their detailed knowledge of the coasts and acute powers of observation. To assist them in the application of their knowledge, they used such instruments as magnetic compasses and lead. When European seamen were within sight of land, they could determine their exact position by taking compass bearings of prominent marks; when on the other hand land was out of sight, they could have an idea of their position by taking frequent soundings for depth and by sampling the bottom of the sea. All these were curious things for Itisam.¹³¹ Among the various instruments it was compasses that greatly fascinated our observer and who called them *Qiblanuma* to denote the direction to *Ka'aba* for Islamic prayers.¹³² Itisam was immensely impressed by the revolution that the invention of the compass had brought about in navigation. He noted that compasses had not been available to the ancient Greeks and Alexander the Great. He described the methods employed in manufacturing compasses and their metallic parts. Loadstone could be found in the deserts of Arabia.¹³³ Actually the use of compasses was well-known to Muslim sailors much before our period of enquiry. Perhaps Itisam was referring to William Gilbert's experiments, the research on the behaviour of loadstone and the discovery of its magnetic properties, which were utilized in the preparation of the needle of magnetic compasses. Our author was not aware of the name of the inventor.¹³⁴ Itisam remarked that Britain excelled over other European

¹³¹ Itisam was seeking to convey to his readers that these improvements in the methods of navigation with the aid of better instruments made oceanic navigation possible, what was hitherto mere pilotage. But he had no technical term to distinguish between "pilotage" and "oceanic navigation".

¹³² Itisam also transliterated it into Persian as "compass" (*kampas*) and mentioned that it was also called *halqa*, probably a local term.

¹³³ Cf. *Shigafnama*, f. 14b. Muhammad Husain also alluded to the above researches and experiments, as well as the investigation on the behaviour of loadstone (*sangi-miqnatis*), again without naming the scientist.

¹³⁴ William Gilbert (1544-1606), made the first extensive series of investigation in his book *De Magnete* (on the Magnet), published in 1600. There, he explained the magnetic behaviour of loadstone and the directive properties of the magnetic needle by the hypotheses that the whole earth was like loadstone. He also showed that other substances other than amber had electric properties. He was primarily interested in magnetism and investigated electricity only in order to distinguish it from magnetism.

nations in this field. During his sojourn in Britain he noted carefully that it possessed one hundred and fifty warships mounted with cannons; subsequently he learned though that the number of strongly-built ships had increased to five hundred within fifteen years. This explains why the British claimed that their country was an island surrounded by war-ships (*jahazat i jangi*) like a fort that could not be approached by enemies.¹³⁵

Muhammad Husain also recognized that the art of navigation was assiduously pursued in England because the latter was an island (*jazira*) and had no direct access to land like other European countries but only through the water which connected it with France in a distance of twelve leagues (*fararsakh*), an allusion to the English Channel. Britain possessed around one hundred and twenty warships (*jahaz i jangi*) loaded with cannons.¹³⁶

Abu Talib realized the importance of the shipbuilding industry and the navy in the economic life of Britain:

It was a well-known fact that Britain possessed well-built and strong ships. They were the major source of its strength and the main reason of British prosperity and wealth.¹³⁷

Britain's political power also rested on its mercant navy. The British always succeeded when they employed their navy against other countries. If they were defeated, they returned without having suffered much loss. It was due to its navy that Britain had prevailed against the revolutionary France, which was known in that era for its strength and power throughout the world.¹³⁸ Abu Talib further emphasized Britain's victory in battles against the combined fleets of Russia, Denmark, Sweden and France.¹³⁹ He

¹³⁵ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 138a-b.

¹³⁶ The word *farasakh* is a league about eighteen thousand feet in length.

¹³⁷ Cf. *Masir i talibi*, ff. 113a.

¹³⁸ *Op. cit.*

¹³⁹ Abu Talib provided a detailed account of British naval operations under Nelson against the above European belligerent powers with clarity. Cf. *Masir i talibi*, ff. 113b-114a.

noted that Britain possessed such vast and unlimited resources for the construction of ships that it could bear the burnt of war with other European countries for next ten years.¹⁴⁰ Our observer admired the wisdom and skills (*hikmat wa falasafa*) that the British manifested in the construction of their ships and the rules and regulations they employed in navigation and which Talib found extremely sound. He reported his conversation with Lord Teignmouth about British ships and their excellent management.¹⁴¹ He noted that ships owned by other countries such as France and the Ottoman Empire might look just like British ships in the eyes of an observer; nonetheless, the British were so proud of their navy that in their eyes all other countries' ships were merely small boats (*kishti*, literally "small ship" or "vessel"), the carriers of provisions to Bengal.¹⁴² The commentator carefully distinguished between the merchant fleet (*jahazat i tijarat*) and the navy (*jahazat i jangi*) and commented that merchant ships were so numerous that they could only be counted by a wise man.¹⁴³ If a British ship succeeded in capturing an enemy vessel, the merchandise aboard the captured ship was distributed amongst the captors like booty (*ghanimat*) and the king had no right over it. At the time this was written, Britain possessed eight hundred and thirty warships mounted with cannons with royal permission in order to guard the British shores against enemy invasions.¹⁴⁴ Our author found that the cities of Portsmouth and Woolwich were fully devoted to shipbuilding (*jahaz sazi*). He visited the dockyard in Woolwich

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 115b.

¹⁴¹ Lord Teignmouth reported to the author an incident which happened when the reporter along with his family was on board an English ship and the ship's mart caught fire, but the travellers on board remained safe. Cf. *Masir i talibi*, f. 113b.

¹⁴² *Op. cit.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, f. 114b. Abu Talib employed careful terminology: for merchant vessels he used *jahazat i tijarat*, for navy *jahazat i jangi*, and *kishti* was used for a small vessel, literally a boat. Similar was the case with other writers, but Abu Talib seems more articulate with terminology.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 114.

in the company of his English friend Peach and observed the introduction of labour-saving devices in the shipbuilding industry.¹⁴⁵ In particular, he noted the use of mechanical aids in this industry and power derived from water and steam (*bukhar i ab*). Like Latif, Abu Talib also discerned a clear relation between scientific knowledge and technical progress, as the principles derived from the new science of mechanics were applied in industry to facilitate labour. The various processes and methods involved in the shipbuilding industry gave the impression to our acute observer that industrialism was based on uneducated empiricism. To quote the author, "If one was to see these tools (*alat*), it would become clear to them that even an old woman or a child could perform such tasks as drilling holes in a large cannon".¹⁴⁶ In his opinion, almost half the British population were involved in navigation activities and earned their livelihood in professions associated with it. At least five young Englishmen were employed on every ship for five years as trainees.¹⁴⁷

According to Latif, the roots of the present ascendancy of Europe could be traced in past centuries, an allusion to the Renaissance, when new discoveries were made with the help of the compass (*Qutubnuma*); later Europeans set out to explore new lands, known as well as unknown. Such exploration became possible with the developments in the fields of navigation (*jahazrani*) and shipbuilding (*jahaz-sazi*).¹⁴⁸ Latif based the above hypothesis on the works of Itisam and Muhammad Husain. Our author considered the British warships and merchant vessels plying at different ports in India as examples of the perfection Europeans had attained in the field of navigation. In order to satisfy

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 114b-116a.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 115b.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 115b-117a. Abu Talib also attended a review of the British army in Windsor and described the occasion (cf. pp. 206-8).

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 117.

his curiosity, he visited the British shipyard in Calcutta and provided an interesting eye-witness account of the dockyard there. He remarked that the English constructed their ships (*jahazat i jangi*) with great precision and skill. They enclosed certain areas on the sea coast as well as on river-banks in various port-towns. This enclosed area was filled with water at the time of high tides and drained of water with the fall of tides. They built an iron gate which they would close whenever wanted to construct a new ship, so that not even a drop of water might enter inside. When the new ship was finished, they opened the gate to let the water flow inside with the high tides. Thus, the ship was landed into the water.¹⁴⁹ Latif continued that at the places where the British did not have a the dockyard, they raised an area above the water level for this purpose. First, they smoothed the ground by placing wooden boards upon it and then installed wooden pillars on both sides to raise the structure a few inches above the level of the ground.

Latif also described how the break-waters were constructed:

They connected this raised ground with the main stream of water by placing the wooden planks in between. They washed these wooden boards with soap to smooth the surface, so that the ship would slide easily into water. Then they issued a general proclamation that on such and such a date the ship would cast anchor. A huge crowd of people gathered on the spot to witness the launching of the new for the sake of amusement. The workers at the dockyard brought the wheel and attached it to the ship. One or two workers turned the wheel to move the ship while others held the pillars tightly and the ship was pushed up to the wooden boards from where it swiftly slipped into the water. Those who were on board immediately cast the anchor to stabilize the ship.¹⁵⁰

Abu Talib had the opportunity to visit some other heavy industry, that is iron foundries, during his sojourn in London. He noted two special features: the use of the steam engine, which he termed "an ironsmith's wheel, moved with steam" (*bukhar*), to perform such heavy load duties as the preparation of large, heavy iron and copper sheets for the casting of cannons and the construction of the roofs and iron pillars. The second feature that Talib observed with admiration was that the tasks which could not be easily

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 165a. This was the description of a wet dockyard.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 165b.

performed through manual labour were carried out by employing the principles of mechanics (*ilm i jarr i saqil*).¹⁵¹

Our writer also described a needle manufacturing device that he named "the wheel for making needles". He observed how iron was placed in this machine and small needles came out from this "wheel" (*charkh*), which were cut into pieces of equal size and similar shape by a pair of scissors attached to the device. Thousands of needles were prepared in a similar way. They were then collected by children who placed them before artisans to make holes in them and who in turn passed the needles to other workers who sharpened their heads. Thus, needles were so cheap that ten were sold for half a *fulus*, that is "small coins of uncertain value".¹⁵²

The increasing use of mechanical devices in the textile industry did not escape Abu Talib's attention. He found that a great amount of thread could be spun at a time with the aid of a certain device, a kind of wheel (*charkh*) that moved with water and sometimes steam power. A child or a women sat near this device and fed cotton into it.¹⁵³ Talib realised that the introduction of mechanical devices in the textile industry had multiplied production but he was not satisfied with the quality of the yarn produced; he thought that it was very coarse. He saw on the other hand, that the Indian cotton textiles, the cossas (*khasa*) and the Dacca muslin (*malmal dhaka*) that were sold at very high prices in London, were far more durable and retained their original appearance even after repeated washes. Coming from a pre-industrial background, Abu Talib preferred refined, luxury articles whose production was skill-intensive to machine-made

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Masir i talibi*, f. 118.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, f. 118b.

¹⁵³ *Op. cit.* ff. 118b-119a. It is not clear which particular invention Abu Talib was describing, the spinning jenny of James Hargreaves, invented in 1768, or Richard Arkwright's new spinning machine called the water-frame because it was driven by water, or Crompton's "mule" or "mule jenny" invented in 1774.

products. Our author was surprised by some of the inventions he came across such as for example a device (*charkh*) that produced very fine wire. Somewhat similar to this device was another machine (*charkh*) which could make rope measuring a thousand yards (*gaz*) within a short period of time.¹⁵⁴

Our observer visited a brewery where he noticed the results of the introduction of machines in the production of porter or "beer", an alcoholic beverage made from barley. In this industry too the British used various devices (*charkh*) that they called machines (*mashin*) and which were operated with steam power (*bukhar ab*). It was an extensive industry where different types of wheels and machines were used at different stages in the preparation of porter. Talib carefully noted how steam was generated from water and moved the machines. Still the machines could not work on their own; thus, there were for example fifty-two people who worked in the brewery of Robert Clive, an acquaintance of the author. The owner of the brewery informed Talib that if they were not using steam power to move the machines, twenty-five horses would be required for the job, and since the same animals could not be employed every day, an extra twenty-five horses would be needed also. The expenses involved in the provision of fodder for the horses and the maintenance of their keepers would be high and so would be the prices of the porter produced this way. At present its price was two *anas* for half a kilogram (*asar*), and already people were complaining of its high cost; he could not imagine what the situation would be like otherwise.¹⁵⁵

Like Itisam, Abu Talib noticed the existence of mills (*asiya*) and commented that these were wind-mills (*asiya bad*) for the most part while there also existed some water-

¹⁵⁴ Abu Talib narrated that a famous anecdote that someone prepared a silver wire which could be stretched between London and Windsor which covered a distance of nineteen miles. Cf. *Ibid.*, ff. 119a.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 119a-b.

mills (*asiya ab*). He observed that mills of these two kinds were so numerous in Briain that no one there would have heard of hand-mills (*asiya dast*) except of small ones used to grind coffee (*qahwa*).¹⁵⁶

The use of hydraulic machines to supply London with water from the Thames was a novelty to Abu Talib. He also mentioned the distribution of water in private houses, and the use of pipes to take water to the second and third floors in buildings. Due to these water-drawing techniques, the British had completely dispensed with the earlier method of drawing water from wells with buckets; in fact, Talib commented, no one in Britain knew of the words bucket (*dalw*) and rope (*risman*). Abu Talib emphasized the fact that the British were using mechanical devices to perform minor routine jobs. They had invented devices to squeeze out the oil from the olives, to roast meat chops (*seekh kababs*), to grind wheat, rice, corn, meat and even onions.¹⁵⁷

Printing was an invention which was admired by all our authors. It was considered the most powerful instrument for the wider dissemination of ideas and knowledge. Itisam was the first to observe it and claimed that it had promoted literacy in England. Abu Talib as well as Mir Husain and Latif were also aware of the great effect of this invention. In the words of Abu Talib:

Printing (*chapagari kitab*) was an important invention and it was the means for the dissemination of learning (*nashr i ulum*) and the proliferation of ideas. It helped scribes (*katiban*) to avoid making errors in copying. The methods of printing were known to Indian people, as printing was carried out in Calcutta also.¹⁵⁸

The art of engraving that allowed copies of a picture to be produced at will, was not known in India though, and our author described meticulously every step in the process.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 118a.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 120a.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 120a-b. Abu Talib was referring to lithographic presses which were established in Calcutta before he visited Europe. During his unemployed days in Calcutta he published the *diwan i Hafiz*, one of the earliest printed editions of the Persian poet Hafiz's collection.

