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Love and compassion for the community: Emotions and practices among North Indian Muslims, c. 1870–1930

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This article investigates how philosophical and ethical reflections, rhetorical strategies, and emotional practices intersect. In the first section, it lays out the traditional emotion knowledge found in Persian and Indo-Persian texts on moral philosophy written in the Aristotelian tradition, which still held an important place in the education of people writing in and reading journals like Aligarh's Tahzību-l Akhlāq. The second section looks at the transformation of this knowledge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and provides a close reading of texts that address education and self-education issues while simultaneously exhorting readers to feel more compassionate (and often to prove their compassion through specific actions). The last section, finally, uses the Punjabi traders of Delhi as a case study to show how practices of philanthropy contributed to community building.

Compassion, the article argues, is a social emotion, but not necessarily an unequivocally benign emotion. It serves to construct a community and to negotiate its boundaries, but it is also a tool of exclusion and helps fortifying the communities' internal hierarchies. The perception of the pain of others is as unequally distributed as the practices for its alleviation.

Keywords: History of emotions, compassion, sympathy, community building, *Tahzību-l Akhlāq,* Panjabi traders

'What is this thing (*chīz*), which links one man to the other, with great commotion (*shorā shorī*) and heat (*garmā garmī*)? What is this thing, which makes man a better being ... and seizes his heart? ... What is this thing, which God laid in every heart, and through which he gave men an enthusiasm (*josh*) for meeting others and establishing bonds? What is this thing through which we are pained if someone cries and rejoice at the melody of someone's happiness? It is affection and love (*uns o muhabbat*).'[1]

This is the beginning of an article from 1880, published in *Tahzību-l Akhlāq,* the Urdu journal of the Anglo-Muhammedan College at Aligarh. The last page with

[1] Anon., 'Uns o muhabbat'.

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the author's name is missing in my copy, but reading the text he seems to be either Saiyid Ahmad Khan himself or someone very close to him. The author as well as the place of publication ensures that the text would have been widely read among the North Indian Muslims. Its distribution went beyond the major cities, and extended to the *qasbahs*, the smaller towns, which still formed important nuclei of public discussion.[2] The text proceeds to praise these feelings, which create thousands of friends (*munīs*, *dost*) and lovers (*habīb*) for the lonely stranger and make him find people who share his sorrows (*ghamkhor*). These feelings—love and compassion (*muhabbat*, *hamdardī*)—are natural, but at the same time they need to be cultivated (*phulne phalne*) and form the basis for civilisation (*tahzīb*). The author points out the dangers inherent in neglect of cultivation, taking the garden metaphor further: feelings become overgrown by bad and unworthy actions. Men become cold and indifferent and their blood turns white (*khūn sapīd [=safed]*). Those, who once were disturbed by the falling of the leaves, now can see their neighbours and even brothers suffer great calamities without feeling compassion (*pasījnā*) in their heart. There is no doubt, the writer continues, that all the misfortune of the community (*qaum*) stems from one root only: the lack of love and compassion (*muhabbat o hamdardī*). Without these emotions, there can be no well-being (*bahbūd*) and no progress (*taraqqī*). 'In short, dear compatriots and co-religionists (*ham-watan o ham-qaum*), if you really care for the sighs of the community … you should create within yourself a heart which is touched by the misfortune of the community, a mind which is always afflicted by the thought of the community's pain.'[3]

Without emotions, the text suggests, a community cannot survive and prosper. In this article I aim to unpack further this relationship between emotions and the creation of a community. Five questions guide my reading of Urdu texts published between the 1870s and the 1930s. The first question addresses the emotions that members of a community feel or are supposed to feel towards each other. Martha Nussbaum has highlighted compassion as the central moral sentiment which holds societies together, calling it 'the basic social emotion.'[4] This has a long tradition in Western philosophy, ranging from Aristotle's discussion of the role of compassion in the educational purpose of theatre and the Enlightenment's emphasis on sympathy as the foundational emotion for civil society, to the present day discussions on the relation between compassion, sympathy, and solidarity.[5] The text quoted in the beginning shows that compassion and sympathy (both are possible translations for *hamdardī*) only rarely appear on their own. They are embedded in a net of related emotions which shape each other's meanings, such as affection, love and friendship, ardor and passion, as well as happiness and pain. The relationships

[2] Hasan, *From Pluralism to Separatism*.
[3] Anon., 'Uns o muhabbat'.
[4] Nussbaum, 'Compassion'.
[5] See for instance Scholz, *Political Solidarity*.

between these emotions, however, are not permanent and stable but remain open for negotiation and change through time.

