

*NOSTALGIA:
Tears of Blood
for a Lost World!*

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ABSTRACT

This article historicizes nostalgia by looking at literary texts in Urdu, written in Delhi between 1857 and the First World War. It traces its development from the testimonies of the immediate survivors of the revolt, for whom the personal loss was still embedded in known rules governing the world, down to those who saw progress as inevitable, but who still mourned the past as a lost world and posited it as a counter-narrative to the colonial present and to modernity. The article thereby aims at not only showing the different uses—political and other—nostalgia was put to at different times, but also to take the emotion itself seriously and to show both its transformation into different feelings and the way it mediated between collective memory and personal, felt experiences.

At first sight, nostalgia, that longing for a time which has passed and can never be recovered, looks like an emotion to which almost everyone can relate. We seem to know how nostalgia feels; its emotional quality—as opposed to the political uses it was put to—therefore appears to be in no need of investigation. In this article I would like to challenge this assumption by looking at texts marked by this longing for a lost world, written in and about Delhi between 1857 and the 1920s.

Almost until the end of colonial rule over the Indian subcontinent, generations of British writers marked out the revolt of 1857 as the central event of the nineteenth century. This was less due to an outstanding intrinsic importance of the event—it was neither the first nor the last revolt against the British, and though it marked the end of the East India Company, this did not imply radical changes to the

1 I would like to thank the members of the panel on “Urban Spaces and Emotions” at the 40th Annual Conference on South Asia, 22 October 2011 and the participants of the workshop “Memory and Temporalities” at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin on 18 June 2014—namely, Razak Khan—for discussions on nostalgia. A big thank you, as always, to Anja Berkes and Rachel Johnson for their editorial support.

colonial/political structure.² However, British representation of the revolt enabled the navigation of feelings of trust and fear by the colonizers and hence also answered crucial questions about the identity of the rulers and the ruled and the character of British government. This led not only to the publication of an incredible number of books from 1858 onward, but also to the inscription of the events of the “Mutiny” onto the North Indian space—the fort, the ridge, the flagstaff tower, among others in Delhi—through the regular enactment of spatial practices by officials, architects, and tourists alike.³

It is against this background that the cultivation of nostalgia in Urdu texts has to be read, but in this debate the cards were unequally distributed. While the English texts were written without any reference to the Urdu recollections, the colonial interpretation of the events of 1857 deeply marked the Urdu writers, even if they did not agree with that interpretation. At the same time, any reference to these events implied risks. In the months immediately following the re-conquest of Delhi, a connection to and praise for the wrong people, notably the King, and criticism of British vengeance could mean death or at least expropriation. In the early twentieth century, authors continued to face censorship, leading to bans and prosecution. Nostalgia, sometimes viewed as an emotion turned exclusively towards the past and lacking the will to confront the present and the future, in this situation offered one possibility of voicing an alternative worldview.

Moreover, while the texts center on a locality as the focus for their recollection—Delhi, and more precisely the *qil’a mu’alla*, the exalted fort, which in memory became the center for India it had not been in real life for a long time—colonial power relations meant that these spatial references could not lead to any form of spatial practices, such as commemo-

2 For a more detailed elaboration of this argument see Margrit Pernau, “India in the Victorian Age: Victorian India?” in *The Victorian World*, ed. Martin Hewitt (London: Routledge, 2012), 639-55.

3 Manu Goswami, “Englishness on the Imperial Circuit: Mutiny Tours in Colonial South Asia,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 9.1 (1996): 54-84.

rating special sites.⁴ If Mutiny tours offered the possibility of reinforcing emotions and validating interpretation by endowing spaces with affective knowledge, for the Urdu writers, this knowledge was lost within a generation after 1857. No one today would be able to point out the exact place where Imam Bakhsh Sahbai, the Persian teacher of the Delhi College, and his sons were shot or even the place where the King was kept prisoner. Furthermore, many of the spaces were materially reconfigured within months after the re-conquest, be it the western part of the palace or the densely populated area between the palace and the Jama Masjid. The nostalgic memories, which the Urdu texts evoke, are therefore memories without concrete spaces, objects or spatial practices to support them. Politics thus structured not only which emotions could be voiced and how they could be expressed, but also the way they could be created or not created in the interface of texts, spaces, objects, and practices. Nostalgia has to be read against this specific context. This is the first argument.

The link between history, memory, and identity has been intensely explored in recent years.⁵ Though nostalgia has been touched upon, it was as a specific way of relating to memories of the past, not as an emotion, “the history of which,” Nauman Naqvi has argued, “would be impossible to determine.”⁶ This article claims not only that the history

4 The distinction between spatial practices—involving bodies moving through spaces which are not only imagined, but also material—and literary practices which refer to spaces has been downplayed in the wake of the linguistic turn. However, if emotion history aims at taking materiality serious, the distinction between material and literary and imagined spaces needs to be kept up. This neither implies the assumption that spaces impact bodies in a form unmediated by culture, nor does it introduce a hierarchy between these different practices. I am grateful to Maritta Schleyer for pushing me to think more precisely on this topic.

5 Daud Ali, ed., *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Vinay Lal, *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); Raziuddin Aquil and Partha Chatterjee, eds., *History in the Vernacular* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008); Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

6 Nauman Naqvi, “The Nostalgic Subject: A Genealogy of the ‘Critique of Nostalgia,’” in C.I.R.S.D.I.G. *Working Papers* 23 (2007): 2-55, quotation: 9.

of nostalgia as an emotion can be written. What changes in the period under investigation are not only the objects of nostalgia, but also the conventions of how nostalgia can be talked and written about, which in turn feed back into the way the memories are organized and emotionally experienced. More than that: emotions provide the central medium through which individual and personal recollections are fed into collective memories through empathy and mimesis—collective memories are built upon individual memories. On the other hand, collective memories are appropriated and rendered meaningful by the individual subject through emotions. This is the second argument.

When the concept of nostalgia first appeared—not in literature or history, but in medicine—it described the yearning for a lost home, not for a lost period of time.⁷ Enlightenment introduced a profound change in the way space and time were related: differences between countries and regions were mapped out and organized along a timeline, leading from early stages of savagery to barbarism and finally to the civility which the philosophers thought to find in Europe. This possibility of translating space into time and time into space also affected the concept of nostalgia, which now referred less to a space, to which a person might one day return, as to a time which was gone once and for all. Increasingly it came to be viewed as a temporal emotion, a longing for what revolution and progress had left behind, for the world which had disappeared and left the subjects without home, “stranded in the present.”⁸ Nostalgia has been read as an emotion which gains its poignancy through conceptions of temporality inherent to modernity: it is based on an idea of linear time, in which the past becomes irretrievable.⁹ More than that: the present is thought

7 Helmut Illbruck, “Figurations of Nostalgia: From the Pre-Enlightenment to Romanticism and Beyond” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2008).