Pictures that had been drawn by hand, that is paintings, cost around thirty or forty guineas, while their engraved counterparts could be purchased for even half a guinea.¹⁵⁹

A latest innovation in the paper industry also came to the attention of our acute observers. European scientists had invented a device, (*charkh alat*, literally "wheel and instrument"), for making paper from all kinds of raw material; and its breadth could be stretched in an area of twenty yards. Recently scientists had succeeded in producing paper from dried barley straws; this paper was ten times more durable and fine in comparison to the ordinary type of paper made earlier.¹⁶⁰

Abu Talib made some general remarks on British industrial products and craftsmanship. British goods were the result of technical ingenuity, skilled workmanship, organised planning and the use of the various instruments and machines that our author had already described. Everything could be a cause of bewilderment for the potential observer, but if one visited a factory (*karkhana*), one would be particularly struck by the feeling that the tasks performed there could be carried out by anyone. What our writer implied was that mechanization had immensely minimized the need for particular skill. Thus, workers in factories needed no specialised scientific training: the various instruments and machinery had rendered their jobs extremely simple and easy. It seems from Talib's analysis of British industrialization that he considered it the product of uneducated empiricism. More than that, probably, our expositor had at the back of his mind the Indian situation, where much depended on the skill of artisans. He added that tasks where manual power and human skill were still necessary, were performed by

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 120b.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 119b.

artisans with the aid though of various machines. For example, tasks which required a sharp eye-sight were performed with the aid of magnifying glasses (*ainak*).¹⁶¹

Our observer noted another special characteristic of the British industry, the division of labour in it. Complex and intricate jobs were distributed among the workers (*kargaran*) and the artisans. Abu Talib cited an example from the production of needles. It had been heard that a single needle passed through ten hands before being finished and that the same held in the process of the making of a clock. The various parts of the clock were made by separate artisans and were then bought by someone else; after assembling the various parts, the clocks were ready to be sold in the market. Our observer concluded that since so much attention, thought, insight, research and manual labour went into the different stages in the production of a single item, it was to be expected that the final products would be pieces of real craftsmanship.¹⁶²

Talib wrote that the British excelled in iron-work, wood-work and the processing of leather, and were famous for their excellence in these not only in Europe but throughout the world. Other famous industrial products of Britain included clocks and watches (*saat*), satin and silk of various sorts and dyed clothes which were coarse and did not last very long. The existing varieties of glassware, the paintings, guns, pistols, swords, knives and scissors, were nothing but a source of bewilderment for our observers.¹⁶³ European watches became an important item of export to India in the Mughal period and were also described by Itisam in his writings. He noticed their varied kinds such as for example the small ones that wealthy people carried in their pockets. People who did not carry watches (*ghari*) were considered poor. There were also large-

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 120b-121a. The word *ainak* in specific usage refers to spectacles, but here he was referring to magnifying glasses.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, f. 121a.

¹⁶³ *Op. cit.*

sized watches, clocks as the British called them, which were hung on walls (*ghari diwar gir*) and usually in the kitchens of the houses of affluent families for the servants to notice in the performance of their daily housework. Large-sized clocks were mounted on road-sides, market-places or the entrances of buildings and parks. Itisam alluded to the sun-dials which he must have seen in Oxford and approved of them highly. Itisam noted with disapprobation the very different attitudes of the Indian upper classes who employed servants to announce the time. He writes:

In this country, the affluent people had installed the *naubat ghari* [the name of the time reckoning device]. They employed servants to strike the kettle drum at stated hours, while villagers and commoners had no idea of the time of day and night.¹⁶⁴

Abd al Latif also observed that watches had an extensive market in Europe but were not that popular in India. Watches (*saat*) made of iron and copper were sold as if they were valuable pearls. Europeans regulated their daily routine for writing, horseback riding, sleeping and eating with the help of watches. There were several varieties of watches and perhaps one could not enumerate them all. Almost every day Europeans were inventing new types of watches, beautiful and elegant ones. Latif reported that such watches were bought by the Indian aristocracy as objects of curiosity and mentioned in this context that he had seen an "astronomical" clock that belonged to an aristocratic gentleman in Calcutta.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 181b-182b.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Tuhfat al alam*, f. 156b. Latif described: "Its dial was about one span, nine inches (*wajab*) and had eight pins, each one named after the planets of the solar system, which were inscribed upon it, namely the saturn, the jupiter, the mars, the venus, the mercury and the moon and the planet earth which formed part of the modern solar system, and the comets, as they were also planets according to European scientists. Each one of these pins moved according to the movement of the particular planet. The dial (*aqrab*) of that clock which signified the planet earth showed the hours and minutes; days and night like any other watch. It made a special sound of *kook kook* once, the seconds (*baru*) were shown in degrees and minutes were written on the dial, each one had its movement as had been laid down by the astronomers".

7.9 *Scientific Advances and Society*

So far in this chapter we have presented our authors' perceptions of the technological developments in this period of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Perhaps this was also the first example of such perceptions in the Indo-Persian literature. Most of the time our observers discussed the process of industrialization as an isolated phenomenon without discerning the interrelationship between the industrialization itself and the scientific achievements that materialised in that era. Answers to very subtle questions should not be expected granted the limited availability of data. Questions such as whether our observers were aware of any connection between the scientific developments and the ongoing Industrial Revolution were not clearly articulated. Still our authors realised that European scientists were applying the principles of modern mechanics (*jarr i saqil*) in iron foundries, the shipbuilding industry and also in navigational techniques. Abu Talib judged that the underlying reason for the mechanization that was taking place in Britain was the absence of cheap labour and pointed out the main characteristics of industrialization: what had hitherto been performed with the help of human and animal power, a practice that was still prevalent in India, was now carried out in Britain by means of water and steam power.

Abu Talib saw the results of industrialization, which had greatly increased productivity and introduced mass production at lower rates (*arzan*) with the aid of various technical devices. Thus, the prices of commodities were greatly reduced although Britain remained an expensive country. Such interests as the pursuit of profit led to the contemporary technological innovations and transformed the nature of the emerging economy into a capitalist one. Our author was simply not aware of various theories of modern economics. Still, some of his remarks on the division of labour echo Adam Smith's views on the subject. Talib must have heard these in the company of his British

friends, the majority of whom belonged to the middle class among whom such ideas were fairly widespread.

One may wonder why in spite of his great appreciation of the technological progress and the resulting material prosperity in Britain, Abu Talib did not suggest the assimilation of such developments in India. Historians of Mughal India agreed unanimously on the lack of an innovative spirit in that period; such a spirit, on the other hand, characterized Western Europe in particular from the seventeenth century onwards and had most strikingly manifested itself in the fields of science and technology. The lack of an innovative spirit in Mughal India led to techno-scientific stagnation and was one of the reasons of the decline of the Mughal Empire as well as of the other two great empires of the East, the Ottomans and the Safwids.¹⁶⁶ Abu Talib was the product of such a cultural milieu, an aristocrat who appreciated skill-intensive products more than goods which had been manufactured with the use of labour-effective devices. Mass-production, another basic result of mechanization, was noted but not appreciated. The concept that lesser affluent sections of society should be equally benefited was not well articulated in his mind. Furthermore, British industrial products could still not compete with Indian products such as the cotton of Dacca in the world market, until the British began dictating the markets by imposing restrictions.

7.10 Scientific Advances: Causes and Effects

A question that may arise from the preceeding discussion is why European ideas elicited such a favourable response from all our three major commentators on the subject. Muhammad Husain's attitude was of one who was thoroughly convinced. Abd al Latif

¹⁶⁶ Cf. M. Athar Ali, "The Passing of the Empire: The Mughal Case", *Modern Asian Studies*, 9, 3(1975), pp. 385-96.

became mystical and introspective towards the end of his exposition. More significantly perhaps, he emphasized man's insignificance and the limitations of his intellect and endeavours. His attitude also implied that there was no finality in the field of science. At the same time, his attitude was somewhat ambiguous also. On the one hand, he manifested a certain introspectiveness and adopted a mystical attitude, while on the other he tried to dispel some popular medieval notions connected with astrology and the sighting of comets, for example. He also rejected several Graeco-Arab notions in the light of the emerging European thought and ideas. Abu Talib, who remained open-minded, went to the extent of appropriating these mechanistic notions in his views on society. One very general explanation for the above enthusiasm could be that interest in scientific developments in Europe had been a traditional preoccupation of the Muslim learned world. In comparison to the scientific advances that were taking place in Europe, its artistic and literary achievements did not arouse much interest. This could probably be explained by the universal character of science as opposed to the culture-bound nature of the arts.

The heliocentric theory, and all that it implied, did not disturb our authors. This same theory took more than two hundred years to gain widespread acceptance among the educated elites in Europe. However, it has been shown that the reason for this disturbance with the new heliocentric system in Europe did not stem from its causing man to be displaced from his central position in the universe and making him appear less important in the scheme of things. For moralists and preachers man in himself was seen as a vile and worthless creature except in so far as he was ennobled by the love of God. Agreeably, for preachers and moralists the centre of the universe was not the most important but the the lowest and least significant of all the places where the dregs of the universe (*faeces mundi*) were to be found. Terrestrial matter was the most

imperfect and must therefore be at the greatest possible distance from the empyrean heaven. The Copernican system undoubtedly disturbed some people but not because it reduced man's importance in the universe but because it undermined his confidence in the power of reason. For many centuries the essential features of the traditional Aristotelian-Ptolemaic system had remained unchallenged and had been accepted with complete certainty. Then, suddenly ordinary man had found himself confronted with a rival system he was incapable to prove or [§]disprove. Instead of the earlier sense of demonstrative certainty he now had to content himself with doubt and hypothesis. It was this sense of uncertainty which was conducive to melancholy. Eventually, the works of Descartes and Newton helped to restore man's faith in the power of reason, but until then, the loss of intellectual security remained a cause of discomfort for many.¹⁶⁷

The case of our Indian writers is different. They did not become aware of the Copernican theory alone. Its religious implications raised the following question: if the earth was a planet and therefore a celestial body which partook of the pure nature of the heavens, how could the heavens, which in turn must partake of the nature of the planetary earth, with all its evils and imperfections, be a suitable place for God? Rather, our authors were met with the fully developed world-view of the eighteenth century scientists and educated men. This new science of the post-Restoration England, and which culminated in the natural philosophy of Isaac Newton and his devotees, was consciously religious in interpretation and implication. At the same time it had also been conceived in the framework of certain combined social and political ideas. Newtonianism was a system of natural theology that explained in a clear manner the relation between God and nature. The concepts of God, space and time were intimately related to Newton's philosophy. The leitmotiv of Newtonianism was that the universe

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CF. A.J. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge Mass., 1936).

had been created and was maintained by God and His laws. Galileo mentioned that God's Word could not ultimately contradict God's work. The Newtonian theory encountered little opposition in England: rather, the mechanical-theological world-view that was based on the work of Newton enjoyed considerable popularity in the eighteenth century. The physio-theological system of Newton was accepted not only by scientists but by the Anglican Church also. For scholars of Newton's as well as later generations, his discovery of certain immutable laws that governed the physical world was not simply a positive proof for the existence of a Divine omnipresence and Will which regulated, in accordance with providential design, an otherwise anarchic nature; it was, at the same time, a striking revelation of the order and harmony which God had ordained for a Christian society and polity. As more recent studies have shown, the Newtonian world-view was adopted by the Anglican Church to support its own version of liberal Protestantism and its vision of social and economic order that was both Christian and capitalist. Newton was not only a symbol of Enlightenment, his name stood as a rallying cry for radical politics and social reform. Under the Hannoverians, the Newtonian version of liberal Protestantism prevailed against its opponents both from outside and inside the Church. The Newtonian version of the Natural world provided irrefutable justification for public order and controlled self-interests that were to be sanctioned and maintained by the Church and State.¹⁶⁸ These facts also explain our authors' excessive preoccupation with Newton. Our writers' sources were invariably high-placed Company administrators, the majority of whom were known for their Whiggish views. Abd al Latif's appreciation of Newton could not be compared to that of any other individual person throughout his writings. A rather obvious reason for this appreciation seems to

¹⁶⁸ Newtonian ideology as political radicalism is the theme of Margaret Jacob's *Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689-1720* (Ithaca, 1976). Also, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemason, and Republicans* (London, 1981).

be the fact that Newton had succeeded in solving the cosmic problem and had showed that the motion of other planets was subject to the same laws as the motion of earth. Perhaps there was no other problem of such cosmic significance and therefore no scientist comparable to Newton. The elaboration of the Newtonian universe and the development of physical dynamics constituted the most spectacular achievements of eighteenth century science. The breathtaking magnitude of Newton's cosmology made Newton something of a national hero. Newton became a prominent figure in Europe before his death. Not only had he accomplished unbelievable feats in physical sciences, but he had also come to symbolise progress comprehending all parts of nature, which was, paradoxically, both infinitely immense and much more complex than had been previously imagined. The science of the era of Enlightenment was Newtonian physics while the philosophy of the era was Newtonian in nature; this was true not only of Britain, Newton's homeland, but of France also, the centre of Enlightenment.

Compared to other parts of the Eastern world, India's response to the technical progress and the scientific advances in Europe did not come very late. Japan responded to the new developments towards the last decades of the eighteenth century, when Shiba Kokan (1747?-1818) attempted to popularize the Copernican theory through his printed works. The acquaintance of Japan with the new theories did not evoke any bitter ideological opposition in Japan except in certain Buddhist circles.¹⁶⁹ In Turkey the scientific discoveries of the West did not arouse any response as there was no mention of Copernicus in the contemporary Ottoman literature until the end of the seventeenth

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Shigeru Nakayama, "Copernicanism in Japan", in Jerzy Dobvzcki, ed., *The Reception of Copernicus' Heliocentric Theory* (Tarun, Poland, 1973). The book is the proceedings of a symposium organised by the Nicolas Copernicus Committee of the International Union of the History and philosophy of science. It contains excellent papers on the reception of Copernican ideas in different parts of world, but no paper on India.

century, and then only fleetingly.¹⁷⁰ Such theories were not widely spread among Turkish scholars until the mid-nineteenth century.

The existence of such an amazing detail of knowledge of the scientific achievements of Europe raises the question why Indian society itself witnessed no breakthrough, despite the existence of such a well-informed Indian intelligentsia. Among possible explanations for this phenomenon may be the fact that our authors' writings represent narrative discourses only rather than an assimilation of Europe's scientific ideas and discoveries. One might then argue that narrations and translations have always been the first stage in the transfer of scientific knowledge as was the case in the early days of the Islamic civilization under the Abbasids. Even in Europe these new ideas were at first understood only by the educated minority of the population. The difference lay in the fact that that minority was a dynamic element in its contemporary society and exercised profound influence on such aspects of that society as its religion, government, economic life and literature, all of which were also affected by the new science. This was not the case though in India where the need to assimilate these ideas beyond merely describing them arose later.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Albert H. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (1988), p. 41.