The second question investigates the emotions which are collectively valued by the members of the community—these may partly overlap with the emotions they feel towards each other, but can also include emotions directed at objects not related to the community. The emphasis many texts place on compassion towards animals could be a case in point; but so could the emotions related to personal hygiene. In both cases emotions contribute to the identification and self-identification of a community, making the feeling of certain emotions (or their absence) a criterion of distinction, which in turn becomes the basis for inclusion and exclusion.[6]

This leads to the third question: what are the boundaries of this community constituted by emotions, and notably by compassion? Emphasising compassion as a social emotion which establishes links between people can easily gloss over the fissures which are created not only in spite of, but even through, compassion. Who is supposed to feel compassion? For whom are they exhorted to feel this emotion? If the second question alludes to conscious processes of exclusion, here the question is rather whose pain matters—or even more fundamentally, whose pain can even be perceived and whose becomes invisible.[7]

If the second and the third questions address the distinction between insiders and outsiders, the fourth question turns the gaze back onto the community itself: how do compassion and its related emotions create an internal power structure within a community, distinguishing between the feeling subjects and the objects towards whom these feelings are directed? The ability to feel compassion, to have a compassionate heart, is not only perceived as 'a quality which [is] by definition in short supply.'[8] Compassion creates an exceptional moral self; it constitutes one of the central factors in the ascription of civility and thus the allocation of a position of influence and power within society as well as in the global hierarchy between societies.

These four lines of investigation show that emotion can add an important perspective to processes which have been at the center of much work in the last generation, notably on nationalism and communalism. The fifth question reverts to a micro perspective: if emotions, and notably compassion and its allied sentiments, were so important, how were they evoked and created in the texts under discussion? The texts go beyond a purely intellectual debate—their aim is to mobilise the reader and to push him towards certain actions and practices. How can the reader be affected by printed words to an extent that his blood which had gone white, as the introductory text explains, becomes red again and he viscerally feels the pain of

[6] This is the central argument in Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*.

[7] For examples of this critique of compassion see Rai, *Rule of Sympathy*; Hogget, 'Pity, Compassion, Solidarity'.

[8] Chakrabarty, 'Witness to Suffering Domestic Cruelty and the Birth of the Modern Subject in Bengal', quotation p. 61.

his community? What are the strategies employed? Into which reading, listening, and feeling practices do they tap?[9]

This article, therefore, is interested in how philosophical and ethical reflections, rhetorical strategies, and emotional practices intersect. In the first section, the article lays out the traditional emotion knowledge found in Persian and Indo-Persian texts on moral philosophy written in the Aristotelian tradition, which still held an important place in the education of people writing in and reading journals like the *Tahzību-l Akhlāq*. The second section looks at the transformation of this knowledge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and provides a close reading of texts that address education and self-education issues while simultaneously exhorting readers to feel more compassionate (and often prove their compassion through specific actions). The last section, finally, uses the Punjabi traders of Delhi as a case study to show how practices of philanthropy contributed to community building.

The Entangled History of Indo-Persian Moral Philosophy

Histories of global entanglements need not always take a macro perspective, but can start out with small, everyday observances. Let us take a look at the education of a North Indian man from a respectable (*sharīf*, pl. *ashraf*) family, someone from Saiyid Ahmad Khan's generation who would be a potential author and reader of *Tahzību-l Akhlāq* and similar journals and publications in the late nineteenth century. This person would have had some exposure to Western education, either in one of the colleges (of which the Delhi College was by no means the only one), or through independent study. He would be familiar with works of Enlightenment scholars like David Hume and Adam Smith, and probably also with John Stuart Mill's Liberalism, either reading the originals or following their ideas in Urdu summaries, discussions, or partial translations.[10]

At the same time, the culture of his family would have exposed him to the Indo-Persian tradition of ethics. At an early age he would have memorised the *Gulistān* and the *Būstān* of Shaikh Saʿadi, whose verses he would quote for the rest of his life in conversations and writings. At a slightly later age, but still as part of his education as a gentleman, he would have read some Persian texts on moral philosophy: if he had intellectual ambitions, the *Akhlāq-i Nāsirī* by Nasir ud Din Tusi (1201-1276), or otherwise the slightly more accessible *Akhlāq-i Jalālī* by Jalal ud Din Dawwani (1426-1502). Both these texts, in turn, referred back to the Hellenistic translation and adaptation of Aristotelian ethics in the tenth century Abbasid Empire.[11] His education and the intellectual resources he acquired for thinking about ethical

[9] For comparison with the rhetorical strategies of the sermon and the poem see Petievich and Stille, 'Emotions in Performance', in this volume.