8 Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

9 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and its Discontent,” *Hedgehog Review* 9.2 (2007): 7-18.

to be so different from the past, that experiences relating to the past no longer hold any value, either for understanding the present or for shaping the future. In this the modern perception of time is held to differ fundamentally from a cyclical concept, in which past experience holds lessons on what to expect from the present—evidenced for instance in the figure of the rise and fall of empires. This argument might need further refinement. While the increasing divergence between what Reinhart Koselleck called the space of experience (what can be known about the past) and the horizon expectation (what can be anticipated about the future) is certainly one of the central figures of thought of modernity,¹⁰ the temporal regimes of everyday life to which the actors refer are much more blurred.¹¹ Nostalgia certainly is premised on an irrevocable past. However, it simultaneously draws on experiences of loss, which do not presume linear time (the longing for the beloved in the *ghazal* comes to mind, for which the experience of many generations of poets remain relevant or the homesickness due to migration or exile, which was never completely displaced by temporal nostalgia). And while the past seems to lose its authority, the age of modernity is also the age in which the past becomes a source of group identity for the present and a way to imagine the future to an unprecedented extent. Nostalgia encompasses multiple temporalities and is not directed only towards the past. Rather, it is one of the ways through which the present and the future are debated. This is the third argument.

10 Reinhart Koselleck, “‘Space of Experience’ and ‘Horizon of Expectation’: Two Historical Categories,” in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, ed. Reinhart Koselleck (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 255-7.

11 Koselleck used the image of temporal layers (*Zeitschichten*) to refer to this simultaneity: different ways of relating the past, which originate at different times, remain accessible at the same time. Reinhart Koselleck, “Representation, Event and Structure,” in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, ed. Reinhart Koselleck (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 105-44; Helge Jordheim, “Against Periodization: Koselleck’s Theory of Multiple Temporalities,” *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 151-71.

STRUGGLING FOR SURVIVAL

Not all of the memoirs produced by Urdu writers in the direct aftermath of the events of 1857 were written in a nostalgic mood; indeed, most were not. This holds true for the rather large corpus of texts written at the instigation of British officers, who wanted to know what had happened in Delhi between May and September 1857, either to use this knowledge in the process against Bahadur Shah, the prince, and their supporters, or out of historical curiosity. Under this category fall the diaries of Jivan Lal, news-writer at the Residency before the revolt, of Muin ud Din Hasan and Shah Mubarak, who both acted as chief police officer for some weeks, and of Hakim Ahsan Ullah Khan, the King's advisor.¹² But the lack of nostalgia also holds true for the writings of Saiyid Ahmad Khan, who had protected the British in Bijnor, and who was one of the first Urdu writers to analyze the causes of the revolt.¹³ All of these men were invested in pre-1857 Delhi, either professionally or culturally and intellectually, all of them lost part or all of their property and their income, but most of all, they lost the world to which they had belonged and which had shaped them. However, none of them dwell in nostalgic comparisons between the present and the past—it is as if they were too busy surviving (in addition to demonstrating their loyalty to the British).

12 Jivan Lal, *Roznamcha*, OIOC, O.R. 11.170; Muin ud Din Hasan, *Khadang-e ghadar*, ed. Khwaja Ahmad Faruqi (Delhi: Dehli University Press, 1972). Both these texts have been translated by Charles Theophilus Metcalfe as *Two Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi* (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co, 1889). However, the translator could not resist the temptation to reorganize the texts and add passages which are not there in the original. Shah Mubarak, *The Kotwal's Diary: An Account of Delhi During the War of Independence, 1857*, trans. and ed. R.M. Edwards and Ansar Zahid Khan (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1994); Hakim Ahsan Ullah's memoirs have been published in translation by Moinul Haq, *Memoirs of Hakim Ahsanullah Khan* (Karachi, Pakistan Historical Society, 1958). Here again, the Urdu original seems lost. For more details on these texts see Margrit Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Class: Muslims in Nineteenth Century Delhi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 205-39.

13 Syed Ahmad Khan, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, intro. by Francis Robinson (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1873]).

There are two texts which form an exception, Ghalib's *Dastanbu*,¹⁴ written on the basis of a diary he claims to have kept during the revolt, and Fazl ul Haqq's *Saurat ul Hindiya*, which was allegedly written during his imprisonment on the Andaman Islands, smuggled out of prison, taken to the Hijaz in the baggage of his son, and returned to India at the eve of the First World War with Abu Kalam Azad.¹⁵ While these two men, too, had to struggle for their survival—successfully in the case of Ghalib, while Fazl-e Haqq died in prison—they took their memories to a different level than the texts previously mentioned and attempted to endow the events with a meaning which emphasized and even created a continuity between past and present. This is made clear already in the choice of language: like generations before him, Ghalib still writes in elaborate Persian, the language of the court and of cultivated society in Delhi before 1857, and Fazl-e Haqq chooses Arabic and embeds his story in Islamic scholarship.

Ghalib draws on his poetic persona for pursuing his aims: not only was he too otherworldly to understand politics and be involved in the affairs of the court (though he might have composed the chronogram for the new coins of the King—of course without realizing the implications), but protecting and rewarding such an outstanding talent would also increase the glory of the colonial power.¹⁶ His troubles are many and his anguish, physical and mental, is sharp: “For you this is only a sorrowful story, but the pain is so great that to hear it the stars

14 Ghalib, *Dastanbu*, trans. and ed. Khwaja Ahmad Faruqi (Delhi: Delhi University Press, 1970). On Ghalib's nostalgia and the imagery used to describe pre-1857 Delhi see C.M. Naim, “Ghalib's Delhi: A Shamelessly Revisionist Look at Two Popular Metaphors,” *Annual of Urdu Studies* 18 (2003): 3-24.

15 Translated by Moinul Haq, “The Story of the War of Independence, 1857-58, by Allamah Fadl-I Haqq of Khayrabad,” *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 5 (1957): 23-57. See also Jamal Malik, “Letters, Prison Sketches, and Autobiographical Literature: The Case of Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi in the Andaman Penal Colony,” *Indian Economic Social History Review* 43.1 (2006): 77-100; Afzal Haqq Qarshi, ed., *Maulana Fazl-e Haqq Khairabadi: Ek tahaqiqi mutala* (Lahore: al Faizal, 1992).