¹⁷¹ It was the task of the great Muslim reformer Sayyid Ahmad Khan who attempted to reconcile the modern sciences with the revealed truth by pointing out to similar parallels in the early days of Islam, when the *Ulama* reconciled the Greek learning with the scriptures of Islam. Interestingly, Sayyid Ahmad first rejected the heliocentric theory in 1847, but later amended his views by providing reasons for discarding Greco-Arab sciences in favour of modern European sciences. The latter, he argued, were based on observations, while the former were merely analogical and hypothetical. Cf. C.W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (Delhi, 1978).

8 POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN BRITAIN

Almost all our writers, those who travelled to Britain, as well as those who compiled their accounts on the Indian soil, manifested an interest in the British political ideas and institutions. Significant accounts of those subjects came from the pen of Abd al Latif and Ahmad bin Muhammad. Though Latif and Ahmad never visited Europe, they were successful in obtaining information from textual as well as oral sources. Ghulam Husain and Murtaza Husain were also aware of the basic ideas and principles that governed the contemporary British political system. Issues that our writers' accounts focused on included the historical evolution of political institutions in Britain, the rise of absolute monarchy, the circumstances leading to the establishment of a constitutional government, the rights and duties of the constitutional monarch, the monarch's relationship with the Parliament, the issue of parliamentary jurisdiction, the role of the Cabinet, and, finally, the question of the constitutional freedom and equality that the British enjoyed. These writers were conscious of the political decline of the Mughal Empire and the subsequent political chaos and anarchy in India; these circumstances led them to attempt a comparison between the constitutional monarchy of Britain and the absolute sovereignty of the Mughals.

8.1 Historical Background

Before we concentrate on the ways in which these writers defined the powers and functions of the various organs of State, it would be interesting to focus on their

perceptions of the evolution of the British political institutions. Our writers' knowledge of the British historical past taught them that the British were simply enjoying at the time the fruits of their struggles through history. In their attempts to trace the history of England our informants displayed a fairly good sense of chronology. They described the four hundred years of Roman rule till 450 A.D., the decline of the Roman empire, the subsequent struggles and, finally, the conquest of England by the Anglo-Saxons during the reign of Augustus in 597 A.D. Ahmad's narrative was relatively detailed and featured a list of kings from the Roman period up to George III, the reigning British monarch.¹ Structurally, the British society gradually emerged from its barbarous past to form some sort of an organized settlement; it then moved on towards the formation of an agro-pastoral society.

It was common knowledge to all our writers that the existing form of kingship was the result of historical growth after England emerged from the age of feudalism. Prior to the rise of a strong and absolute monarchy and the establishment of a well-regulated government, there prevailed anarchy and chaos.² Itisam stated that British political institutions and ideas were the aftermath of political changes which, in turn, stemmed from the changing social circumstances as did also the country's history as a whole. He wrote that at first England was not unified and thus lacked an absolute and powerful ruler; it was a feudal society dominated by petty chieftains (*muluk ut tawaiif*). He compared the political anarchy of feudal Britain with the eighteenth century Indian

¹ For a list of British monarchs and significant historical events of their respective reigns, cf. *Mirat al Ahwal*, ff. 129a-32b.

² Our literati emphasised that England had successively been ruled by foreign people, the Romans and the Anglo-Saxons, who settled there permanently. At the time of the Roman conquest, England was inhabited by tribes which had primitive organizations and institutions. They worshipped idols and they did not have any knowledge of the world around them. Each tribe had a leader whose duties and responsibilities were to protect the life and property of his people. They were constantly at war with each other on one pretext or other, fighting with their crude weapons and methods. Under the Anglo-Saxons, these small principalities were united.

regional potentates and *rajadoms*. British history witnessed much bloodshed because of the country's religious differences with the rest of Europe. England was a small country in comparison to other European states and, to make matters worse, its petty rulers had continuous feuds among themselves. Because of these internal weaknesses and the lack of a unified political authority, England faced foreign invasions and was governed by foreign rulers for a considerable period of time; first by the Romans and then the Danes. Foreign rulers were driven out of the country as the previously divided petty chiefs gradually united against the common enemy. Nonetheless, the numerous monuments that have survived to this day bear testimony to an earlier alien rule in Britain. William the conqueror, according to Itisam, was the first independent sovereign of Britain although he, too, originally came from France.³

Itisam perceived a class-struggle in the British society between the upper classes, which included the earlier ruling elite, the nobility and ministers, the intelligentsia and scholars, whom he called *ashraf* (*qaum i shurfa*) and the lower orders of the society (*arzal*). In this struggle the hitherto underprivileged and marginalised social strata succeeded in gaining certain concessions and positions in the administration which were earlier exclusively enjoyed by the upper classes. Nevertheless, the traditionally privileged groups continued to occupy the higher echelons of State administration. Itisam had the case of India in mind to illustrate his point: white man who came from the lower classes and served in the Company's administration were not promoted beyond the rank of a sergeant or a sergeant-major.⁴

³ For an sketch of the British historical past, cf. *Shigarf nama*, ff. 122a-7b. Itisam did not provide a list of all British kings, but others after him, in a stereotyped format. The trend was set by Murtaza Husain; cf. *Hadiqat al aqalim*, pp. 529-32. Ahmad's list is comparatively detailed.

⁴ For the perception of the class struggle in the British society, cf. *Shigarf nama*, ff. 122a-7b.

British society went through several stages of growth and change as its people sought to formulate rules, regulations and laws to govern their country. Their contemporary era of prosperity, wealth and riches could be traced back to earlier efforts to improve their lives as well as those of their countrymen.⁵ The author of *Shigarfnama* further examined the fact that British political institutions evolved through successive historical developments. Following the union of the petty chieftains for the benefit of the common people (*rifah i khaliq*), four powerful bodies and groups emerged from amongst the leaders of the earlier chieftaincies; these new groups formed the nucleus of the administrative force of the country and comprised the judiciary, the financial and bureaucratic elite, the body of advisors, and the military elite. The first group concerned itself with the task of the dispensation of justice (*adalat*); the second group consisted of accountants and clerks for the assessment and realization of revenues, and included treasurers (*khazanchi*), paymasters (*bakhshi*), and superintendents (*darogha*); the third group comprised of administrators who looked after the affairs of the kingdom (*mamlekat*); finally, the military elite, recruited from the ranks of both the navy and the army, was responsible for the protection of the country from invasions. It was these four groups, and not the king, as Itisam realised, who in reality conducted the affairs of the State.⁶

Other writers also displayed an awareness of the historical evolution of the British political institutions. They were conscious of the rise of nation-states in Europe following the weakening of feudal structures in the sixteenth century.⁷ Abd al Latif pointed out that even after the rise of the nation-state, the king of England remained to

⁵ *Op. cit.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 128b.

⁷ For the circumstances that led to constitutional monarchy, cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, ff. 140-1b.

some extent an absolute ruler, a despot like those of other nations. This situation necessitated further modifications in the political structure of the country. It was in the seventeenth century, we are told, that revolutionary changes occurred in the British political structure; such changes resulted in a series of transformations as the State was regularized and the power of the monarch curtailed. Our authors manifested some comprehension of the intellectual social milieu that made such changes possible. The rules and regulations pertaining to statecraft (*qawaid i saltanat*) had been defined and laid down by scholars and philosophers. They were considered to have played an extremely significant role in providing alternative principles for governing the country. The British monarch was himself a man of philosophical disposition and favoured the re-organisation of the existing administrative and governing apparatus. According to Latif, philosophers and scholars spent years considering the issue of the king's powers and concluded that the king should indeed be divested of unilateral powers. A specific sum equivalent to a *crore* of rupees was allotted to the king and was considered sufficient for the expenditures of the Crown; separate provisions were made for each of the royal princes and relations of the sovereign. The king agreed to this arrangement and relinquished some of his powers. Thus, he retained for example his prerogative to distribute patronage and largesse; on the other hand, he waived his right to inflict punishment on his subjects: he could no longer inflict death or injury even among his own servants, unless the judges ordered such punishment. Indeed, if he so wished, the king could every year intercede on behalf of three persons condemned to death or exile.⁸

⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 140-1b. Five hundred *tumans* of silver were thought to be the equivalent of a *crore* rupees. For a similar account, cf. *Mirat al Ahwal*, f. 133.

8.2 The Crown

All our authors noted that while monarchy in Britain was hereditary in nature, it was regulated by well-defined laws of primogeniture, the eldest son succeeding his father to the throne and later passing his office and power to his own first-born son. If a king died without issue, the throne passed to the brother next in line or the eldest daughter, if there were no male children; in the latter case, the husband of the heiress to the throne had no jurisdiction over matters of State.⁹ It was common knowledge to all our writers that in the British political system the power was shared by the judiciary and the executive and legislative bodies. In the words of Latif:

After the king relinquished some of his earlier power, the founders of the State divided it between the king, the nobility (*umara*) and the populace (*riaya*) in such a way that whenever it was necessary to attend to a major political matter, no decision could be reached until all the three bodies (*firqa*) were in agreement.¹⁰

Ahmad bin Muhammad made similar remarks on the evolution of the English constitutional government but he held that the power was shared among the king (*padshah*), the ministers responsible and the Members of Parliament (*ashab i bar millat*). The members of all these three groups came from the upper social strata and were devoted to the welfare of their country and the common people. Ahmad identified the status of the Members of Parliament with that of the *ulama* and the nobles in the Islamic State: 'those who bind and loose' (*ahl al hall wa'l aqd*).¹¹ Abu Talib considered the British political system as the very source of the country's power and wealth and provided a clear and detailed exposition of the way it worked. According to Abu Talib,

⁹ For a clear exposition of the law of primogeniture, cf. *Mirat al Ahwal*, f. 133b, *Tuhfat al Alam*, f. 141, *Masir i Talibi*, f. 131, *Shigarf nama*, f. 129a, and *Hadiqat al qalim*, p. 526.

¹⁰ Cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, ff. 140-1b.

¹¹ Cf. *Mirat al Ahwal*, f. 133a.

the British governing body comprised of the King, the Prince of Wales, the Ministers and the Parliament. Officially, the king remained the supreme Head of State.¹²

All commentators paid special attention to the position of the British monarch and his rights and duties to his subjects. Itisam and Abu Talib had the opportunity of personally meeting George III and the Queen. Both the writers were fascinated by the royal sight and pageantry,¹³ and underneath the apparent show, the royal ceremonies and rituals, they were both able to appreciate the stature of the British constitutional monarchy. Although there existed no term equivalent to that of 'constitutional monarch' in our authors' vocabulary, they, nevertheless, succeeded in providing a good description of the above institution. They defined it as a system where the monarch had no intention or power to override either the law or the will of the Parliament. Abu Talib realised that the king was the principal element in the British political system. He specifically mentioned his visit to the king and queen and described George III as a courteous, polite and well-behaved person.¹⁴ According to our author, the king lacked any streak of absolutism and despotism. He had a high sense of duty and responsibility towards his subjects and remained occupied in the pursuit of the well-being of his people. He personally inspected the state of agriculture in his country, visited schools and colleges and enquired into the condition of education and the progress of pupils.

Itisam, who visited Europe prior to the French Revolution, had a high degree of appreciation for the British constitutional monarchy. "The British system of government", writes Itisam, "was based on unique laws (*qawanin*), rules and regulations, which could not be found in any part of the seven climes". He differentiated clearly

¹² Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 131a.

¹³ For a portrait of George III, cf. *Shigarf nama*, f. 127b.

¹⁴ For an account of the meeting with king George III and the Queen Charlotte, a description of the Queen's apartment and the heir apparent's residence, cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 131.

between the sovereignty of British kings and the sovereignty of kings in other countries: in foreign lands kings were for the most part absolute monarchs, free to enjoy their power and privileges without any checks or balance. If such kings were just (*adil*) and possessed an innate sense of rectitude and other commendable virtues, if their ministers and nobles were well united and in agreement with each other, the affairs of the State were bound to be conducted smoothly. If, on the other hand, such autocratic kings were unjust, oppressive and surrounded with a dissenting nobility, the gradual decline of the State's prosperity was imminent. In such cases, the peasantry faced ruin and the entire country was threatened with desolation and revolt. The contemporary political condition in India was an example of such mal-administration.¹⁵ Itisam acknowledged the fact that given the regulations, traditions and customs of England there was little chance of such dispute, rebellion and disturbance (*fasad*) arising there. The laws had been laid down with the consent of the people (*qaum*) and there was little possibility of the State affairs falling in disarray. Thus, any form of mal-administration was inconceivable in Britain.¹⁶ The supremacy of the British nation over other nations was a proof of its well-regulated State.

Itisam posited that the British people appointed as their kings persons who possessed such virtues as an agreeable disposition, bravery, courage, a strong intellect and were either of noble descent or had princely blood. The common people paid respect and honour to such a king and obeyed his just commands and orders. They accepted him as their sovereign in accordance with the rules and regulations which had been laid down with the consent of the populace. If a king ever disregarded the established usages and customs of the country and failed to observe the existing laws,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 127a-8b.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*

his subjects could refuse to obey him.¹⁷ Thus, British kings had no authority to infringe the laws nor could they act in an arbitrary and uncontrolled way. The institution of kingship was established to perform certain specified functions, namely to maintain the peace and protect the country from war, dispense justice and safeguard property. The king would act as the guardian of his subjects and a trustee of the State.¹⁸ Itisam emphasised that the British monarch could rule only with the good-will of the people. They had the right to depose their king and have him replaced, if ever it was discovered that a king was not performing his duties with honesty or that he was oppressive and unjust. Itisam further pointed out that the king could wage war and conclude peace with the consent of his people, the nobility, and the men in authority.¹⁹

Itisam conveyed the idea that the monarch in Britain was to a certain extent nothing more than a figure-head. The British did not obey the king but the law (*qanun*) as that had been laid down. It was the law that reigned supreme. The power of the monarch was limited by the existence of laws and his required consultation with ministers. Itisam wished to explain the source of the weakness or the strength of different societies, and more specifically the role of the State in society. According to him, Britain's prosperity was the result of well-laid rules and regulations which governed the State and were founded on justice and freedom. British monarchy was based upon principles which were healthy and beneficial for the people; the populace in Britain enjoyed a higher degree of freedom and social equality in their lives than their Indian counterparts.²⁰ Itisam drew a clear contrast between India and Britain; unlike

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 129a.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*

¹⁹ For the limited power of the monarch, cf. *Ibid.*, ff. 128b-9a and ff. 136a-7a.