[10] For more detail on the curriculum and the texts forming part of North Indian elite education see Pernau, 'The Virtuous Individual'.

[11] On *akhlāq* literature in the Indo-Persian tradition see Alam, *Languages of Islam.*

and moral questions were thus the result of an entangled history reaching back as far as Aristotle and involving at least Greek, Arab, Persian, and English language (and even more, if we were to trace the entanglements of which these texts in turn bore the traces). The story therefore is much more complicated than becomes visible if we investigate it as an encounter with colonial knowledge, as if colonial or Western knowledge referred to a homogenous canon, and as if this were the first encounter an otherwise homogenous Indian tradition faced. Our analysis needs to focus less on cultures imagined as stable over time than on encounters. Encounters between cultures were no exception, but a very ordinary, daily occurrence which started long before colonialism and the new forms of globalisation and entanglement it brought about. However, this does not imply that encounters created a homogeneous universe in which texts and ideas floated freely—encounters were not only about movement, but also about the prevention of movement. Encounters could transcend and simultaneously create boundaries and hierarchies.

The fact that our young gentleman could refer to a variety of traditions simultaneously, however, complicates the interpretation. Reinhart Koselleck uses the image of temporal layers (*Zeitschichten*) to visualise the way in which concepts and figures of thought originating at different times nevertheless remained accessible to actors at the same point in time—what he called the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous.[12] But unlike geological layers, which tend to remain stable, the layers of texts were not only perceived simultaneously, but also blurred into each other: reading Nasir ud Din Tusi and Adam Smith side by side, and in a nineteenth-century colonial context, was bound to change the perception of both. Any reading which we attempt of the classical texts forming part of the nineteenth-century education of the *ashrāf* therefore has to deal with a multiplicity of times: the times in which they were originally written, the times in which our actor read them, and of course also our own time, which in turn inflects our reading—the text itself only gives us part of the information we need for our interpretation.

With this caveat in mind let us look at some traits common to many of the *akhlāq* texts.[13] Unlike the highly emotional text with which this article started, *akhlāq* literature is a philosophical genre. It does not aim at evoking emotions, neither through narration nor through other rhetorical strategies (which distinguishes it from the exempla literature found in Saʿadi and many others, even if they are based on a similar knowledge of emotions and on similar values). Rather, it enquires into their nature, their taxonomy, and their role in the creation of a virtuous person, a well-managed household, and a just polity. Many of the texts follow a tripartite structure, addressing the *nafs*, the soul, and its emotions in the first part, going on to

[12] Koselleck, 'Representation, Event, and Structure'.

[13] This glosses over some of the important differences between the texts and also their historical development, which would require a study of its own. However, only few of the nineteenth century readers would have been aware (or interested) in these differences—this article follows their simplified reading of a much more complex tradition.

the *manzil*, the household in the second, which also includes the relations between spouses and their children, and culminating in the *madīnā*, the polity, which need not, but by this time usually would, be a monarchy.

The division of the soul into three faculties is common to most of the texts: the concupiscent, the irasicible, and the rational faculty, corresponding at times to the vegetative, the animal, and the human soul,[14] at others to the bestial, the savage, and the angelic soul.[15] This three partite structure forms the basis for ever-increasing divisions and subdivisions. Two points are central for the conception of emotions: first, emotions are not a distinct category, but come under the same rubric as moral qualities, virtues, or vices.[16] Thus courage encompasses not only bravery, a sense of honor, and compassion—which would even today be recognised as emotions—but also magnanimity and perseverance; while justice—hardly an emotion in todays' understanding—is made up of amity, the care of kin and affection, but also fair judgment and sincerity.[17] Second, neither emotions as such nor individual emotions are good or bad in and by themselves. What makes them bad is not only their excess, but also their deficiency. Anger, for instance, can be a virtuous and even pleasurable emotion, bringing forth the courage to live up to a sense of self and of honour. On the other hand, excessive anger, which is no longer controlled by reason, has to be avoided. The same holds true for insufficient anger, namely cowardice. Virtue, therefore, is centrally premised upon balance. Balance—*ʿadl*, the same word which is also used for justice—in turn is the concept which embeds the philosophy of emotions into an encompassing understanding of the world: balance is as important for the microcosm, for the human body, whose health consists in a balance of the humours, as for the intermediary stage of the city, which has to be founded on justice, as for the macrocosm, whose harmony is built upon the harmony of the spheres.