16 Ghalib, *Dastanbu*, 48 and passim.

will weep tears of blood.”¹⁷ But these traumatic events, though they have destroyed his world, have not altered the world at depth. Neither is history only indebted to human agency, nor does it bring anything that has not happened before. The constellation of inauspicious planets, Saturn and Mars, which brought the destruction upon Delhi, is the same which also governed the Arab invasion of Iran. The rotating skies bring misfortune and torments—a well-known topic from *ghazal* poetry—but in the end they are in the hand of God.¹⁸

Ghalib has lost everything and the present holds nothing but further suffering. However, what has changed is his fate, and the fate of his beloved city, but not the course of the world: “I weep and I think that the times are completely uncaring. If I, who am closed in my corner of grief, cannot look at the green and the flowers or, by smelling the sweet flowers, fill my mind with perfume—the beauty of spring will not be diminished and no one will punish the breeze.”¹⁹ The verses Sa’adi composed in the thirteenth century still hold their truth for him: “Alas, when we have gone from the world, innumerable springs will still refresh the land and flowers will bloom in profusion.”²⁰

As had many members of his family since the time of his father, Fazl-e Haqq started his career in the service of the colonial administration, but as early as 1830, he decided that this was not the path toward honor and left Delhi for a succession of princely states (though it remains unclear as to whether he took up service with the British again at a later stage). He was in Delhi at least for some part of the crucial time between May and September, advising the King, and he may also have signed a fatwa calling for jihad. He left Delhi before its reconquest and turned towards his native town of Khairabad, where he was apprehended by the British and shortly afterwards condemned to

17 Ibid., 34.

18 Ibid., 26-31.

19 Ibid., 63.

20 Ibid., 65.

a lifelong exile on the Andaman Islands.

Like Ghalib, Fazl-e Haqq provides us with a vivid description of his life as “a heart-broken and suffering prisoner, who is sighing for what has been lost to him, who is afflicted with every kind of injury.”²¹ This sentiment of loss is exacerbated in prison, but the “calamity, which turned the nobles into beggars and destitutes and the kings into prisoners and slaves”²² had started much earlier and went way beyond his personal fate. While the topos of the downfall of empires and of nobles into beggars is traditionally developed in the *ibratnamas*, poems elaborating on the fickleness of all worldly power and happiness and warning the readers to put their trust in no one but God, Fazl-e Haqq uses it as a starting point for a precisely spelt-out critique of the colonial empire: the empire not only aimed at converting Indians to Christianity, but also deprived them of their livelihood and created havoc in a well-ordered society by abolishing distinctions between creeds and classes.

But all these violent alterations do not change the laws governing the world and its history—far from being devaluated, history still holds precious lessons for the present. God, “who saved Noah from being drowned, Abraham from being burnt, Job from what he suffered of the diseases and miseries, Jonah from the belly of the fish and the children of Israel from their hardships ... he saved Moses and Aaron from Pharaoh, Haman and Korah and ... the Messiah from the evil designs of the crafty,”²³ had the power to save Fazl-e Haqq from his prison cell and, by implication, could bring back the days of felicity not only for one individual, but for the community as a whole.

Nostalgia, the grieving for a way of life which was gone, was a burning sensation in both of these texts, intensified by the trauma of the British violence and the despair and anxiety of the present, which

21 Haq, “Story,” 26.

22 Ibid., 28.

23 Ibid., 55.

precluded any thought about the future, except the one of survival. At the same time, neither Ghalib nor Fazl-e Haqq can be described as stranded in a world they no longer understand. On the contrary: the laws which governed their life before the events still hold true and provide an interpretation of their present condition. This does not attenuate the pain, but neither do they need to despair. Their nostalgia establishes an emotional community of sufferers which stretches way beyond Delhi and the present.

AESTHETICIZING LOSS AND PAIN

Recent studies on cultural memory have brought out the close interplay between memory and media. Rather than viewing memory and its transmission as two consecutive steps, media play a central role in the production of memory itself, in the selection of what is worth remembering (or forgetting), in the organization of the remembered fragments into a narrative whole and thus, in its endowment with meaning.²⁴ This emphasis on media includes a careful attention to genres and genre conventions, which not only work on emotions already existing, permitting the expression of some and the minimization of others. Rather, the knowledge of what can be said, and what has already been said previously, precedes the voicing of feelings, and gives shape to the experience itself. At the same time, the availability for a multiplicity of culturally shaped genres for the interpretation of the same experience opens up a wide—but not unlimited—array of choice for the remembering individual. Different genres allow for different interpretations and

24 For a very good introduction into recent memory studies and for suggestions where to take the field see Gregor Feindt et. al, “Entangled Memory: Towards a Third Wave in Memory Studies,” *History and Theory* 53 (2014): 24-44. See also Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, eds., *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009); Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds., *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).

emotions, they even allow the same person to feel differently according to different contexts.

Nostalgia, as the painful but cherished remembrance (*yad*) of something or someone lost, has a long tradition in Urdu poetry. The separation from the beloved is the central topic played out in the *ghazal*. While it is generally left open as to whether this separation has ever been preceded by a union, the emphasis is on the agony of longing itself, rather than on the contrast between a former blissful state and present suffering. What qualifies the real lover is capacity to endure pain, readiness to die not just once but a thousand times. This codification of pain needs to be kept in mind while reading the nostalgic texts: drawing on the imagery of a *ghazal* does not make the suffering any less real or painful, but the pain to which the author lays claim at the same time is something which marks him out as a man of heart—to be commiserated, certainly, but also admired.

The beloved is also at the center of the second poetic genre focusing on nostalgia, the *shahr-e ashob*,²⁵ the destruction of the city. Originally conceived as an extension of the havoc an all too beautiful beloved could create, into the devastation of an entire city, the translation of the genre from Persian to Urdu shifted the attention from the beloved to the city. Now the city itself was imagined as a beloved. This beloved, however, was no longer a cruel tyrant, but the object of suffering. Premised on enumeration of destructions wrought and pains inflicted, the *shahr-e ashob* opened up the space for the detailed description and lamentation of losses.

A collection of *shahr-e ashob*, the *Fughan-e Dihli*, put together in 1863 by the poet Tafazzul Husain Kaukab, was one of the first Persian/

25 Sunil Sharma, "The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24.2 (2004): 73-81; Carla Petievich, "Poetry of the Declining Mughals: The Shahr Ashob," *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 25.1 (1990): 99-110.