²⁰ For the constitutional freedom, cf. the chapter on "Society" in the present work. Also *Shigarf nama*, ff. 136a-7a.

Britain, India lacked such well-laid rules and regulations and was consequently facing ruin and economic decline.

Itisam was indeed at pains to convince his readers of the advantages of a well-regulated monarchy. Later writers such as Abu Talib, Abd al Latif and Ahmad bin Muhammad, appreciated the British constitutional monarchy, but what distinguished Itisam's account was that he drew a comparison between the British monarchy and the Mughal sovereignty in order to point out the weaknesses of the latter. According to Itisam, one of the most important reasons for the decline of the Mughal empire lay in its absolutism or in the absence of the law of primogeniture; such deficiencies led to frequent wars of succession, factionalism among the nobility, oppression of the peasantry, rebellions instigated by the chieftains and the rise of regional powers under the provincial governors (*subedar*). The chaos that followed such civil strife precipitated the disintegration of a powerful empire and the decline of a country's prosperity. Autocratic rulers were free to adopt any policies with no concern as to whether they were just or appropriate. Such rulers were later succeeded by their sons irrespective of whether the heirs-apparent possessed the necessary qualifications for a king. It often happened that other brothers incited revolts to usurp the throne. This fear of rebellion usually resulted in imprisonment and occasionally in murder, too; sometimes sons with a claim to the throne would kill their father, the king, or vice versa. Disloyal and deceitful ministers would usually take advantage of such precarious circumstances and take the reigns of the State's administration in their hands. Itisam specifically quoted Ghaziuddin's inhuman treatment of Shah Alam as an example of mal-treatment of a sovereign.²¹

²¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 130a-b.

In praising the constitutional monarchy, Itisam echoed in reality the views of political thinkers such as John Locke and J.J. Rousseau without actually mentioning them or using the terms that the thinkers themselves had employed such as for example 'popular sovereignty' and 'social contract'. Locke's ideas, as interpreted by the Whig aristocrats, became the bulwark of the propertied conservatism of the landed and mercantile classes. These views were fairly popular among the middle-classes of Britain with whom Itisam came in contact during his sojourn in London, Oxford and Edinburgh. Itisam admirably mirrored the views of his contemporaries in this respect. Thus, he assumed that people in Britain had the power to depose their kings should they be found acting contrary to the trust laid on them. What Itisam failed to realise was that these were merely theories that were popular among the political visionaries of the Age of Enlightenment but which were not specific to the British constitution as such. The reason for the above concern on the part of our writers was that as the Company continued to exert its influence and involvement in Indian affairs, its officials made conscious efforts to negate the legitimacy of the Mughal monarchy and replace it with their own. Itisam, as well as other writers, echoed the views of the Company's officials in attributing the decline of the Mughal empire to the moral laxity of its rulers and in minimising the importance of the emperor as the sovereign of the State. Paradoxically enough, Company officials at the same time portrayed the Company as the representative body of the king of Britain in India, as an integral part, that is, of the British Crown and not merely a mercantile organisation.

Abu Talib knew that the sovereignty of the British monarchy was limited in the sense that the Parliament checked kings and did not allow them to be autocratic. He greatly appreciated the limited royal power viz-a-viz the judiciary. He remarked that the king had divested himself of all his authority over judges who then became independent

of any pressure exerted by royal or parliamentary circles. The king had no right to remove any judges even if they had decided against him. Like Itisam he noted that the king could not transgress the existing laws (*qanun*) of the State. He further emphasised that the king was the supreme commander of the armed forces and that with the exception of the king no one, not even members of the nobility, kept any retainers. To sum up his point and show that this was indeed an extreme example of a monarch with limited powers, Abu Talib stated that should any State matter be referred for further consideration and should the king fail to consult the Parliament over the said matter or should the king display any opposition to what the Parliament considered to be correct, it could lead to a revolt by the common people. Consequently, such a matter could be thrown into jeopardy.²² Therefore, the king administered his ruling in consultation (*mushawarat*) with the two Houses of Parliament: the House of Lords (*majlis i amiran*) and the House of Commons (*majlis i umdat ur riaya*). No decree or law could be issued by the king without the prior consent of the two Houses of Parliament. Such a perfect balance had been struck between the different organs of government that in spite of disputes, resignations of ministers or occasional illnesses of monarchs, the actual governing of the State would always continue undisturbed and united within its well-defined compartments. Abu Talib cited the example of William Pitt's (1759-1806) resignation in 1801 over the question of the separation of the Roman Catholic Church; William Pitt who had been a successful Prime Minister for over seventeen years resigned because of certain crucial matters of State.²³ Five other ministers resigned along with Pitt at a time when England was at war with France and the king's health was rather poor. In spite of the resignation of the Prime Minister, the ongoing war with

²² *Op. cit.*

²³ *Ibid.*, f. 131. Abu Talib seems to be unaware of the reasons of Pitt's resignation, although he knew of the problems in Ireland.

France and the neurosis of George III, the institutions of government continued to function almost as usual. The system did not collapse, although no official work could be accomplished for about two months without the signature of the king. After the king's recovery the administration of the various affairs of the State resumed as usual without any disturbance. Such incidents, according to Abu Talib, testified to the stability of the British system of government.

Ahmad bin Muhammad had at his disposal textual as well as oral sources in writing his account of the British government. He used information available in *Tuhfat al Alam* and *Masir i Talibi*. Perhaps more in order to satisfy his own intellectual curiosity, he discussed the nature of British government with Sir John Shore, the then Governor-General of India. He was informed by Shore that there existed no difference between the subject and the monarch, the ruler and the ruled, in the courts of law (*darbar i adalat*) in England. Any subjects could file a suit against their monarch and judges decided cases related to the monarchy like any other ordinary cases.²⁴

Ahmad did not whole-heartedly endorse the fact that in the case of a breach of conduct, the king could be summoned publicly by the judicial officials and have to answer for his actions in the presence of his subjects. He agreed that it was in the interests of his subjects that a king should not be above the law but held that such a kingship held little charm for the king himself. In fact, according to Ahmad, kingship as it existed in Iran and Turkey was superior to monarchy in Britain with its limited powers.²⁵ Ahmad referred explicitly to Abu Talib's appreciation of King George III as a virtuous, caring, and just monarch.²⁶ He, too, noted that the British monarch was

²⁴ Cf. *Mirat al Ahwal*, f. 133a. Ahmad narrated some popular anecdotes about George III, in order to explain that the king was bound by law like the common men.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 133b.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 133a.

bound by law and that he received a fixed income from the State. It was the Members of Parliament (*umdat ur riaya*), the councillors and ministers who decided on the amount of expenditure allowed for various functions such as the maintenance of the armed forces and the payment of the different officials, from the Royal Exchequer (*khazana i amira*); the king was treated just like any other salaried official of the State in this respect.²⁷ Ahmad, like other writers, was aware of the civil list provided to the king with revenue and routine expenditure. The king had to consult the ministers for any expenditure from the State Treasury funds. Like other writers, Ahmad emphasised the law of primogeniture as one of the underlying causes saving the State from civil strife, bloodshed and revolts by younger princes with ambitions to the throne. The heir-apparent had no control over State affairs during the lifetime of the king. Should a prince incite a revolt to usurp the throne, the military would not aid the rebel prince.

Murtaza Husain Bilgrami dealt with similar themes such as the advantages of a limited monarchy regulated by the law of primogeniture, the benefits of the existence of a representative body such as the Parliament, (House of Commons, *umdat ur riaya*, and the House of Lords *amiran i muazzam*), the ways the parliamentary system worked and equality before the law as it was guaranteed by the British constitution. His information was based on Jonathan Scott's Persian treatise written for Asafuddaulah, the Nawab-wazir of Awadh. The author seemed to emphasise the point that the powers of the Crown had been greatly curtailed in Britain. This measure was in the interests of both the State and the people.²⁸

²⁷ *Op. cit.*

²⁸ For an account of the British system of government, cf. *Hadiqat al Aqalim*, pp. 526-8.

8.3 *The Parliament*

All our authors were aware of the fact that the British king administered the government of the State in consultation with the two Houses of Parliament and that no decree could be issued by the king without their prior consent. The Parliament was a new institution for these Indian observers who could not offer an exact equivalent Persian term for it. They invariably transliterated the term 'parliament' into Persian at the same time all as they attempted to provide a near-Persian equivalent word for it. It was clear to them that the Parliament constituted of two Houses; the Upper House, the House of Lords, consisted of members of the British nobility and aristocracy; thus, its name *majlis i amiran*, the House of Nobles. Membership in the House of Lords was largely hereditary in nature and our writers perceived it as an essentially aristocratic assembly where an oligarchy of landed aristocracy prevailed. The majority of its members belonged to the ancient families of the landed classes and were descended from the old traditional families of Britain.

It was understood that the real power lay with the House of Commons. This House had a representative quality as its members were appointed by the people. Thus, the equivalent Persian term that was provided signified a representative body (*majlis i umdat ur riaya*) and its members were called *arbab i umdat ur riaya*, namely 'those who were the best among the populace'. Itisam equated the word parliament with the Persian term *khana i adalat*, and called it 'the House of Justice' and its members *arbab i adalat*. Abd al Latif preferred to call the Houses of Parliament *Khana i shura* and *Khana i mushawarat*; both these terms stood for 'House of Consultation'. Ahmad bin Muhammad provided a more exact Persian equivalent for 'parliament', namely *Majlis i bar i millat*. Almost all of the abovementioned Persian terms described the House of Commons as a consultative and representative body.

All our authors depicted the method of election of the Members of Parliament, the nature of the tenure of their office as well as their functions and duties. Latif writes that:

A very fine building had been put up near the royal palace, which had been named Parliament (*shura*) or the Houses of Parliament (*khana i shura*). Messages were sent to the people of the cities and the provinces of the whole kingdom that the population of each city and town should appoint their representatives (*wakil*), whomsoever they thought worthy of the office.²⁹

Latif further describes the manner in which the populace elected their representatives:

Men of importance in towns and villages alike asked citizens to decide whom they considered worthy to represent them. The people wrote upon a piece of paper the name of the preferred person. They collected all these and acted according to the decision of the majority; thus, they delegated the office in question to the person who had been voted by the majority of the subjects and dispatched him to the Capital. No one was appointed for more than seven years, after which period they elected new members.³⁰

Our author comments on the parliamentary system in an evocative manner:

Whenever such issues arose as for example the question of war or peace with a nation or the subsidy of an agricultural project or an army, the ministers submitted the matter for the king's consideration; the king then issued an order for all his Lords, the royal advisors and the representatives of the House of Commons to be present on a particular day in the Parliament. The king consulted the Members of Parliament as to the appropriate course of action and decisions were finally taken on the basis of a majority vote. If there was equality in votes, the king had the right to choose one course of action over another and his decision was approved without the possibility of amendment.³¹

According to Latif the advantages of such a system were numerous; for example whenever a project was decided upon, the populace willingly yielded its share in the funds raised for the realisation of that project. The king and the lords promoted the project in question to the maximum of their ability. There was no room for arguments and everyone was called upon to fulfil their commitment.³² Latif's account was evidently based on second-hand information and most probably it was Abu Talib who had informed Latif about the British system of government while the former was based in London.

²⁹ Cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, f. 141.

³⁰ *Op. cit.*

³¹ For the above quotation, cf. *ibid.*, f. 141.

³² *Op. cit.*

Abu Talib had the opportunity to visit the Parliament several times in the company of his British friends. Some of his companions such as Sir William Elford, Sir Charles Talbot, Sir John Macpherson, the former governor of Bengal, and Johnson who had served as *Bakhshi* at Lucknow, were themselves Members of Parliament. Abu Talib described the House of Commons as a vigorous and interesting assembly. He was mostly impressed by William Pitt's skill for eloquent oratory and articulation. Abu Talib postulated that the parliamentary system presented numerous advantages. In general it performed three major functions: it facilitated the collection of taxes for the government, supervised the bureaucratic apparatus of the State and, finally, it acted as a check on the authority of the king and the ministers.³³

In another passage Abu Talib commented briefly on the members of the House of Commons, the procedure through which they were elected and the range of duties and functions assigned to them. The Commons comprised of more than two hundred and fifty members, all of whom were elected representatives of the people (*umdat ur riaya*). Like Latif he noted that they were elected from the villages, towns and cities all over the kingdom for a set period of seven years on the basis of a majority vote.³⁴ Abu Talib like other writers knew that those elected to the House of Commons usually belonged to the upper social strata and the propertied classes of Britain; they often came from the landed aristocracy or the rising commercial class. They generally possessed statesmanship qualities, wisdom and prudence and he claimed that it was only such people that were elected by the populace to act as their representatives (*wakil*).³⁵

³³ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, ff. 133b-134a.

³⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, f. 141.

³⁵ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 140.