Where does compassion figure in this taxonomy of emotions? The article in *Tahzību-l Akhlāq*, with which we started, placed compassion not only in the immediate vicinity of charity, but also of love and friendship. In the *akhlāq* tradition, however, these are very different phenomena. Generosity (*sakhā*) and mercy (*rahm*) are discussed in the first part, the one focusing on the individual soul (*nafs*).[18] Generosity belongs to the concupiscent soul, it is a state of balance which neither indiscriminately gives in to bodily desires nor neglects them, but is willing to share and gift within reasonable bounds. Mercy, on the other hand, is situated

[14] Tūsī, *The Nasirean Ethic*, p. 42.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[16] For more detail see Pernau, *Civilizing Emotions*.

[17] Tūsī, *Nasirean Ethic,* pp. 82–4.

[18] This location of the discussion of virtues as part of *nafs* points out that at least for this genre and this period *nafs* cannot be simply translated as carnal soul, the most common translation in South Asia today. In the *akhlāq* tradition it is not so much dominated by low desires which have to be overcome, as the space in which all the faculties have to (and can) achieve virtuous balance.

in the irascible soul and is linked to forgiveness. Forgiveness consists of a state of balance, which neither insists on excessive vengeance nor forgoes a justified anger, as this would be incompatible with a sense of honour and moreover endanger justice. Both virtues are underpinned by emotions, but these emotions are moderate and tempered by reason rather than strong passions.

Friendship and love between friends, which the article in *Tahzību-l Akhlāq* links so closely to compassion, are not discussed in this section at all, but find their place in the elaboration on the polity. Taking up the Aristotelian premise that man is fundamentally a social being, the *akhlāq* texts elaborate that God and nature have created man for life in society. This works both ways: it is only through sociability and notably through friendship with his peers that man is able to attain virtue and perfection and hence felicity.[19] But society, too, cannot exist without such virtuous men: virtues and emotions are constitutive for the creation of communities. Without friendship, there can be no sociability and hence no society.[20] While Aristotle's ethic was not geared towards any particular form of government, most of the Persian and Indo-Persian texts assume the existence of a monarch—be it that they address him directly, blurring into the genre of mirrors of princes, be it that they advise their readers how to negotiate their way at court. This may lead the authors to emphasise the role the king has in keeping up the structures needed for the cultivation of virtues,[21] sometimes even blending the ruler with the *insān-i kāmil*, the perfect man responsible for holding up the macrocosmic balance. More often the emphasis remains on the virtuous affections citizens feel towards each other: 'Since men are naturally city-dwellers, with the completion of their felicity lying among their friends and their other associates in the species; and inasmuch as whoever has his completion in something other than himself, cannot become perfect in solitude, so the perfect and felicitous man is the one who spares no pains to win friends.'[22]

The civic community is thus built upon the emotions of virtuous men, their compassion, their generosity, and above all, the feelings they cultivate towards each other. Even if they are dedicated to a particular ruler and can be shown to bear the traces of the context in which they were written, the *akhlāq* texts, as philosophical treatises, are generally written in a universalistic language. Nevertheless, the community they reference and aim to create is by no means universal, nor do the emotions encompass all humans, irrespective of their social position. The fact that compassion and generosity are discussed in the section on the individual psyche is telling: what interests the philosopher here is neither their impact

[19] On the way this translated into actual practices of friendship in seventeenth and eighteenth century North India see Kia, 'Contours'.

[20] For the way this is played out in different genres of poetry see Petievich and Stille 'Emotions in Performance', in this volume.

[21] Dawwāni, *Akhlāq-i Jalālī*, p. 141.