Urdu books to be published about the events of 1857.²⁶ Similar to Ghalib and Fazl-e Haqq, Kaukab too emphasized the continuity of the present calamities to former destructions. Recalling the time when the revolt had not happened and the King not been exiled, the collection opens with his poem (possibly even written before 1857), thus displaying the traditional hierarchy of the poetic gatherings. This is followed by a *shahr-e ashob* by Rafi ud Din Sauda, an eighteenth century master of the genre. Including poetry written before 1857 shows that the changes that formed the subject of the collection, terrible though they were, were not of a character to devaluate traditions. Not Kaukab's would be Adorno's claim that after Auschwitz it was no longer possible to write poems—on the contrary, writing poems and writing them in the traditional style was the only possibility of coping with the agony each of the poets had personally lived through.

This embedding, however, does not imply that the poems could and did not refer very specifically to the events witnessed. This specificity encompassed the description of precise and verifiable facts: Azurda's lamenting of the slaughter of his friend Imam Bakhsh Sahbai, which almost drove him mad,²⁷ or Dagh bemoaning the razing of the buildings within the fort, which changed the heart and life of Delhi.²⁸ But the enumerations and listings, characteristic for the genre of the *shahr-e ashob*, also offered room for the recollection proper, the juxtaposing of the beauty, liveliness, and blessing of Delhi has displayed before the revolt and its present desolate condition.²⁹

26 Tafazzul Husain Khan Kaukab, *Fughan-e Dilhi*, ed. Muhammad Ikram Chughtai (Lahore: Sang-e Mil, 2007). For a brilliant in-depth interpretation see Soofia Siddique, "Remembering the Revolt of 1857: Contrapuntal Formations in Indian Literature and History" (PhD diss., SOAS, University of London, 2012). I would like to thank Soofia for memorable time spent translating and discussing poems from the *Fughan* in June 2014. See also Pasha Muhammad Khan, "The Lament for Delhi 1863" (paper, Columbia University, New York, April 2006), http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urduhindilinks/workshop2009/txt_pasha_fughanintro.pdf.

27 Kaukab, *Fughan-e Dilhi*, 39; translation Siddique, "Remembering," 40.

28 Kaukab, *Fughan-e Dilhi*, 143; translation Siddique, "Remembering," 52.

29 Siddique, "Remembering", 53-54.

The diary, which Abdul Latif kept during the months of the revolt at the instigation of his father, and which he rewrote for publication probably sometime in the 1880s,³⁰ is a good example for the way poetical imagery permeated prose texts. Abdul Latif belonged to a family that had been in the service of the palace for a number of generations, holding minor offices, but mainly spending their days as companions to the King and the princes and, one may assume, writing and reciting poetry. While the diary proper holds some interest for the elaborations on the emotions of the principal actors during the months of the siege, it is the introduction, which for the first time (as far as I have been able to make out until now, at least) goes into detailed nostalgic remembrance of an age now bygone.

For the first time as well, the memories centered on the person of Bahadur Shah: “Without doubt, the King was of noble character, his conscience was pure and he had spiritual gifts. His countenance was radiating light, and he was of a Sufi temperament.”³¹ Thousands of people benefited from his generosity, but even more, his character, his blessings—and, in a nod towards the colonial rulers, the harmonious relations between him and the British—were responsible for turning Delhi into a place of bliss, where “every moment was spent in happiness, from night to day and from day to night. ... Delhi was displaying its splendor and the people of Delhi reveled in its glory. Everyone was distinguished by his ability and his consideration for others, people were good-tempered and had pleasant dispositions.”³²

This depiction of Bahadur Shah shows the entangled nature of nostalgic memory. While only a few people before 1857 would voluntarily have praised the King either for his character or for his poetry (and certainly no one would have called his relations with the colonial

30 Abdul Latif, *1857 ka Tarikhi Roznamcha*, trans. and ed. into Urdu by Khaliq Ahmad Nizami (Delhi: Nadwat ul Musannifen, 1971).

31 Latif, *1857*, 52. I would like to thank Sameena Siddiqui for the many hours we spent together on the translation of this text.

32 Latif, *1857*, 52.

power harmonious), once the British had turned him into a symbol of everything they abhorred in Indo-Muslim courtly culture, in the Urdu memoirs there was little space left for differentiation—Bahadur Shah had to be shaped into the mold of the *insan-e kamil*, the perfect man, the Sufi-king, who ruled with justice and generosity, through love but also through anger, if necessary, and whose rule transformed the ethical character of his subjects.³³ The loss of this king went beyond personal suffering, intense though it was—lost as well was his cosmic significance, through which he had held up the moral order of his time.

The pain of nostalgia drawing on conventionalized poetic imagery, in poems or in prose, is neither less intense nor less “real” than the more immediate expression of emotion we tend to associate with letters or diaries. The poetic distress at the same time is and is not the emotion of the poet; we should not doubt the sincerity or the intensity of the feelings the writers of the *Fughan* or Abdul Latif express. Poetry and the aesthetization inherent to it can render the pain even sharper, but it changes its quality: it is never the pain of the one and isolated individual only. This was the consolation it offered to poets and audience.

SAVING THE KNOWLEDGE OF PAST CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

Debates on nostalgia in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century show a deep ambivalence.³⁴ In an era premised upon progress—a progress whose vanguard was male, urban, and Europe-

33 Margrit Pernau, “Creation of a Royal Personality: The Yadgar-e Silver Jubilee of Mir Osman Ali Khan, Nizam of Hyderabad, 1936,” *Internationales Asien-Forum*, 31 (2000): 255-73.

34 Caroline Arscott, “Victorian Development and Images of the Past,” in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, ed. Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989): 47-67; Peter Mandler, “Against ‘Englishness’: English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 7 (1997): 155-75.

an—nostalgia for a lost world was a sentiment associated with those left behind in the race towards the future and unable to face the challenges of rapid change. Allocated a place outside of culture and history and associated with nature and the eternal, they were reduced to powerlessness but at the same time envied, often by the same people. Anthropology was the new discipline tasked with both preserving knowledge about pre-modern societies and controlling them. It combined ostentatious scientific distance with acute and nostalgic consciousness: what anthropologists witnessed was about to disappear and could already only be recovered through oral testimonies bound to vanish with each dying elder.³⁵

Academic anthropology kept a strict dividing line between the researcher and the objects of his research—anthropology as the investigation of the cultural other was part of the very definition of the discipline. On the ground, the lines were much more blurred, and already in nineteenth-century Delhi there were a number of men who did not restrict themselves to playing the role of the anonymous native informants, but conducted their own investigations in the anthropological mode and published them under their own names. While careful not to give vent to their feelings, these texts not only fed a second generation nostalgia of those who no longer had any memories of Delhi before the revolt, they were animated by the spirit of preserving a valued cultural knowledge which was important for the present day community and which was disappearing quickly.