Abu Talib saw that it was the Commons' function to legislate, fix the level of taxes and, very importantly amongst their other duties, discuss the budget before its approval. They could approve the budget the first time it was submitted for discussion or they might revise and amend it before it was implemented and its burden fell upon the subjects (*riaya*). Like Latif he noted that issues of war and peace as well as all new projects had to meet with the approval of this representative body. Its members enjoyed full freedom of expression. Whatever the king, the nobility or the English intellectuals (*uqala*) considered beneficial to their country they proposed in Parliament. Once their proposals met with the approval of the Parliament, the responsibility of determining and identifying the sources of the necessary expenditure for the particular project fell on it also. The king and the nobles to see to it that approved projects were implemented. Upon completion of a project, the Parliament examined carefully the expenses incurred in the process of the implementation of the project; should it discover an excessive expenditure of money on a particular project or in its yearly budget (*salyana*), the Parliament could reduce future investment on specific projects. Thus, taxes levied by the Parliament were approved for both collection and spending. When the Parliament did not have any urgent tasks to perform or any major issues to debate they considered such matters as the prices of goods in the market and formulated laws (*qanun*) which were beneficial to the socio-economic life of the people.³⁶

Abu Talib realised that the Parliament was an extremely influential organ of the British government. It legislated on behalf of the State (*qawanin i riayasat*), controlled the commerce (*tijarat*) and regulated the judiciary. In fact, as our author emphasised, all the laws concerning all the aspects of the British society were laid down by this body. Penal laws too were not based on *shariat* and Divine ordinance (*ahkam i samawi*). Laws

³⁶ *Op. cit.*

were subject to revision in accordance with the changing demands of the era and the emergence of new circumstances. New penal laws were formulated in the light of the experience of past judicial decisions and the legislators could modify the severity of the existing laws and ordinances (*ahkam wa hudud*).³⁷

Itisam seems to have personally visited the Houses of Parliament while he was in London and was deeply impressed by the importance of this institution in the life of the British nation. However, he failed to distinguish between the Commons and the Lords. Like other writers Itisam provided a Persian translation of the term 'Houses of Parliament', or 'House of Justice' as he preferred to call it, as *khana i adalat*; its members he called 'the members of the House of Justice' (*arbab i adalat*). It was fairly clear to him that it was the Parliament which determined state policy, enacted laws and held the power to retain or remove judges and control the armed forces. He realised that British monarchs were merely the titular Heads of State and concluded that if the people were dissatisfied with their king, the Parliament had the power to replace him with another. He notes further that:

If anything new had to be accomplished for the benefit of the country, they sent an order to the villages, cities and towns notifying the people to this effect. Two individuals were called in from each and every city: one represented the upper (*ashraf*) and the other the lower classes (*arzal*). The British regarded the order of the Parliament (*hukm i adalat*) as supreme, something equal to the Revealed Book (*wahi asmani*). On the appointed day around two hundred people assembled, and if they could not decide matters unanimously, decisions were taken on the basis of a majority vote (*qurra*).³⁸

Itisam knew that the British monarch did not have any real power and yet he graphically described the ceremony and pomp displayed at the opening of the Parliament by the king. He seemed to have been in the House of Lords and described its seating arrangements. He also described the customary dress in the House of Lords, which he greatly admired. The power of the two Houses seems to have eluded our author who

³⁷ *Op. cit.*

³⁸ Cf. *Shigarfnama*, f. 135a.

was also not very clear about the executive and legislative bodies as well as the judiciary and rather equated the House of Lords to the courts of justice. This confusion prevailed in spite of his knowledge of the British criminal and civil laws.³⁹ Itisam writes:

The affairs of the State that were related to its government and finances (*mali wa mulki*) were the concern of this House. Twenty-four men were appointed with the consent of the people and came from both the upper and the lower classes. These individuals were distinguished for their wisdom, honesty and innate rectitude.⁴⁰

Perhaps he was alluding in this passage to the ministers of the State. The Cabinet discussed various bills, which should also meet with the approval of the king before being implemented, although the king had no effectual power to amend them. The British people had great faith in their Parliament and in the honesty and sincerity of their ministers. A Cabinet reshuffle was carried out every third or fourth year so that its members could not develop close ties with any particular social group. Itisam concluded that practices such as bribery and nepotism did not exist in England which was free from corruption.⁴¹

Ahmad bin Muhammad based his account on *Masir i Talibi* and *Tuhfat al Alam* besides dwelling on discussions with Sir John Shore. He also provided an accurate description of the parliamentary system and emphasised the representative nature of the Parliament. There were more than four hundred members, he writes, who were endowed with prudence, sagacity, a strong intellect and statecraft. They were devoted to the welfare of the populace and sought to enhance their public image by discharging their duties sensibly. They were chosen by the people to represent them for a term of seven years. They played an important role in public affairs and no decree could be passed

³⁹ For the description of the Parliament House, the houses of Lords and the seating arrangement in this house, cf. *ibid.*, ff. 132b-3a.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 132b.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, f. 134b.

unless most of them agreed on it. Whatever bills became laws were carefully written and recorded in English and other languages for the general knowledge of the people. Official injunctions were made known to the citizens so that the governing bodies could not take advantage of the common people's ignorance to oppress them.⁴²

Like all our authors Abu Talib and Ahmad bin Muhammad paid attention to the ministers of the State (*majlis i wuzara*). Ahmad considered them the pillars of the State, the people who held and exercised the real authority. They were chosen from among the Members of the Parliament and were accountable to the Houses. Both these expositors recognised that in reality the king's functions had been delegated to the Parliament and the Cabinet. Free discussion always preceded any decisions concerning affairs of the State. Ahmad emphasised that the ministers of the State had a sound practical knowledge, administrative skills and a good grasp of the management of public affairs.⁴³

Abu Talib was acquainted with a number of political figures, including ministers of State. He enumerated nine ministers and their functions carefully. According to him, the most important of all ministers in terms of power and duties was the Chancellor of the Exchequer (*wazir i khazana*); he was responsible for finance in the State besides representing the ruling party, the king and the nobility in Parliament.⁴⁴ Our writer considered the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (*wazir i amur i kharja*) as the second most important minister in the British Cabinet; the Secretary of State oversaw ambassadors and dealt with the foreign affairs of Britain.⁴⁵ Third in the ministerial

⁴² Cf. *Mirat al Ahwal*, ff. 134a-b.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, f. 134b.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 133.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 134b-135a. Abu Talib described his personal relations with the then foreign secretary Lord Pelham.

hierarchy came the Home Secretary (*wazir i amur i dakhla*) who was responsible for the internal affairs of the State.⁴⁶ The Minister of War (*wazir i amur i kharja*) came next in importance according to Abu Talib; at that time Dundas was the Minister of War and held that position until his appointment as Secretary for Indian Affairs; he was later succeeded by Lord Hobart.⁴⁷ Abu Talib emphasised the fact that the four abovementioned ministers and their portfolios were the most significant in the Cabinet since they played a crucial role in the formulation of state policy.

A separate minister was appointed to supervise the Department of Navy (*wazir i jahazat*) as Britain's navy was larger than its army; amongst his other duties he was also responsible for the appointment of naval officials.⁴⁸ The seventh most important minister according to Abu Talib was known as the Minister for Indian Affairs (*wazir amurat i Hind*) and oversaw the activities of the East India Company. Our writer regarded the Board of Control, which supervised the activities of the Company in India, as a full-fledged separate ministry.⁴⁹ The Minister for Religious Affairs (*wazir i shariat i Isawi*) ranked eighth in the ministerial hierarchy of the British Cabinet. Christian law (*shariat i Isawi*) in Britain had no bearing on state policy; religion and politics were completely separated and the jurisdiction of the Minister for Religious Affairs was well defined and confined to religious and social matters only.⁵⁰

Ahmad bin Muhammad, whose discourse was largely based on *Masir i Talibi*, had no additions to make to earlier expositions of the duties of the officers of State. He

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 135b.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.* Abu Talib described his relations with Lord Spencer, former naval minister.

⁴⁹ For the role of Board on India, see *supra*.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*, f. 137. For a detailed treatment of this matter see the chapter on "Religion" in the present work.

summed up his discussion noting that all the ministers consulted the king regularly regarding ministerial affairs. They then took note of the king's opinions on the matters presented to him and submitted their revised proposals to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to present them later in Parliament. If a bill was rejected in Parliament, it was re-submitted to the king for further consideration.⁵¹

All our writers regarded Britain as a well-regulated State, whose political institutions were based on well-defined rules and laws (*qanun*). The material prosperity of the British was due to a stable government, a responsive Parliament, competent ministers as well as the freedom of expression of individuals and the encouragement of the citizens for participation in the government of their country. The constitutional freedom that the British people enjoyed was greatly appreciated by almost all our writers; Itisam was the first to praise it highly.⁵² Abu Talib admired the freedom and social equality among British citizens.⁵³ Abd al Latif regarded highly the fact that all people in Britain were equal before the law, king, nobility and peasants alike. The stronger did not have power over the weaker in the British society.⁵⁴

All our authors knew that Britain was a class-based society made up from numerous classes and orders. This social stratification was communicated through terms such as *ashraf* and *arzal* that were used to describe two distinct classes which, nonetheless, formed one equal social order before the law. Ahmad bin Muhammad writes:

In British society the strong had no power over the weak. Masters did not have absolute control over their servants, fathers over sons, husbands over wives and the kings over their subjects. It was the law (*qanun*) which reigned supreme. Each citizen was free to seek justice in the

⁵¹ Cf. *Mirat al Ahwal* , f. 134a.

⁵² Cf. *Shigarfnama*, ff. 136a-7a.

⁵³ Cf. *Masir i Talibi*; also the chapter on "Observations on British Life" in the present study.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Tuhfat al Alam*, ff. 139b-140a.

country's courts of law if they felt that their rights and freedom had been infringed upon by someone stronger than them. All social strata were as one in the eyes of the law.⁵⁵

Murtaza Husain argued that this freedom had its roots in the country's system of government where power was shared by the Parliament as well as the king. The king had no independent authority over the State. As Murtaza remarks:

The king could issue no orders without a prior discussion of the project in the two Houses of Parliament; this was the underlying reason for the prevailing peace and stability the country enjoyed. Even if any of the three organs of State, that is the king, the House of Lords and the House of Commons, resorted to oppressive measures, they could still not act in an arbitrary way. If the king desired to raise the amount of taxes, he had to consult the Parliament first.⁵⁶

The second reason for the stability of the British State according to our writer was the consultative procedure. Each and every policy was debated in the Parliament before they decided on any course of action. During the consultation process they examined carefully both the positive as well as the negative implications of the implementation of a policy.

Murtaza, like Itisam and Abu Talib, was clear that legislation in Britain was not based upon religious dictates but had its foundations in the constitution of the country. Our authors could not provide a Persian equivalent for the term 'constitution' either. They stated that the British constitution had been codified by the nation's thinkers and was based on the customs, traditions and usages of the nation. As such, these laws were occasionally subject to modification. In the words of Murtaza:

It should be understood that nothing contrary to the laws (*shariat i Isawi*), rules and regulations of the State (*qawaid i saltanat*) could ever be applied; these were considered superior to both the orders of the monarch and the Houses of Parliament. Paupers, nobility and king alike were bound by laws of the State (*qawaid i saltanat*) and none could transgress them.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ For the above remarks, cf. *Mirat al Ahwal*. But Ahmad was not satisfied over the operation of British law in India, for it was not in favour of the upper classes. The respectable people were treated with contempt and considered insignificant, while it encouraged the lower orders of the Indian society at the expense of the respectables.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Hadiqat al Aqalim*, pp. 526-7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 527-8.

Murtaza emphasised that Britain was a prosperous and flourishing country due to its well-defined laws. He observed that the majority of the British were God-fearing and kind-hearted people. Their conquests of foreign lands testified to their virtues. It was also a well-known fact that British people professed the Christian faith (*Din i nasara*). Its dictates (*sharia*) were based on the Old and New Testaments (*Kitab i Tauret wa Injil*). In certain respects it differed from Islam but there was some resemblance in the way they both attended to their worldly affairs.⁵⁸ It was more clearly articulated by Itisam and Abu Talib than Murtaza that the British law was not based on Christian religion; in fact, they claimed that religion and politics were completely separated in the British society. It was the reality and laws of their country, their own preconceptions of what laws were like that our authors had in mind and which brought about the need for a comparison.⁵⁹

All our observers were fully convinced that the British had faith in the strength of their State, which provided maximum protection to its people. Among all our writers it was Ahmad who provided a very good account of the official mechanism adopted to safeguard the citizens and their interests. Ahmad's understanding of the British political institutions and ideas was based on textual sources, as we noted earlier, as well as his

⁵⁸ The above treatise was compiled from a treatise of Jonathan Scott. In this treatise, an attempt was made to show and to convince its readers that Britain's power and prosperity lay in its system of government. The most significant feature of this system was its limited monarchy. The British monarch had no power over its government and subjects, neither he could levy any taxes or control the army. It was the parliament which was the real sovereign. Since the parliament was a body whose members were elected by the people of the country, therefore, actual power lay in the hands of the people. The king was nothing more than a titular head, a paid servant of the State and it was the people who ruled in Britain. At the same time this treatise was an indirect attempt to negate the power and the very nature of absolute sovereignty of the Mughal Emperor. The Mughal emperor by then, though a powerless monarch, still exercised great veneration in the imagination of his subjects. It would not be irrelevant, probably, to mention that the above treatise was purposefully written by Scott. The accounts reflected Whiggish views, favouring the maintenance of parliamentary privilege, limited sovereignty and a less influential church.

⁵⁹ In Islam the Canonical law (*Sharia*) set limitations over the government, judicial power in civil as well as criminal cases. Although in practice a State based on *Sharia* could never be realised in the face of the harsh realities of this world, yet, it always remained the ideal for every thinking Muslim.

discussions with leading British officials such as John Shore. Moreover, his great appreciation of the well-governed British State stemmed by default from his own understanding of the decline of the state apparatus in Iran and India.

Ahmad focused in detail on the advantages of a State governed by well-defined laws. The fact that the peasants were protected by the State law was highly appreciated by Ahmad. He wrote with high approbation that the amount of tax (*kharaaj*) was assessed and fixed before it was realised. Revenue officials could levy from taxpayers only the legal contributions that had been set by the State. The peasants willingly contributed their share to the State Treasury. Intermediaries were paid a fixed salary in cash from the Treasury funds; this safeguarded the peasants against extortion by the intermediaries. If tax officials concealed the real assessment figures from taxpayers, collected revenue at will and themselves sought to flourish at the cost of the taxpayers, it would prove detrimental to the peasantry; the ruin and impoverishment of the peasantry would in turn cause a decline in the prosperity of the country itself. The prosperity and affluence of one particular group at the expense of another could not be beneficial to the State. Ahmad concluded that the British had understood and appreciated this point very well.⁶⁰

A second regulation that Ahmad sought to explain concerned the periods at which land tax was collected; it was levied twice a year as annual collection might prove burdensome and oppressive to the peasants. After tax had been deducted from their income, the peasants were free to sell the remaining part of their crops in the market. Such earlier practices as the payment of cesses and extraordinarily heavy contributions had been completely discarded. Intermediaries were forbidden to enter the houses of peasants and harass them even if the officials in question ranked as high as lords (*lord*

⁶⁰ Cf. *Mirat al Ahwal*, ff. 134b-5a.

bahadur) or the highest among nobles (*amir ul umara*). If some peasants were unable to pay their taxes, state officials could sell the peasants' land property only with the prior consent of the proprietor. If such a situation arose, the intermediates informed their higher officials (*arbab i hall u aqd*). These were all measures to safeguard the common people against economic exploitation in the hands of the king and his agents as well as against punishment brought about by the non-fulfilment of legal demands.⁶¹ Economically disadvantaged social groups enjoyed the full protection of the State. In fact, the British ruling elite sought to rule with the good will of their subjects. They believed that the oppression and exploitation of the people would eventually lead to a decline in the prosperity of the State itself.⁶² Peasants considered themselves as members of the State and wished its stability and prosperity.⁶³ Excise and custom duties and taxes on goods were also fixed by the State; they were made known to the people by being advertised on a country-wise basis. Notices were put on shipboards regarding the level of custom duties and the rules and regulations concerning them were printed in many languages besides English such as Hindi and Persian for example for the benefit of Indian merchants.⁶⁴

If a merchant reported against a state official for over-taxation, an enquiry was held by members of the judiciary. The cases were decided on the basis of evidence and if the charges were proved, the official concerned was penalised irrespective of his social status. Ahmad sums up:

It did not matter if the plaintiff was an ordinary subject (*adna raiyyat*) while the official in question belonged to the aristocracy. The British believed that the good will of the citizens was essential for the success and prosperity of the State.