[22] Tūsī, *Nasirean Ethic,* p. 242.

on the social or economic structure nor even on the situation of the receiver. Nor is it the attuning to the suffering of a fellow human being (in the Greek tradition, this would be addressed in rhetoric and in writings on the theatre, not in philosophy), but the effect these virtues have on the creation of the ethical personality which constitutes the focus of the debate. Having an ethical self, in turn, would qualify a person to form part of the social and political elite. Friendship is discussed as a social emotion, but a social emotion which is only conceivable between peers—if they are not equals, they should at least be close enough in social status to be able to forget about their differences. This does not exclude emotions towards other categories of persons, like wives or slaves. But these would be perceived as so different in character from friendship between elite males that they would be discussed in an entirely different section—nor would they be seen as emotions constitutive of the polity, except in a very remote sense.

Social Reform and the Creation of a Community

The Urdu journal *Tahzību-l Akhlāq*, from which the initial quote was taken, bore the translation *The Muhammadan Social Reformer* on its title pages. If the Urdu title linked the venture back to the *akhlāq* tradition—the verbal translation of *Tahzību-l Akhlāq* would read as the cultivation or polishing of the habitus (*khulq*, pl. *akhlāq*)—the English title placed it firmly within the endeavours to create a colonial modernity. This aptly sums up Saiyid Ahmad Khan's program. He certainly wanted to bring about a close collaboration between the Muslims and the colonial government, which would not only help them regain their position after the Revolt of 1857, but also catch up with what he saw as the superior knowledge of the West. But this endeavour was not to constitute a complete break with the Indo-Persian tradition. Notably he needs to be read in continuity with the Islamic reform movements centered in Delhi since the eighteenth century: the Naqshbandī Mujaddīdiyyah, with which he had family links, and the Madrasa Rahīmiyyah founded by Shah Wali Ullah. The reform of the Muslim community was already a much debated topic before the British conquered Delhi at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[23]

An all-round comparison of these movements to the Enlightenment tradition would lead to glossing over too many differences—particularly with regard to the role of religion. However, they do show a remarkable similarity in the importance both accorded to the creation of the polity and community through the interaction of ethically qualified individuals rather than through the coercive power of the state. For our investigation it matters less whether the aim was to overcome the state in order to create a civil society, or whether the state was simply no longer available, because the Muslim kings and nobles were perceived as more interested in their

[23] The two classical studies of Saiyid Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh movement still remain unsurpassed: Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*; Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*.

private pleasures than in the welfare of the community, or had already been replaced by non-Muslims. What is important is that in both cases it is believed that a social community can be based, if not exclusively then at least to a large extent, upon the emotions the members of the community have towards each other individually and towards the community as a whole. Even without coercion, reformers in Edinburgh and Delhi believed that these emotions were strong enough to push the actors towards moral and selfless behaviour. It is in this constellation that compassion, as well as the moral education held to ensure its prevalence, gain central importance. This argument can be shown to tie up with the Aristotelian *akhlāq* philosophy and was the basis for a debate internal to the Muslim community.

A second line of arguments addresses the colonial rulers. The same Scottish Enlightenment, which developed the link between emotions and civil society as a universal discourse, also argued for a concept of history premised on successive stages of development. This allowed mapping out differences observed between societies on a time line leading from savage beginnings to the pinnacle of civility, which the European nations and specifically Britain claimed to have reached. Every stage of development is marked not only by specific social and economic features, but also by certain emotions.[24] The emotions prevalent in a certain society thus indicate the place it had reached on the ladder of the global civilisational hierarchy, with all the implications this had in the imperial age—by no means limited to philosophy, but with a strong impact on the allocations of political and legal rights. Again compassion had an important place in this debate, this time drawing the dividing line between a civilised and compassionate British culture, and the cruelty of the Orient, specially, but not exclusively of the Oriental rulers. These arguments can be found from the first decades of the nineteenth century onward, where they form the background for the introduction of British law and the campaign for the abolition of *satī*; they are also at play in the colonial re-organisation of charity according to criteria of efficiency.[25] They gain a new insistence after 1857, when the opposition between chivalrous British and bloodthirsty Oriental rebels lacking in compassion even towards women and children became the staple for a whole print industry of memoirs and novels depicting the rebellion.[26] Disproving charges of cruelty as well as indifference to human suffering was crucial, especially for Saiyid Ahmad Khan's efforts to convince the colonial power of the Muslims' willingness and ability to subscribe to the civilising mission.