Published in 1885, Fazl ud Din Dihlavi's *Bazm-e akhir*, the last banquet, was probably the first text not to dwell on the pain of loss, but instead offer a very detailed description of what had been lost.³⁶

35 William Cunningham Bissell, "Engaging Colonial Nostalgia," *Cultural Anthropology* 20.2. (2005): 215-48; Rob McQueen, "Homesickness for a Foreign Country: Nostalgia and Colonisation," *International Journal of Law in Context* 6.3 (2010): 257-75.

36 Fazl ud Din Dihlavi, *Bazm-e akhir*, ed. and intro. Kamil Qureshi (Delhi: Delhi Urdu Academy, 1986).

The only information we have about Fazl ud Din is that he belonged to the entourage of Mirza Ilahi Bakhsh, a distant cousin of Bahadur Shah, who was recognized by the British as the head of the royal family after the fall of Delhi and the exile of the King. His publisher urged Fazl ud Din to put down in writing his detailed knowledge about the palace before it was too late. This Fazl ud Din did, in a writing style that was as precise as it was unemotional. Two introductory verses are the only concession to nostalgic conventions:

On the garden's throne, the king of the roses was sitting in splendor
Surrounded by an army of nightingales, an uproar and clamor.
The day of autumn has arrived, in which we no longer see any-
thing but thorns.
Crying, the gardener exclaims: here were the buds and here the
roses.³⁷

He then goes on to cover the everyday life of the palace, detailing the King's daily and yearly routine. Fazl ud Din only rarely tells a story—his text thrives on lists of words: the names of the different kebabs, chicken dishes, lentils, or breads cover several pages. He gives the exact designations of the female officers in the female apartments, and lists the names of all modes of conveyance, from the open palanquin to the howdah of the elephant, used by the inhabitants of the palace. Even for occasions whose emotional fervor we know from other sources, the death anniversary of Khwaja Qutb ud Din, or the celebrations held for Abdul Qadir Jilani, are described in short, matter of fact sentences, punctuated only by a stereotyped addressing of the reader: "Look!" or "Behold!", which does not really do the work of involving him emotionally.

The entanglement with British knowledge production is obvious in the case of Saiyid Ahmad Dehlavi (not to be confused with

³⁷ Fazl ud Din Dihalvi, *Bazm-e akhir*, 37.

Saiyid Ahmad Khan). Descended from a family of scholars from Bihar, his father had migrated to Delhi and become a disciple of Shah Ismail and Saiyid Ahmad Bareilwi, who had radicalized the reform movement of Shah Wali Ullah and taken it to the battlefield. As Saiyid Ahmad was born in 1846, most of his knowledge of the vanished world of Delhi thus no longer stems from firsthand knowledge, but from his contact with those members of the royal family who had found refuge in Arab Sarai, near Humayun's tomb, where Saiyid Ahmad's family also lived.³⁸ His varied appointments included working as an assistant to S. W. Fallon, the inspector for schools in Bihar who was compiling one of the first Hindustani-English dictionaries. This involvement led to Saiyid Ahmad's lifelong passion for linguistics and dictionaries, which after thirty years of labor resulted in his four volume Urdu-Urdu dictionary, the *Farhang-e Asifiya*, still recognized today as a major reference work, and a special dictionary devoted to the language of women, the *Lughat un Nisa*,³⁹ which helped establish research into the *begamati zuban* as a topic in its own right.⁴⁰

At one point he was involved in the Ethnographic Survey of Delhi.⁴¹ Once again, he is open to British influences, but quickly transforms them into an agenda of his own, leading to two major anthropological texts on the culture of Delhi before the revolt, the *Rusum-e*

38 Gail Minault, "Sayyid Ahmad Dehlavi and the 'Delhi Renaissance,'" *Delhi Through the Ages: Selected Essays in Urban History, Culture, and Society*, ed. Robert Frykenberg (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1986]), 174-85. See also Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 95-104.

39 Saiyid Ahmad Dehlavi, *Lughat un-Nisa* (Delhi: Daftar-e Farhang-e Asafiya, 1917).

40 Gail Minault, "Begamati Zuban: Women's Language and Culture," *Gender, Language and Learning: Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History*, ed. Gail Minault (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), 116-34.

41 Minault, "Sayyid Ahmad Dehlavi", 182.

Delhi, first published in 1900,⁴² and the *Rusum-e Hunud*.⁴³ Similar to the *Lughat un nisa*, their success triggered off other publications in the same genre.⁴⁴ The customs and traditions Saiyid Ahmad describes were not limited to the palace, but held their place in the female quarters of the well-born of Delhi and beyond. Most of these customs, Saiyid Ahmad explained, were due to the intermingling between the religious communities, which led to Muslims adopting and accommodating Hindu rituals, like singing songs to Lord Krishna at the birth of a child or during marriages.⁴⁵ Though he carefully denies taking side for or against these customs, the very fact that he devotes so much time to their detailed description seems to be an indication that at the very least they should not be allowed to disappear without leaving a trace.

The texts we have discussed in the previous sections bemoaned the loss of the past with intense emotions, but this loss was embedded in a sense of continuity. This did not so much temper the pain as make it bearable through the fundamental trust of living in a meaningful cosmos. On the contrary, in the anthropological texts, if we may call them so, nostalgia becomes a very subdued emotion. It is no longer linked to pain and suffering, but nevertheless is strong enough to motivate writers to pen down whatever they or the people around them could still recollect. At the same time, the temporalities have changed fundamentally: nostalgia for the past notwithstanding, anthropology is closely linked to a notion of progress, to a sense that not only the world of pre-1857 Delhi, but all the pre-modern worlds are doomed disappear and have to make place

42 Saiyid Ahmad Dihlavi, *Rusum-e Dihli*, ed. and intro. Khaliq Anjum (Delhi: Delhi Urdu Academy, 1984).

43 Saiyid Ahmad Dihlavi, *Rusum-e Hunud*, quoted in Mohan Lal, *Encyclopedia of Indian Literature* vol. 5 (Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1992), 4263.

44 For instance: Begam S., *Rusum-e Dihli, ya'ni bayan-e shadi vagairah taqribat ke halat* (Lahore: Matba' rifah-e 'am, 1906).

45 Saiyid Ahmad Dihlavi, *Rusum-e Dihli*, 58-63.

for something radically new. The conservation of knowledge proceeds from a collector's interest; it can change neither the present nor the future.