⁶¹ *Mirat al Ahwal*, f. 135a.

⁶² *Op. cit.*

⁶³ *Op. cit.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 135b.

Another regulation that Ahmad focused on decreed that no office of the State could be sold for any sum of money and that appointments could not be made on contract (*ijara*). Middle and lower ranking positions of officials such as superintendents (*darogha*), tax collectors, custom and excise officers, were not leased; it was feared that such a practice might lead to superficial enhancement in the profit of the contractor as officials might show no consideration for the welfare of the people. It would be detrimental to the peasantry to have taxes raised unofficially by the small amount of even two *dinar* more than the officially fixed amount. They believed that even the slightest corruption might result in the ruin and depravation of the State.⁶⁵ Ahmad appreciated the organisation and discipline of the British bureaucratic apparatus. The ranks and grades of officials had been defined clearly in advance. There was no place for favouritism and nepotism in British bureaucracy. This sense of discipline and harmony was evident in British methods of administration in India as well.⁶⁶ Ahmad saw even more far-reaching beneficial consequences of the British limited monarchy: since the people of Britain regarded their kings as their appointed leaders only, they considered all newly acquired foreign lands as their personal property and wished to safeguard them in the same spirit.

Ahmad appreciated traditional virtues of British bureaucrats such as honesty, a sense of duty and responsibility; these were characteristic of both the British bureaucrats who were serving in India as well as those in Britain. British officials treated each other with respect irrespective of their social origins. If they did not pay due respect to their colleagues, they feared they might weaken the foundations of their own polity and the fabric of their society. In fact, asserted Ahmad, he had never heard of any British

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 135a.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 135b.

official who had landed on the shores of Hindustan and had ever been considered anything other than a gentleman (*sahiban i alishan*) by his compatriots. Those already in India welcomed all their newly-arrived compatriots including surgeons (*jarrahan*), painters, engravers, cleaners, artisans and craftsmen and made them feel at home.⁶⁷

The attitude of the British people towards each other was very different from that of Muslims, who did not care to pay respect and attention even to persons of higher rank. On this point Ahmad offers some serious and reflective comments by way of comparison:

In India there existed discord and disunity (*nifaq*) between the *Irani* and *Turani* groups unlike the British who were united. The British worked together in great harmony and unity where matters of State (*amur i mamlekat dari*) were concerned. As to their religious faith, the British apparently believed in the religion of Jesus (*Din i Hazrat i Isa*) but in practice they occasionally rang the bells of churches (*naqus*) and visited them only on Sundays, as did some British people in India. They did not fulfil any other religious obligations. It was evident from the lifestyle and attitudes of the members of the British gentry and aristocracy that they believed in the oneness of God. Other aspects of religion they considered mere inventions. They devoted their lives to something other than religion; their major preoccupation was with finding ways to occupy (*taskhir*) other countries, with devising the most appropriate methods and means of governing these territorial lands and formulating rules to govern the socio-economic life there. Nonetheless, they remained humane, kind-hearted and polite in their behaviour. Gradually, the Company (*kampany*), which was initially a mercantile organisation, came to occupy far-flung countries.⁶⁸

8.4 Traditional Images of Royalty

All our writers were interested in the political aspect of British life. Among the political institutions it was kingship that aroused the greatest interest. It might be interesting at this stage to consider the reasons for this excessive preoccupation with the British monarch and his rights and duties and for their fervent approval of constitutional monarchy. The interest of Muslim intellectuals in issues such as the institution of kingship, the powers of the constitutional monarch, the relationship between the Crown

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 136a.

⁶⁸ *Op. cit.*

and the Parliament, the roles of both the Houses and the Cabinet as well as, more significantly perhaps, the position of the East India Company in the political hierarchy, could best be understood within the framework of the contemporary background of India in the post-Plassey period. During the second half of the eighteenth century the East India Company emerged after a series of struggles as the most powerful contender for political supremacy in India. It succeeded in eliminating its European competitors, the French and the Dutch, from the Indian sub-continent. It later defeated the Indian powers themselves, such as for example the Nawab of Bengal Sirajuddaula in 1757, the combined forces of the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam and Nawab Wazir of Awadh Shujauddaula in 1764, Hyder Ali (1722-1782), the latter's son and successor Tipu Sultan of Mysore in 1799 and, finally, the Marathas under Scindhia in 1803. Though the Company's position remained unchallenged as far as political and military issues were concerned its rule could not be legitimised in the eyes of the indigenous intelligentsia, the Indian political elites and other persons concerned. Prior to 1756 the British in Bengal were known as merchants; their social standing, therefore, was lower than that of sovereigns. The Company was not an individual but an impersonal and corporate body of merchants; as such it was not ruled by a single independent sovereign but by a body of merchants. Its twofold function as a mercantile organisation and a ruling power was regarded as inconsistent contradictory and anomalous.

If the Company had any right to political power in India, it was only as a Chief Civil Officer (*diwan*) of the State (*suba*) of Bengal; this title had been conferred upon it by the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam in 1765. The emperor was still considered by his subjects as a source of honour. His name appeared on the coins and in *khutba*. No usurper, however daring, was prepared to outrage the general feeling by treating the

emperor's name with disrespect.⁶⁹ Emperors may have been tools in the hands of their ministers and mandates, they may have been evaded and disregarded, but they were still deemed as the sole source of honour.

The general feeling of respect for the Mughal Emperor may have been the reason why the British confined themselves to the self-imposed role of a protector of the Emperor and did not depose him after Lord Lake entered Delhi. In fact, by assuming the role of a protector the British were seeking to legitimise their rule in the eyes of the native power elites. Rather than deposing the Mughals and proclaiming themselves the rulers of India, they were content with the instructions of Lord Wellesley, the then Governor-General, to offer the Mughal every demonstration of reverence, respect and attention.⁷⁰ The Mughals were now given nominal authority; they were considered useful by the British for, even though they no longer had any real power, domination or authority, they were still acknowledged by almost every state and class of people in India.⁷¹

Although the British referred to the Mughal Emperor in English as the 'king of Delhi', they continued to use his full titles when they addressed him in Persian. His full name and regnal years were still used by the contemporary literate classes to indicate the year of the composition of literary works and to mark any contemporary or past important events; this practice continued until the mutiny.⁷² The *khutba* was still read

⁶⁹ Even Nadir Shah, who sacked Delhi, acknowledged Muhammad Shah as the Emperor and did not undermine the Mughal sovereignty.

⁷⁰ Cf. the letter of Wellesley to Lord Lake, 27 July 1803, in Montgomery Martin (ed.), *The Dispatches Minutes and Correspondence of the Marquess of Wellesley During His Administration in India* (London, 1837), iii, p. 232, also quoted in Bernard S. Cohn, *Representing Authority in Victorian India*, p. 170. For the above article, cf. also pp. 165-210 in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁷¹ Wellesley to the Court of Directors, 13 July 1804; cf. *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁷² Cf., for instance, Karim Khan Jhajjari, *Mirat i Giti numa*, for names and titles as well as the regnal year of Bahadur Shah to indicate date of composition. Such examples could be multiplied.

in his name in the mosques of British India and until 1835 the coins issued by the East India Company bore his name.⁷³ Until 1858 the monarch of Great Britain was not also the monarch of India; this created a sense of incompleteness and contradiction in the cultural and symbolic constitution of India as Cohn showed. The authority of the Mughal sovereign was being steadily eroded by the Company's growing ascendancy. Sir John Kaye, a contemporary British official, commented on the relationship between the Company and the Mughal Emperor between 1803 and 1857; he noted that a political paradox had been created as the Mughal became a pensioner, a pageant and a puppet. "He was to be a King and yet no King, a something yet a nothing, a reality and a sham at the same time".⁷⁴

A second possible explanation for the literati's attitude towards the institution of kingship could be traced back to their traditional education and the attitudes inculcated in them by their training. They had a profound respect for political authority. The ongoing discussion on the personality of the British monarch, his place in society, his duties towards his people and the need for him to be just and kind, was a traditional one. Despite our authors' appreciation of the separation of the powers among the judiciary, as well as the executive and legislative bodies and the benefits of such a system in Britain, the ideal society, according to them, remained one where the ruler was to be plainly obeyed. All of them were explicit about the need for the existence of a ruling group to ensure the welfare of the State. Although kingship is not an Islamic institution, our authors seemed so accustomed to the notion of kingship that it was taken for granted as the natural, and most rational form of government. The king was of prime

⁷³ Many of the Indian states continued to mint coins until 1859-60 with the regnal year of the Mughal emperor on them.

⁷⁴ John W. Kaye and George B. Malleson, *Kaye and Malleson's History of Indian Mutiny of 1857-8*, Second Edition, London 1892, ii, p. 4.

importance in their vision; as we have already seen, our writers considered the power and functions of the British Parliament, the role of its ministers and of the members of the judiciary and the traditional aristocracy of Britain from the focal point of the king; they paid close attention to the king's relationship with these organs of government and administration.

Such traditional thinking was evident in the political discourses of all our authors. Abu Talib, who provided a clear, succinct and well-articulated account of British political institutions such as kingship, the Parliament and Cabinet as well as the distribution and balance of power among the various organs of government, still failed to transcend the limits of the traditional mode of thinking. He visited the Upper House on the opening day of the Houses of Parliament and heard the king's speech in Parliament that day. According to Abu Talib, on the appointed day the British king with full magnificence and pomp visited the House with his princes and nobility as well as with envoys from other European countries. He specifically mentioned that with the help of the Duke of Gloucester, the brother of the king, our writer was allotted a place close to the royal throne (*kursi sultani*) and heard the speech that the king delivered to the representatives of the clergy and the members of the House. The visitor thoroughly enjoyed this rich spectacle; as he writes:

The monarch was seated on a grand-looking chair which resembled the royal throne and which was placed under the royal umbrella (*chatr*). On his right sat the heir-apparent while on his left were the royal princes seated on embroidered velvet chairs. Close to the royal princes were the ornamented seats of other members of the royal family and relations. On the right side of the king and below the seat of the heir-apparent, the princes of Europe and other representatives (*wukala*) of foreign kingdoms occupied their seats. The sword of the king was in the hands of Lord Spencer and the "Cap of Liberty" (*kulah i azadi*) in the hands of the Earl Winchester. These two last persons were standing close to the king. Lord Peter Godwyl Burrell was in charge of the House of the Council Chamber (*diwan khana*). Other nobles were seated behind the king's chair while bishops, judges and other Members of Parliament were to be found at the back of the room in a distance.⁷⁵

This preoccupation with the royal person and the pageantry and grandeur characteristic of royalty amounted to nothing short of an obsession. Itisam too was no less attracted by the pageantry, glitter, pomp and grandeur of the House of Lords. Abu Talib's fascination with this grandeur persisted in spite of his knowledge that the titles of nobility such as of dukes and earls were traditionally hereditary in Britain. The aristocratic class had no direct control over the administration of the country though it remained an enormously influential and wealthy group which owned large estates. Their wealth stayed intact due to the law of primogeniture, which ensured that the eldest son in the family inherited the family's wealth, which thus always remained in the family.⁷⁶

There were some secondary reasons for this obsession with the royal person; such reasons could be traced to the royal rituals and elaborate ceremonies of the Mughal Court and the fact that the successor states of the Mughal Empire sought to imitate the Mughal traditions. Such rituals were more evident in the Court of Awadh where Abu Talib had served for some time. As Cohn has shown there were well-established rules for the placement of people at the Mughal Court.⁷⁷ Under the Mughals the dispensation of justice, equality and law had been delegated to the Emperor who stood over and above society; he was affiliated to no particular group or class so that he could always act as a just arbitrator in social disputes. George III was extolled by our authors as a just and right king who had divested himself of judicial power to demonstrate his respect for the law; he was praised in a manner that befits autocratic rulers who govern with innate rectitude and regard for the law. Justice was the only sound basis for the management of the affairs of the State.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ The spatial order of the *darbar* fixed, created and represented relationships with the ruler. The closer one stood to the person of the royal figure, the higher one's status and authority. Cf. *Representing Authority*, p. 169.

The curiosity manifested by our writers about the king's personal life, the queen and the position of the royal princes testifies to their traditional framework of thought. This traditional perspective towards monarchy explains also the attitude of Ahmad bin Muhammad, who preferred the autocratic kingship of Persia and Turkey to the limited monarchy of Britain; Ahmad Muhammad was already aware of the decline of the Mughal Empire and its loss of authority. He claimed that the sovereign who could openly be summoned in a court of justice and tried for his offences in the presence of his subjects could hold no attraction as a sovereign in Iran and Turkey. He could not accept the fact that the sovereign could be so strictly bound by law. Nonetheless, he conceded that a monarch with no absolute control over the judiciary as well as the executive body was beneficial to the State's political stability, its economic prosperity and the well-being of its subjects.