The new conceptualisation of compassion is closely intertwined with a transformation of the *akhlāq* genre. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the age of writing and rewriting philosophical treatises in the Aristotelian *akhlāq* traditions was over. This does not imply that the words *tahzīb* or *akhlāq* disappear from the

[24] Millar, *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks.* For more detail on the relation between emotions and stages of development see Pernau, 'Civility and Barbarism'.

[25] Mill, *History of British India*; see the brilliant analysis by Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings.*

[26] For many others see Chakravarty, *Indian Mutiny.*

newer publications—on the contrary, the last decades of the century see a multitude of printed books that bear titles like Zaka Ullah's comparison of Hindu, Muslim and Christian morality, the *Tahzību-l Akhlāq*, *Makarramu-l Akhlāq*, *Mahāsinu-l Akhlāq*; Shankar Das's *Guldastahu-l Akhlāq*; Ayodhya Prasad's *Guldastah-yi Tahzīb*; Ahmad Husain Nahani's *Tahzību-n Nafs,* and the many books and journals under the title of *Tahzību-n Niswān*.[27] With the exception of Zaka Ullah, who is famous for his links both to the Delhi College and the Aligarh Movement and the many books he wrote, most of the authors are not otherwise well-known. Many of them hailed from smaller towns, where they often either taught or worked in the colonial education department. Their writings are geared towards education, providing introductions to questions of morality, however no longer with a philosophical, but with a practical aim in mind. While they keep many of the traditional concepts in a much simplified form, they give up the tri-partite structure and introduce narrative elements, using stories to make their arguments more convincing and accessible, especially for school and college students.[28]

The journals, too, subscribe to a pedagogical aim, broadly speaking. Saiyid Ahmad Khan modelled the *Tahzību-l Akhlāq* on the eighteenth-century London journals by Addison and Steel, who, he explained, aimed at freeing the life of people from vice and restoring the community to purity.[29] But where the modernised *akhlāq* treatises still drew on their philosophical antecedents, authors writing for journals seem to have seen themselves in the tradition of preachers. Like preachers, they saw it as their duty to exhort and arouse the community; like preachers too, they moved between a universal framework and very concrete, day-to-day interventions. Many articles originated in oral genres, speeches, and addresses, which were then accorded a wider reach through the print medium. This would make it probable that not only the social function of the preacher, but also the rhetorical devises of the sermons, were translated into journalism.[30]

The earliest text which discusses compassion in *Tahzību-l Akhlāq*, published in 1870 by an unknown author, is still strongly marked by the Aristotelian tradition. Compassion here is viewed as an emotion felt towards those who are in a state of misfortune, for which they are not themselves responsible—otherwise, the author pontificates, it would not be misfortune but punishment, unworthy of compassion. He then goes on to distinguish between *rahm* and *hamdardī*, emotions which have to be kept apart though they are often perceived as closely related. But while *rahm* originates in natural virtue (*fitratī nekī*), which can also be shared by animals,

[27] Zakā Ullah, *Makārumu-l Akhlāq*; *idem*, *Tahzību-l Akhlāq; idem, Mahāsinu-l Akhlāq;* Dās, *Guldastahu-l Akhlāq;* Prasād, *Guldastah-yi Tahzīb;* Nahāni, *Tahzību-n Nafs.*

[28] For more detail see Pernau, 'The Virtuous Individual'.

[29] Khān, 'Tahzību-l akhlāq', p. 2.

[30] Unfortunately, we still lack a history of sermons in the nineteenth century. For the figure of the journalist as a preacher see Pernau, *Ashraf*, 120–1.

hamdardī is linked to the rational mind (*ʿaql*) and thus specific to humans,[31] to the extent that a person without compassion lacks humanity (*insānīyat*). True compassion, on the other hand, corresponds to both nature and the divine injunctions.[32]

Within a short time, the semantic net of compassion—the other emotions that are associated with it—changed profoundly. The way this change was brought about was through the introduction of a close relationship between compassion and friendship, two emotions, which, as we have seen above, were perceived as very distinct in the Aristotelian discourse. Since at least the eighteenth century, friendship (*dostī*) already had moved away from a conception based only on the rational appreciation of each other's virtues. Friendship, in this new perception, not only encompasses a surge of love (*josh-i muhabbat*),[33] but it even comes close to *ʿishq*, the passionate love which transcends the boundaries of reason. The *locus classicus* for the elaboration of *ʿishq* is poetry, notably the ghazal. Not only is losing one's mind for the sake of the beloved not condemned here, the fact that a passion cannot be reined in by reason even becomes the ultimate proof of its strength and ethical value. Linking compassion to passionate love opens up the possibility of drawing on the whole universe of poetic images, which were already associated with intense emotions for anyone who grew up in the Indo-Persian and Urdu poetic tradition (which would have been the case for all of the journal's readers). Mutual help among friends and lovers is no longer based upon rational appreciation of needs and desserts, but rather on emotions overwhelming the entire person and on ideas of sacrifice—all of them resonating in the mind of the cultivated reader through the word *ʿishq*.