ORIENTALIZING THE PAST

By the turn of the century, disputes over 1857 had lost much of their edge, though they tended to flare up again in moments of crisis.⁴⁶ But even for the British, the Mughal court had ceased to be remembered as a den of iniquity and squalor; the colonial power increasingly imagined itself no longer so much the victor as the inheritor of the Mughal Empire.⁴⁷ Indo-Muslim courtly culture, preserved at the princely states, notable at Hyderabad, Bhopal, and Rampur, became a projection screen for Orientalist imagery, at the same time the incarnation of the "Indian India" and a page out of *One Thousand and One Nights*. It was argued that this form of rule—personalized instead of bureaucratic, appealing to the senses with its colorful sights, bewildering and bewitching sounds and smells, emerging directly out of the past—appealed to the local genius. Orientalism's links to the creation of colonial power have been closely investigated. Even for the princely states, the British praise for oriental rulership always went hand in hand with an emphasis on the need of close control to prevent its degeneration into oriental despotism. What has been less studied is the appropriation and reinterpretation of this discourse by Indians themselves, the way it was turned into a critique of colonial-

46 Kim Wagner, "'Treading Upon Fires': The 'Mutiny'-Motif and Colonial Anxieties in British India," *Past & Present* 218. 1 (2013): 159-97.

47 Bernard Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 165-211.

ism and a resource for resistance.⁴⁸ I would argue that it is in this context that the many nostalgic descriptions of Delhi before 1857, which began to be published from the end of the nineteenth century onward, have to be read.

Rashid ul Khairi, one of the most prolific Urdu writers in the years before the First World War, was born in Delhi 1868. He was linked by marriage to both Nazir Ahmad, the writer, and Nazir Husain, one of the leading figures of the Ahl-e hadith. For some time the despair of his family because he would not stick to any form of regular work, he finally found his vocation in writing novels for women. Though he subscribed to the agenda of women's reform movements, it was less this aim which drove his books, than the emotions he was a master in provoking in his audience, a talent which earned him the title of *mu-sawwir-e gham*, the painter of grief. He used this same talent to recreate nostalgic scenes from the court of Bahadur Shah, which overflow with tears of blood, pierced livers, and torn hearts. These emotions sold very well, and Rashid ul Khairi was one of the first authors to be able to live from his pen. In this he was aided by the business acumen of his son Raziq ul Khairi, who bought back all the copyrights, printed the books at the family printing press, and skillfully marketed them through his father's journals, *Ismat* and *Tamaddun*.⁴⁹

Though Rashid ul Khairi seems to have been aware at least of the work of Faiz ud Din and makes use of his collections of designations, he no longer has any first-hand information, nor is he particularly interested in historical accuracy. He freely mixes information about

48 Margrit Pernau, *The Passing of Patrimonialism: Politics and Political Culture in Hyderabad 1911-48* (Delhi: Manohar, 2000); Razak Khan, "Minority Pasts: The Other Histories of a 'Muslim Locality', Rampur 1889-1949" (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2014).

49 Najm us Sahr Azmi, *Allamah Rashid ul Khairi. Shakhshiyat aur adabi khidmat* (Delhi: Color Press, 2000); Saiyid Zamir Hasan Dihlavi, "Muqaddimah," in Rashid ul Khairi, *Akhri Bahar*, ed. and intro. Saiyid Zamir Hasan Dihlavi (Delhi: Delhi Urdu Academy, 1991), 11-33; Tanvir Ahmad Alavi, "Muqaddimah," in Rashid ul Khairi, *Naubat-e Panj Rauzah*, ed. and intro. Tanvir Ahmad Alavi (Delhi: Delhi Urdu Academy, 1987), 11-33; Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 129-49.

earlier rulers with his knowledge of the time of Bahadur Shah and fills in the remaining gaps with his imagination.⁵⁰ What matters is the memory (*yadgar*), “which still burns like a wound of the heart.”⁵¹ Delhi and Shahjahanabad are directly addressed in the texts, as if the city were a graceful and beloved person, but the hub around which everything turned—the heart which held its life and its essence—was to be found in the palace and in the character of the King. If his subjects—beyond members of his family or one or the other of the nobles—entered the picture at all, it was to bring out the care and compassion with which he addressed them: “What great men, who thought about feeding rather than about eating, about clothing others rather than about their own dresses! Their deeds deserve to be written down in water of gold.”⁵²

The very same imagery of the oriental court could be found in some British travelogues or novels on princely states (though their metaphors as a rule were a little more restrained): the luxury, the glittering jewels, the nightly gatherings in the gardens, amidst flowers and fountains, the secrecy of the female quarters to which no one had access, the elegance and timelessness. However, the qualities ascribed to the good oriental ruler were, to some extent, also shared among colonial and colonized writers at this point in time: the direct justice, regardless of the status of the accused, which was awarded to a poor sweeper woman, who accused one of the princes of stealing her two chickens,⁵³

50 For instance: Bahadur Shah used to offer his daily prayers at the *tasbih khana*, not the Moti Masjid (Rashid ul Khairi, *Naubat*, 40-1) and he went to the Jama Masjid only on ceremonial occasions (*Naubat*, 56-7). While orientalism requires oriental kings to eat from golden and silver plates (*Naubat*, 47), this luxury had long since become a matter of the past in Bahadur Shah’s time.

51 Rashid ul Khairi, *Naubat*, 33.

52 *Ibid.*, 51.

53 *Ibid.*, 44-5.

the ruler's humanity and compassion and his loving nature.⁵⁴

Where Rashid ul Khairi did move onto new ground and shifted the meaning of orientalism is in the contrast he established between the lost world of Bahadur Shah and the present days, where the madness of love had been replaced by business,⁵⁵ where the garden had to give way to the desert, and where interactions were marked by ruthlessness and selfishness—the ways of those who worship progress and the West (*parastaran-e maghrib*):⁵⁶

I know that in today's time every passing moment is cursed, as are the unbelievers who pray towards the east. The beauty of the West reigns unchallenged. The white planes of the desert of ice have destroyed the *falsa* fruits of the garden. The briskness of the moon lit nights, when the breeze bent the branches, they have been overcome by gas light and electricity.... Today, it is a different world.⁵⁷

This juxtaposition of the old and the new deepens the text's emotional impact. The contrast gives its poignancy to nostalgia, while it also serves to criticize the modern times, and hence the colonial government, without needing to go further into details, which could have caused him problems with the censors. Instead, he can take on the poet's cap, cry his tears of blood, and still claim not to defy the Western interpretation of the present age: "Your ideas are right and your advice true. I don't contradict them. It is your time, your color,

54 The British texts as a rule matched this description with references to the weakness of the ruler, and always lurking dangers of uncontrolled oriental rule, thus bringing together the exaltation of the oriental ruler and the need of his control by the colonial power.