A monarch with limited power retained certain of his prerogatives as for example enacting laws, concluding treaties, appointing officials and dispatching royal orders (*farmans*). At the same time, though, he could not claim his own expenses which had to be granted. Such a king reigned but did not rule. This paradox that prevailed in the minds of some writers of the period was a result of the strange and unprecedented circumstances of the time; there seemed to be no solution in sight to many contemporary problems and bewilderment stemmed from this. Our writers descended from families whose ancestors had served as the revenue and judicial officials of the Mughals. As the Mughal Empire began to collapse its administrative machinery disintegrated and former indigenous bureaucrats of the Empire now entered the service of the regional states of Murshidabad, Hyderabad and Awadh. With the growing political ascendancy of the Company, the bureaucrats of these states began to lose their earlier status as their financial bases were eroded. The Company's own employees came to fill the posts held

by native bureaucrats such as those of tax-assessors, collectors, judges and magistrates; this created further unemployment and generated a sense of political deprivation and economic insecurity. In such an atmosphere of tension at a time when the political system had virtually been granted to the British to run, the political illusions of the former elites could not die out; if anything, they were further reinforced. An element of nostalgia, mingled with personal interest, permeated the reflections of the previously ruling classes in India.

EPILOGUE

In 1767 Itisam al Din visited Britain. Two major events preceded this date: the Treaty of Allahbad had been concluded two years earlier and the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam conferred the title of *Diwani* to the Company. These two events marked the beginning of a period of major political changes in India which continued until the early nineteenth century. During this period the East India Company rose from a mere regional power to a dominant political force. After a series of struggles with the indigenous powers it emerged as the strongest political, economic and military force in India. The British established themselves as the *de facto* rulers of Bengal after defeating the *Nawab* Sirajuddaula in 1757. Subsequently, they defeated their French rivals and the combined forces of the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam and the *Nawab-Wazir* of Awadh Shujauddaula in 1764. They also succeeded against Hyder Ali (1722-1782) as well as his son and successor, Tipu Sultan of Mysore, in 1799. Finally, they established their authority over the Marathas under Scindhia who were the last ones to capitulate in 1803. By that time India had passed under the almost complete political domination of the British, not so much by military force as by means of what Arnold Toynbee called "the force of mimesis". The Mughal Empire had already faded to a secondary role, although the Emperor was still based in Delhi and the "nominal sovereign" Shah Alam (d. 1806) was succeeded by another *de jure* ruler, Akbar Shah (ruled 1806-1837), who also enjoyed "nominal sovereignty".

Such drastic political changes affected the employment prospects and the economic status of the educated members of gentry, a predominantly Muslim section of the population. Regional states were politically subordinated, former bureaucrats were displaced and unemployment became a widespread phenomenon among the gentry. Calcutta, the administrative capital of the Company, and not Murshidabad, Awadh or Hyderabad, became now the heart of the empire and the centre of occupational opportunities. Delhi had long ceased to be the centre of patronage. There was a discernable shift of the displaced educated but unemployed gentry towards Calcutta in the hope of employment; they began to develop client-patron relations with the British officials, who now occupied crucial positions in the regional courts as Residents and in other important administrative positions. Such a trend could be observed most clearly in Awadh which always held a particular concentration of the professional classes, the gentry. Members of this "service" gentry now earned a living by utilising the literary and administrative skills they had earlier acquired in the service of the Empire and the newly created successor states; they thus became historians, geographers, philologists, archaeologists and grammarians, to name but a few of the professions they now entered most frequently. They were employed by the British in various capacities: writers, interpreters or diplomats. They were usually known under the generic term *munshi*. It seems difficult to denounce them as intermediaries between the Indian people and the occupiers of their country or as the "collaborators" of the foreign rulers; they are better seen as "resource persons". It is true that India was an alien world to the recently appointed British administrators and that, naturally, it fell upon the members of the displaced bureaucracy to smooth away any difficulties in this period of transition. Interestingly enough, it was in Calcutta that the traditional elites were exposed to a

different world; there they became aware of the latest technological developments and medical practices and caught glimpses of the British social life.

The writers we concentrated on in this thesis came from different social backgrounds and geographical areas as diverse as Bengal, Hyderabad, and Awadh; some of them had even migrated from Persia, such as, for example, Abd al Latif and Ahmad. Some were members of the *qasbah* based elite, while others came from the urban centres of India: Murtaza was from Bilgram, a famous town in Awadh. Itisam was also a member of the *qasbah* based elite and came from Panchnor, a little-known semi-urban place in the Bengal province. Abu Talib and Muhammad Husain were both born and brought up in Lucknow, the *Nawabi* capital city. Lucknow was the cultural centre of North India and a "window to the West". Generally speaking, they all had bureaucratic origins although they were engaged in a wide range of professions: from petty bureaucrats (*munshi*) and writers, to district-level revenue officials (*amil*) and high-placed diplomats (*wakil*) in regional states. They were all Muslim scholars who pursued knowledge in addition to their political careers. They had all undergone a Muslim education and this was reflected in the traditional modes of discourse they employed to render their perceptions of the West. Although they had no direct access to the sources of European social thought, their ideas often echoed the views of political and social thinkers such as Lockes's theory of "popular sovereignty" in Itisam's case, or Adam Smith's ideas on the division of labour in the case of Abu Talib. In this respect they faithfully mirrored the concerns and interests of their British contemporaries who were often their sources and echoed the ideas that were popular among the British middle classes.

Our observers commented on a wide range of issues, each in his characteristic way; they were different individuals who reached different conclusions. In the present

study we have sought to impose a sense of regularity on the views of a heterogeneous group of people, although any incidents in the history of Europe that are mentioned here are strictly viewed from the authors' perspective. Their perceptions of Europe, in general, and Britain, in particular, were not constructed entirely in terms of abstract images; they were based on first-hand knowledge, observation and experience. They tried to understand a different culture and unfold various aspects of Western life, according to their personal tastes and genuine intellectual curiosity. They concerned themselves with issues as diverse as British social life, religion, political institutions and Western scientific and technological progress.

Although they concentrated on different topics of interest, there were underlying similarities in their treatment. Their Hindustan was not geographically confined to a certain area of the upper Gangetic plain. It rather comprised of the whole sub-continent and extended from Kashmir to Cape Comorin and from Assam to Bengal. These educated elites invariably identified themselves with their places of birth, whether that a small town such as Bilgram or a well-known urban centre such as Delhi, Shahjahanbad, Lucknow or Hyderabad. There existed an immense amount of geographical mobility as members of the educated unemployed gentry moved within the Empire, from Lucknow to Hyderabad and Calcutta. Yet they lacked any sense of territorial patriotism, that is, a sense of community with all who shared the same homeland and which stemmed from their love for that land.

Although Persian was the language of the Court, the culture and of the discourses of educated Muslims and Hindus alike, no sense of linguistic affinity could be discerned among our writers. It would have been virtually impossible to trace the origins of the language controversy between Hindi and Urdu to replace the Perso-Arabic script; this the controversy which assumed an unproportionate magnitude in the late nineteenth

century. Unlike the religious elite's concern, our writers' preoccupation with the British rule was pragmatic: such matters as whether India was indeed *dar al harb* or *dar al Islam* did not seem to interest them. Their major preoccupation remained with their survival in an unfavourable political climate.

The initial phase of the forced introduction of an Eastern country into the political and ideological framework of the West culminated in the country's complete domination by the West. There was one factor which brought all of them into contact with the West: the political ascendancy of the Company in India. Their experience of the unemployment and consequent financial insecurity that the rise of the Company had created explains to a large extent their negative images of the West. Knowledge of the West thus coincided with the realisation of its colonial supremacy; this in turn accounts largely for the negative images of the Company and its rule that these intellectuals had. They became intrinsic parts in an inexorable process of change for the worse; they were now unemployed and improvement seemed highly improbable in the crippled machinery of government of the Empire. They considered the Company as a catalyst in this process which had deprived them of their means of livelihood by participating in the disintegration of the Mughal Empire and the successor regimes without providing any viable alternatives.

Since these indigenous elites had acted as "collaborators" of the newly established British bureaucrats in India, they had been in a position to observe the Company and its methods. By now they were almost entirely disillusioned with the Company and the unlikely possibility of any employment by it. On the other hand, they came to realize that Britain was dynamic because it was ruled by a well-regulated government. They knew by now that Britain was governed by well-defined laws and presented a complete contrast to the political anarchy and chaos that prevailed in India. Consequently, their

indictment of the Company's rule was sharp and penetrating. Moreover, they were the preeminent beneficiaries of the earlier regime and saw their fate bound with its prosperity; any force which had hastened its disintegration was bound to be looked upon with an unfriendly eye.

It is also significant to note that our authors exhibited an unfeigned concern with the growing European hegemony in the Islamic world; such an apprehension was most obvious in the cases of Abd al Latif, Ahmad and Abu Talib. They viewed Western expansion in global terms and took into account such remote to them events such as the American War of Independence, its indirect repercussions on India, the impact of the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic wars, the French occupation of Egypt and the subsequent Anglo-French rivalries in the region as well as the Russian encroachments in Iran and Turkey. There existed no precise equivalent Persian term for the terms 'colonisation' and 'colony' but the Persian word *taskhir*, which stood for 'conquest by force' was invariably employed by these commentators to denote the expansion of the West in India and other countries such as Egypt and Iran as well as for the Russian aggression in Iran and the lands of the Ottoman Empire.

Murtaza and Ghulam Husain's concern was primarily with the contemporary political scenario, the complex process of the rise of British power in India, the increasing ascendancy of the Company and the gradual and simultaneous subordination of the indigenous power elites. Murtaza Husain Bilgrami and Ghulam Husain did not manifest much interest in British social life in India despite their extensive contact with British officials in their own homeland. Ahmad's discourses on the socio-cultural life of Britain were largely derivative, based on the writings of Abd al Latif and Abu Talib. His major preoccupation was with the growing British intervention (*mudakhla*) in the regional Indian states. The European expansion in other parts of the Islamic world did

not escape his attention but his major preoccupation remained with European political expansion in the East and especially the British intervention in the regional states. On the other hand, those who had had direct contact with the West showed an absorbing interest in British social and political institutions. Since attention in this study focuses on the socio-cultural life of Britain, we offer a detailed exposition of the writings of Itisam and Abu Talib, both of whom professed a deep interest in the socio-cultural aspect.

As we have already seen, prior to a direct contact with the West, that is, before the period under consideration, there existed only a rudimentary knowledge of Europe. It was primarily the Portuguese who were known, on account of their forceful presence, while certain memories of the Ottoman Empire's relations with Eastern Europe reverberated in the Muslim historical discourse. The Mughal Emperor Akbar's attempts to establish a channel of communication with the lands of Europe remained unsuccessful. Initially, the term *Farang* or *Farangistan* was employed in Indo-Persian literature to denote Europe as a whole; a similar term was later coined for Britain, namely *Inglistan*. The term *Farang* signified an inhabited part of the world, "a world of cities and settled agriculture", without any implications of a qualitative distinction between the East and the West.

Our writers were conscious of the fact that they were writing about a world that was scarcely known, if at all. Thus, they began by placing Europe in its historical perspective, by briefly alluding to the Middle Ages, the waning of feudalism, the rise of national monarchies, as well as the Reformation and the Age of Discovery in the course of European history; in this process they neither used any of the above terms nor did they attempt to find any precise Persian equivalents. Their concern to place Europe in its historical perspective seems to imply that to them the rise of Europe was a

relatively recent phenomenon. The beginning of Europe's ascendancy was traced back to the Age of Discovery when Europeans were thought to have organized their polities, strengthened their ship-building industry, improved their navigational techniques and set out to discover hitherto unknown lands. The ship-building industry was the first to undergo technical improvement. The expansion of Europe overseas was the result of continuous efforts to improve seamanship and navigational instruments, which made distant voyages possible. Our authors' curiosity about America was mainly motivated by the fact that its existence offered a totally new dimension to their traditional geographical perception of the world.

It was common knowledge that the entire Europe professed Christianity. The Christian religion was a traditional concern of Muslims; under the patronage of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, it was primarily works related to Christian faith that had been translated. Indian knowledge of the Christian faith was based on texts and had been passed down from one generation to another and to the present one. Our writers defined the Christian religion as a revealed faith and Christians as "the People of the Book" (*Ahl i Kitab*). They sought to assess Christianity in terms of their own faith and also manifested purely intellectual motives for doing so. In fact, Muslims had their own viewpoint from which they considered issues of the Christian faith. From the beginning, Muslim thinkers regarded Jesus Christ as one of the authentic prophets and attributed to him a unique and distinguished place among the prophets. This Quranic Jesus was ever present in the Muslim imagination and belief before any contact was made with the West. At the same time, any idea of the divinity of Christ was simply against the uncompromising monotheism of Islam.

Our authors' preoccupation was not so much with the religious aspect of Western life as it was with Western political systems, scientific and technological developments

and the political expansion of the West in India and the Islamic world. Such a lack of interest is most conspicuous in the cases of Abd al Latif and Abu Talib. Issues of religion entered only rarely in Abu Talib's writings and then only to complete his picture of the British political system or to ascertain that even though the clergy was better read and informed than the princes, they, nevertheless, had no control over the formulation of state policy. Similarly, Latif's concern with the Reformation stemmed apparently from his desire to understand contemporary European developments from a historical perspective. He was aware of the current criticism of religion in Europe but he did not concern himself with a detailed examination of such issues.

Itisam al Din and Abu Talib, who had the opportunity to visit Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century, considered almost every aspect of British social life they observed. They were meticulous in recording the varied manifestations of contemporary British life. Their impressions of British society, and especially those of Abu Talib, are related to the period in the history of Europe that was later referred to as "the Age of Revolutions". When Itisam, our first traveller, visited Britain in 1767-69 British society was in transition. The Agricultural Revolution, the Enclosure Movement and certain early industrial changes were in progress while the Industrial Revolution itself was still to come. Socio-economic changes became more evident as the century progressed.

Abu Talib had the good fortune to visit the country when various social transformations, later subsumed under such terms as 'Agricultural', 'Demographic' and 'Industrial Revolution', had already set in and their impact was gradually becoming apparent in society. Another important revolution in Europe, the French Revolution, had already taken place. Abu Talib referred to all the above phenomena in his writings. Our authors did not employ the terms 'Agricultural', 'Demographic' or 'Industrial

Revolution' to describe these phenomena, nor perhaps were they aware of them. These key terms were after all introduced into Western historiography itself much after the onset of the socio-economic transformations. Nonetheless, Abu Talib was to a large extent successful in conveying the characteristically elusive quality of the "spirit of the age". The *Masir i Talibi* represented a successful record of a comparison between the Indian and the British cultural systems. Abu Talib's extensive social contacts with the British aristocracy and gentry enabled him to view British cultural life closely. His observations are mainly of what we might call "the leisured classes of Hanoverian England" with rare references to the less privileged social strata; Itisam's complemented Abu Talib's exposition in this respect through his abiding interest in the less fortunate social classes.