55 Rashid ul Khairi, "Shahjahanabad ke sada bahar phul," in Rashid ul Khairi, *Akhri Bahar*, 35-40, quotation: 35 (originally published 1913).

56 Rashid ul Khairi, "Inqilab-e tamaddun," in Rashid ul Khairi, *Akhri Bahar*, 78-83 (originally published 1911); Rashid ul Khairi, *Naubat*, 44 (quotation).

57 Rashid ul Khairi, *Naubat*, 34-5.

your day, your night. I don't disturb you, by shedding tears over past misfortunes."⁵⁸

Nostalgic orientalism thus is about the present as much as it is about the past. It opens up a space to think about—or rather feel for—alternatives to the colonial present which move beyond the dichotomy of progress or decadence. However, the tears he is so fond of invoking, and which his audience seems to have shed copiously,⁵⁹ remain as ambivalent as the passion he arose. Given the right time and occasion they could be the affective power behind political mobilization. However, nostalgic pain could also, again depending on the context, be self-sufficient, an aesthetic rather than a political emotion, consumed and, to a certain extent, also relished. It would be tempting to read this in relation to the establishment of print capitalism and in turn link it to a commercialization of emotions, which become goods which can be consumed through the media of texts or other artifacts.⁶⁰ As a successful professional author, Rashid ul Khairi certainly was aware that bloody tears, melodrama, and the critique of mercantile culture sold extremely well, but this does not tell the entire story. The traditions on which he drew, of validation of suffering as the sign of a noble heart and of the vicarious enjoyment of painful emotions, went back much further than North Indian print capitalism. The nostalgic feelings were strategically evoked and deeply felt at the same time. They were both a response to repetitive triggers and authentic expressions of a compassionate self, longing for the past and culling the energy for transforming the future from his dissatisfaction with the present, or just taking pleasure in a good cry with his friends.

58 Rashid ul Khairi, *Naubat*, 44.

59 See the description of a gathering of friends, Khwaja Hasan Nizami among them, who was himself the author of many tearful stories on Delhi before and during 1857: Tanvir Ahmad Alavi, "Muqaddimah," 25. On Khwaja Hasan Nizami's own nostalgic writings see Maritta Schleyer, "Ghadr-e Delhi ke Afsane," *Annual of Urdu Studies*, 27 (2012): 34-56.

60 Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (London: Polity Press, 2007).

THE AMBIVALENCES OF NOSTALGIA

At first sight, the nostalgia displayed by Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg follows a similar program to that of Rashid ul Khairi, though his keen sense of humor saves him from the worst melodramatic lapses. Born in 1883 to an old Delhi family of Mughal origin, he studied at St. Stephens' College and received private lessons from Deputy Nazir Ahmad in Arabic. Like many North Indian writers and intellectuals, the search for patronage led him to Hyderabad, where he spent most of his professional life, mixing nostalgia for a lost era with homesickness for his native town.⁶¹

Each year during the Monsoon, the flower sellers' festival took a large part of the population of Delhi out of the city to Mehrauli in a colorful procession, first to the Hindu temple of Yogmaya and then to the shrine of the Sufi saint Qutb ud Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, originating in a vow by the Queen Mother at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Like Rashid ul Khairi, Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg also gives pride of place to Bahadur Shah, but with a decisive twist. Where Rashid ul Khairi emphasized the role of the king as the cherisher of his people, for Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg, it is the subjects which have become the lovers on which attention centers.⁶² The affective relation thus becomes reciprocal: "What joy was there of the subjects, in which the king did not take part! And what sorrow was there of the king, in which the subjects did not share! The fact was that they both knew and under-

61 Rashid Hasan Khan, "Muqaddimah," in Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg, *Daktar Nazir Ahmad ki kahani, kuch meri aur kuch unki zabani*, ed. and intro. Rashid Hasan Khan (Delhi: Anjuman-e taraqqi-e Urdu, 1992), 9-19; Akhtar Qamber, introduction to Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg, *The Last Musha'irah of Delhi* (Delhi ki akhri shama'), trans. and intro. by Akhtar Qamber (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2010 [1979]), 3-50; Ghulam Yazdani, ed., *Yadgar-e Farhat* (Hyderabad: Farhat Memorial Committee, 1951).

62 Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg, "Bahadur Shah aur phulwalon ki sair," in Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg, *Mazamin-e Farhat*, ed. Saiyid Aziz Hasan (Delhi: Fine Art's Press, 1927), 5-48, 42.

stood: as he is, so are we, and as we are, so is he.”⁶³ This is not merely claimed, but informs Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg’s choices of anecdotes and descriptions—not only the King and his ladies, but also the courtesans, the wrestlers, and the people thronging the bazaar come in for their fair share of attention. If nostalgia’s selective gaze on the past also tells us something about whose past matters and is intended as the foundation for the future, this can be read as an incipient democratic awareness.

Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg’s best known story—not least because it was translated to English already thirty-five years ago—is the description of the last *musha’irah*, an imaginary poetic contest in Delhi, which brought together all the famous poets from the pre-mutiny era, in a well-researched and beautifully written piece.⁶⁴ What makes this text so fascinating for our purposes is the ambiguity it introduces to the concept of nostalgia. Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg takes over the poetic personage of Karim ud Din, one of the younger scholars of the Delhi College who ran its press, but was also active in putting together a *tazkirah*, a collective biographical dictionary of the poets of Delhi (which brought him in contact with Garcin de Tassy, the famous French Orientalist who was working on a similar project), and writing a number of treatises on education and modern sciences, besides regularly contributing verses of his own.⁶⁵ Karim ud Din sets for himself the goal of bringing together once again all the poets in a single gathering, a tradition that had lapsed because of their internal quarrels and was only remembered nostalgically in 1848.⁶⁶ What Mirza Farhat Ullah

63 Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg, “Phulwalon ki sair,” 2.

64 Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg, *Last Musha’irah*.

65 Karim ud Din, *Tabaqat-e Shuara-e Hind*, (Lakhnau, 1983 [reprint]). For more background on his biography see Avril Powell, “Scholar Manqué or Mere Munshi? Maulawi Karimu’d-Din’s Career in the Anglo-Oriental Education Service,” in *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education before 1857*, ed. Margrit Pernau (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2006), 203-31.

66 Daniela Bredi, “Nostalgia in the Re-construction of Muslim Identity in the Aftermath of 1857 and the Myth of Delhi,” *Cracow Indological Studies*, 9 (2009): 137-56.

Beg thus depicts is the nostalgia for an event, which was itself already cast in the nostalgic mood, in the awareness of the protagonists that changes were imminent and that this would be the last chance of celebrating in the style of a past which was almost gone: the last flicker of the lamp before extinction or the last deceptive recovery of a person about to die.⁶⁷

In turn, the texts under investigation in this article have meanwhile become the object of nostalgic longing by present-day Urdu scholars: hardly any introduction to the reprint editions by the Delhi Urdu Academy forgoes the opportunity of pointing out the greatness of the authors, such of which can no longer be found today, or at least regretting the better times, when they were still well-known and even taught in schools.⁶⁸ Nostalgia thus need not have a fixed reference point, but can shift backward and forward in time, an emotion less linked to a definite object, but floating and free to be applied to shifting contexts.

If Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg already told the story of the last poetic gathering with a twinkle, reminding the readers of the early twentieth century that the times they were longing for had not seemed so much worth longing for by those who lived through them, this sentiment gains the upper hand in a witty description of his early days in Hyderabad. Its title, *Purani aur Na'i Tahzib ki Takkar*, the clash of the old and the new civilization, raises the expectation of a tale of nostalgia, and the introduction, playing on Kipling's famous phrase "East is East and West is West," seems to confirm this impression.⁶⁹ Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg had been appointed to accompany the young son of a Nawab from Hyderabad to his studies in Aligarh. He is invited to spend some

67 Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg, *Musha'irah*, 60 and 64; for the interpretation of the metaphors (Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg, *Musha'irah*, 52) see Naim, "Ghalib's Delhi."

68 Khaliq Anjum, "Pesh lafz," in Rashid ul Khairi, *Akhri bahar*, 9-10. See also the introductions quoted above.

69 Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg, "Purani aur na'i tahzib ki takkar," in Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg, *Mazamin*, vol. 2, 56-73.

time in the city to get to know his charge and his family background. What follows is a delightfully humorous description of the traditional society and customs of Hyderabad, the princely state that prided itself on being the only place in India, which still followed the Mughal etiquette and preserved the old culture—a dream come true for the nostalgic writers of North India, one should suppose. The opposite happens. Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg finds the protocol and formalities surrounding the Nawab slightly ridiculous. He does not feel at home in discussions on horses, as he is used to riding a bicycle and prefers to do so even in Hyderabad. However, what irks him is the scant attention the Nawab pays to poetry, asking the court poets to recite their *marsiya*s, but interrupting each of them after a few verses. Against his advice, the family insists on their young princeling taking twenty-five servants to Aligarh. As Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg had predicted, all except two were sent back by the college authorities, which brought an early end to the boy's education. Nostalgia was all very well in its place, the author seems to tell us, but if it came to real life choices, going back to the Mughal court did not always seem an attractive option.

CONCLUSION

Nostalgia, this article has shown, encompasses a whole variety of different phenomena. These have often been classified according to their separate objects, but even if nostalgia refers to the same courtly culture, in a single place and within a limited time span—Delhi, as embodied in the royal palace during the reign of Bahadur Shah, i.e. the last twenty years before the revolt—it can lead to very diverse modes of relating to the lost past and making sense of the present. While Ghalib's *Dastanbu* is still based on a world view in which the rotating skies and inauspicious constellations may bring misfortunes for some time, but in which the fundamental laws governing the universe nevertheless remain stable, the early anthropologists like Saiyid

Ahmad Dihlavi can but safeguard the knowledge on a past irretrievably lost. Rashid ul Khairi, on the other hand, goes furthest in linking nostalgia with a critique of the changes brought about by the colonial government, while Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg reminds us that this critique does not always need to be taken at face value.

But nostalgia encompasses not only different temporalities and different ways of creating historical knowledge. It also links not just to one, but to a whole family of emotions, which can be distinguished according to both genre and generation: First, the emotions which could be—and had to be—expressed in a *shahr-e ashob* were not the same as those permissible in an anthropological treatise. Nostalgic emotions are both social and individual at the same time. If the context in which the authors and audiences lived rendered some interpretations of and emotions towards more plausible than others, and if the genres guided the emotions along certain well-defined tracks, these emotional offers still had to be appropriated by the individuals. Their agency was played out both in the selection of the genres and also—as we have seen in the case of Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg—in the reinterpretation or subversion they enacted upon the genres and their expectations.

Second, looking at the overall historical development of nostalgia, researchers have tended to emphasize its intensification: for most events involving a disruption, on the social or on the individual level, the second and third generation seem to be more into nostalgia than the first, who personally experienced the trauma and who recollected the time preceding it. The first generation was “often notoriously unsentimental, leaving the search for roots to their children and grandchildren, unburdened by visa problems”⁷⁰—or, as we have seen for Ghalib, the recovery of his pension or even very simply: survival. While the early authors did pen down their memories of the violence and destruction of 1857, it was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that detailed and nostalgic accounts of the daily life in pre-

70 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xv.

revolt Delhi came about in great number.

This intensification of nostalgia has also been claimed at a level transcending individual events, claiming a close link between nostalgia and modernity and positing the existence of a linear interpretation of history as the precondition for nostalgia. It is only when the past can no longer be recovered, when, moreover, it has lost its interpretative value for the present, that the subjects are left “stranded in the present,” in Peter Fritzsche’s felicitous formulation. This seems both plausible and borne out by this article’s findings. Rashid ul Khairi’s nostalgia seems indeed more desperate than Fazl-e Haqq’s, who still felt part of the community of those who had undergone similar suffering throughout history. Most of those who at the end of the century bemoaned the loss of the past, and who were keen to recover its traces and testimonies, were in one way or the other linked to the Aligarh movement and its aim of reforming the Muslim community. Not only were the customs they so lovingly described the same whose eradication they fought for under the label of superstition, the disappearance of glamor, the well-planned allocation of time and money were central to the self-identification with which the new middle class thought to distinguish itself from the old nawabi culture, and which they also proudly claimed as characteristic for Delhi as opposed to what they perceived as the decadence of Lucknow. Aiming at colonial modernity did not prevent them from being nostalgic, quite the contrary.

On the other hand, the distinction between the cyclical and the linear temporal regime should also not be overstated. A complete disjunction of the space of experience and the horizon of expectation would preclude any anticipation of an action’s results and thus the very possibility of acting meaningfully. The past cannot be recovered, but nostalgia can still allow for a different interpretation of the present and the future, precisely because the past experiences still are a guide leading towards possible horizons of expectation.



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