Abu Talib, Abd al Latif, Muhammad Husain and Ghulam Husain employed the term *English* for the English people while Itisam used the term *angrez*; it was the latter term that gained currency as the century was progressing and British rule was gradually acquiring deeper roots in India. Abu Talib and Itisam were also aware of differences among the English, Irish and the Scottish people while such a consciousness did not seem to exist among those who did not have the opportunity to visit Britain. Representations of British social life were mainly descriptive as the observers only rarely compared it with life in India. Their native social milieu was always present in their minds and their descriptions of the vices and virtues of the British revealed also their understanding of the strength and weaknesses of their own society.

All of the authors we focused upon in this enquiry regarded Europe as a part of the inhabited world where various arts and sciences flourished and men of intellect devoted their lives to the pursuit of knowledge. Above all, they looked upon Britain as a preeminent place for scholarly activities. We saw how Itisam, Muhammad Husain and

Abu Talib highlighted the contribution of the printing to the spreading of new ideas in all strata of society, while, at the same time, it elevated the intellectual, the writer, to self-sufficiency. Writers who earned money from their work, as Itisam observed, were not so dependent on the patronage of the rich. Printing promoted a new sense of freedom and independence, the freedom of the spirit. Although it cannot be asserted as a fact, for counterfactuals are never true beyond doubt, it can be surmised that the face of Europe would have been different were it not for Guttenberg's invention. And this seems to have been realised by the acute observers we have considered.

When knowledge advances, consciousness is sometimes slow to follow. This seems to be the inevitable prerogative of social evolution; such societies easily fall into decadence. However, during the period we have been examining, Europeans not only promoted scientific and technical knowledge, but also attempted to preserve and revive their ancient cultural heritage. Greek, Latin and Hebrew literature was translated, printed, read and widely discussed. Not only did Europeans diffuse among them new ideas and discoveries, but assimilated the heritage of their ancestors to an unprecedented level.

Technical progress may have made long journeys possible, but it is mainly the attitude towards new cultures which marks this period. Exotic destinations were not only seen as sources of revenue, but also as valuable sources of ideological impetus. So, as all of our writers observed, the British were interested in the literature, history and politics of the places they visited and dominated. The question, of course, as we have indicated in this essay, is whether this interest was purely put in the service of colonization or whether it was, although undeniably connected and sometimes concurrent to it, a separate process. Our writers seem to have seen the problems that this question raises, but, unfortunately none has treated the subject exhaustively. Their works seem to suggest that they had some elementary notions about the relationship between the

pursuit of knowledge of a civilisation and the power such knowledge confers upon the one who possesses it.

The fall of the Ptolemaic universe signalled the beginning of a new era for Europe and the world. Although our writers could not trace the beginning of this new era exactly, but they were well acquainted with Copernicus' discoveries. In the Newtonian science they could not help but note the way Europe was going: trying to escape a purely mechanistic interpretation of the world, European science re-discovered God. This suggested a new relationship between science and the people, and it is to the credit of our observers to have noticed that European scientists did not indulge in their work for the sake of science alone, but tried to apply their research for the benefit of the people.

This attitude, in turn, favoured technical progress, the most evident manifestation of which was, probably, the advancements in the ship-building industry and the development of various navigational techniques. Abu Talib realized the big advantage that the domination of the waters gave to England, and he noted, as we have seen, naval force was the major source of Britain's strength and the main reason for the British prosperity and wealth.

It was at this point in our enquiry that we came across the most widely discussed historical phenomenon, the Industrial Revolution which started in Britain. Our writers accounts are perhaps the first occurrence in Indo-Persian literature of any reference to this landmark of world-history. For the most part our writers discussed the process of industrialization as an isolated phenomenon. Detailed answers to very subtle questions should not be expected, granted the limited availability of data. As we have seen, questions about any connection between the current scientific knowledge and the ongoing Industrial Revolution, were not even formulated. Nonetheless, most observers

noted that the connection between the newly-discovered laws of modern mechanics (*jarr i saqil*) and the iron foundries or the ship-building industry.

It is, again, Abu Talib, who noticed the connection between industrialization and manual force. Where ten oxen were used before, now a mechanical device would do the job. At a more serious level, industrialization, which had greatly increased productivity, now made it possible to introduce mass-production with lower rates (*arzan*) and reduce the prices of commodities. Still, England was an expensive country from an Indian point of view.

A by-product of the scientific revolution was the requirement for a "mechanically" regulated government, a government which, like the universal laws it had to implicitly obey, was rigid, dynamic and, at the same time, could aid evolution. The absolutism of the imperial government in India had driven the country to political ruin and economic decline, while the prosperity of Britain was the result of its well-established political institutions, based on justice and freedom. The stability of the British government, the country's responsive Parliament, its competent ministers, and the freedom of the individuals, these were all reasons which our authors clearly saw behind British prosperity. Our authors realised that in economic terms there existed a social stratification and employed the terms *ashraf*, *ain*, and *Khas wa am* for the aristocracy, the notables and the common populace respectively, but all British citizens were equal before the law.

Certain issues could probably be understood best if they were set against the contemporary background of India in the post-Plassey period; such issues centre around the Muslim intellectual interest in the institution of monarchy, the powers of the constitutional monarch, the relation of the Crown to the Parliament, the functions of the two Houses, the role of the Cabinet and, more significantly perhaps, the position of the

East India Company in the hierarchy of political organs. Even though the Company had gained in political and military power in India its rule had not been legitimised in the eyes of the indigenous political and intellectual elites. In fact, the latter saw a paradox in the twofold function of the Company, which had been introduced as a mercantile organisation but was now slowly transforming into an arbiter of Indian affairs. If the Company had any right to political power, they claimed, it was only through the title of Chief Civil Officer (*diwan*) of the state (*suba*) of Bengal, a title that the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam had conferred to the Company in 1765.

It was held that the Company contributed to the steady erosion of the authority of the Mughal sovereign. Although the Mughal Emperor had no real power, domination and authority in European terms, almost every class of people and every state in the Empire continued to acknowledge his nominal authority; his subjects still regarded him as a source of honour. The *khutba* were still read in his name in the mosques of British India and all the coins the Company issued until 1835 bore his name. The British chose not to depose the Mughal Emperor after Lord Lake entered Delhi in 1803. Instead of proclaiming themselves the rulers of India, they confined themselves to the self-imposed role of a protector of the Emperor. In fact, by assuming this role the British were seeking to legitimise their rule in the eyes of the native power elites. Until 1858 they appeared unwilling to depose the Mughal sovereign and proclaim the British monarch as also the Emperor of India; this created a dilemma in the minds of the indigenous intellectual and political elites, a dilemma which our writers tried to resolve.

An inherent dichotomy can be discerned throughout our authors' writings on the West. They knew that British laws were not based on Christian religion, but, rather, that religion and politics were separate domains. They greatly appreciated the fact that it was the Parliament which enacted the laws for the welfare of people and that these laws

were subject to change and modification. Nonetheless, although they applauded the British political system, still a state based on *Sharia* remained an ideal concept for all our writers.

Another dichotomy recurs in our authors' expositions of the scientific and technological developments in the West; although they admired its technological progress and the resulting material prosperity of the West, they still criticised the very Western societies which had produced these achievements. In fact, as Ira Lapidus pointed out, whatever the economic forces that impinged from without, the Muslim elite responded primarily in political or cultural terms and tended to define the problem of European intervention in socio-cultural rather than economic terms. Although at this stage there existed no such qualitative distinction between the East and the West; which was to become the major characteristic of nineteenth century perceptions. Nonetheless, the dilemma of the Muslim elites as to how to accommodate with the west at the same time also to remain true to their faith without compromising the social and moral values which underlay it, had begun.

The declining elite became passive recipients of European knowledge rather than agents for change. Unlike other Islamic societies European ideas were not integrated ideologically in the Islamic thought in India. The Muslim decline on the subcontinent was a reality and bureaucrats were those were most affected from the political change; this also explains why in the nineteenth century it was mainly the *ulama* who were at the vanguard of response to the west. Seen in long term perspective, ^{the} subsequent period was to see an unequal development of the middle class, as in other parts of India and Bengal in particular, schools and colleges modelled on the European style had already opened. Such attempts did not take place in North India until 1827, when the Delhi College was established for the benefit of the sons of the affluent Muslim *ashraf*

families who were thought to have been ruined under the British rule. Yet Muslims also survived as H.A.R. Gibb emphasised, in his famous article entitled "Islamic Biographical Literature", ^{because of} the continuity of cultural tradition in Islamic societies ^{He makes this assertion} while explaining the importance of the *tabaqat*, the biographical dictionaries in the Islamic culture.

In the context of Indian Islam it was the task of the great reformer Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98), who although ^{he} came from a prominent family of Mughal administrators, had been associated with the Mughal Court and had served under the British in positions not very different to those of many members of his class. Nonetheless, he was to become what Robinson called the "Renaissance man" who formulated an active response to the West; he showed that western scientific thought was not antithetical to Islam rather Islam was compatible with modern science, if the *Quran* was interpreted in the light of the reason.

During the nineteenth century several Indians visited Europe and recorded their experience of the West. Some of them travelled there to gain political concessions from the Directors of the Company, while others came to satisfy their natural inquisitiveness about a different world. They came from an India under full colonial rule. The territorial suzerainty of the East India Company had almost been established by this time and the Company had emerged as a paramount power. It now exercised its sway almost over the whole of the continent directly or indirectly. As the century progressed, it was Britain which became the focus of attention of the Indian educated elite which considered Europe as synonymous to Britain.

Nineteenth century commentators wrote about a Britain that was very different to that of their predecessors; it had already emerged as the strongest power in Europe and one of the arbiters of its fate. It played an important commercial role globally and decisions taken in Westminster affected countries as diverse as China, Canada and India.

From an economic point of view Britain was now far more industrialised and, if one was to follow the idea of economic growth in an industrial society along the five stages that Rostow identified, one might say that Britain by the 1830s had completed its "take-off" (1783-1802) and was more than half way through its progress to "maturity". By 1832 the first stage had been completed with the successful application of steam power in the textile industry, the expansion in the production of coal and iron and the development of the engineering industries.

Like their predecessors, all the nineteenth century visitors were members of the aristocracy and the gentry. They all travelled to Britain in the fourth and fifth decades of the nineteenth century and, unlike previous visitors, they witnessed the industrial progress of mid-Victorian Britain at a much grander scale. This, in turn, facilitated a more critical outlook of their own culture. As Yusuf regrettably noted, much of India's lack of scientific progress stemmed from its aristocracy's indulgence in the pursuit of pleasure which had frozen all strivings for knowledge and the development of arts (*ilm wa hunar*).

Another nineteenth-century visitor, Karim, came to Britain when London was throbbing with the construction of railways; it was the Age of the railway, "the great connector". He did not conceal his extreme bewilderment at the technological progress in Britain and often admitted frankly his lack of understanding of the various aspects of this transformation. His narrative reverberates with his concern that Indians (*ahl i hind*) might not be able to follow or appreciate his accounts of "the wonders" (*ajaibat*) of Britain.

Like the eighteenth century commentators before him, Karim realized that Britain's prosperity owed much to its political stability, which allowed a great part of the population to freely engage in trade and commerce, their rights safeguarded by a well-

laid out constitution. The wise men of the country had formulated the nation's laws (*qanun*) in such a way that the increased feeling of rivalry among the citizens promoted the prosperity of the country and the state (*mulk wa saltanat*).

When Karim visited Britain in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century the country was plunged in a prolonged depression which lasted from 1837 to 1842. The Industrial Revolution had at this stage taken the form of a social experience and Britain was witnessing an intense class-struggle in the form of Chartism, the great class movement. This was a period of tension and frustration. The observer endeavoured to comprehend these complex phenomena and incorporate them in the framework of his own cultural categories. It was the issue of the British political system which Karim could not resolve. The issue which most impressed him was the debate (*adawat* literally, "rivalries") between the Tories and the Whigs. He wondered how such differences and discord among "the pillars of the state" did not lead Britain to its downfall, but rather promoted the stability of the state and the prosperity of the people.

However, unlike their eighteenth-century predecessors, the nineteenth-century observers did not raise the question of the reasons behind Britain's success in dominating India directly. The hegemony of the West in the non-European world was by now too well-known a phenomenon for them to discuss; the British political ascendancy in India was too evident to be questioned. Nevertheless, Karim concerned himself with the East India Company, the nature of its organization and its relationship with the British Crown and the Parliament in particular. Contrary to the views of his predecessors, Karim argued that the East India Company, initially a commercial concern, had now become an integral part of the British government with the support of the rulings of various acts passed in the British Parliament.

He specifically disagreed with the views of the author of *Shigarfnama* and argued that the employees of the Company enjoyed the same status as royal officials since they both derived their power and authority from the British monarch; this authority had been granted them in the form of a royal certificate issued to all bureaucrats whether they served in India or Britain; all bureaucrats of the British Empire were subject to the same regulations regarding issues of payment, retirement and pensions. The Board of Control was an extension of the British King's power over the Company and the Governor-General of India could not take any decision without the prior approval of the Board of Control. Moreover, the Governor-General of India invariably belonged to the nobility and was thus a representative of the British monarch. Karim stressed that the British Parliament had not allowed the Company to confiscate the *jagir* of the regional Indian potentates; he quoted the precedent of the Parliament questioning the confiscation of the *jagir* of Farrukhbad.¹

Unlike their eighteenth century predecessors, the mid-nineteenth observers had nothing to offer in comparison to what they observed in Britain. According to them, contemporary India could not be compared to Britain which had far surpassed it in every respect. Karim Khan regretted the fact that the underlying reason for the downfall of India lay in its deep indifference and disregard for the world outside their country. He accused contemporary Indians of the Indo-centricism of the days of Alberuni, a kind of xenophobic passivity leading to staticism. According to Karim, Indians lacked intellect (*aql*) and experience (*tajriba*), the twin prerequisites of progress and development.

¹ For a detailed account of the nature and the organization of the Company, cf. *Mirat i Gitinuma*, ff. 125b-30a; also *Siyahatnama*, ff. 152, 208-12b.

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