Another way of establishing a link between compassion and poetic love is effected through the quotation of verses in the articles. This slowly undermines the distinction between the genres and merges the poetic images with the orientation towards ethical action inherent in sermons and journal articles: the same verse offering the sacrifice of one's life works quite differently when it is recited in a traditional poetical gathering, where it is appreciated for its aesthetic quality, but certainly not meant to mobilise the audience into emulating the poetic lover in their everyday life, or in an article aiming at stirring an audience into political action or simply into subscribing to the numerous funding campaigns.[34] Quoting verses, and even more, using the poetic language of *ʿishq*, passion and sacrifice in a prose text, blends these forms and imparts an innovative orientation to poetical sentiments.

This reconfiguration of the semantic net opens up possibilities for emotionalising the discourse on compassion, but not all of these possibilities are immediately

[31] What the article fails to address is that both God and the beloved in poetry are traditionally not implored for *hamdardī*, but for *rahm*, which gives quite different a coloring to the emotion.

[32] Anon., 'Hamdardī'.

[33] Mahmūd, 'Dostī'.

[34] See the article by Petievich and Stille in this special issue for the transformation in the mobilising strategies in poetry since the second half of the twentieth century.

explored to the same degree. The two articles that Muhammad Mahmud wrote on friendship in the early 1870s are a good example. In his first article, Mahmud starts with the classical argument that God endowed human beings with a social nature (*madanīa-t tabīʿ*). This is the reason why man is in need of companionship (*suhbat*) and associations (*jalsā*). His compassionate nature (*tabīʿat-i hamdardī*) draws him towards other people in friendship. This fulfils his emotional needs. Without friendship, man cannot experience the joys of life (*hazz-i zindagī*), and his thousand desires cannot be met. But friendship also brings other, more practical advantages: only through friends and their advice can virtue be attained and the many needs engendered by living in the world be met.[35]

In a second article Mahmud therefore continues to elaborate on the behaviour appropriate between friends, and it is here that compassion becomes central: 'A friend rejoices at our happiness, and when we are sad, his compassion lightens our grief, as he carries half of our burden.'[36] With rare exceptions friendship arises from the pleasure men take in each other's company and from the appreciation of each other's advice. Only those who have a steady and honest disposition, as opposed to those of fickle and malicious temperament, can become friends. Friends are men on whose compassion one can rely. They will neither betray confidences, nor make fun of their companions, nor desert them in times of need. However, even in these seemingly rational reflections on the advantages of friendship and advices on whom to choose as a friend, the imagery of the beloved introduces strong emotions—love cannot be imagined without suffering. As in the ghazal, the danger of betrayal, pain, and a broken heart is always present, giving depth to the emotional encounter.

These new connections between compassion and passionate friendship among peers did not obliterate the older layer of meaning linking compassion to pity and charity. If man was pushed by an emotional upsurge to help his friends, no man of heart could (or should) be unfeeling to the extent that pain and cruelty, even of strangers, did not affect him. There is hardly any pedagogical text that does not exhort boys never to torment animals or humans who look up to them for their protection—the line between the two at times tends to become a little blurry. The feeling of compassion (*rahm dilī*), which boys need to imbibe at a young age, seems to be almost the same, whether it is directed at the poor, at a younger sister, or at a stray cat—*tahzību-l akhlāq*, the polishing of the inner being, in both cases shows itself in the care (*nawāzish*) for the poor and helpless (*ajuz, miskīn*).[37]

Like all emotions, compassion is seen as both an innate and an acquired trait. Every human being is born with a certain natural disposition (*tabīʿat*), which inclines him towards some virtues and vices more than towards others. However,

[35] Mahmūd, 'Dostī'.
[36] Mahmūd, 'Dostī ka bartāʾo', p. 110.
[37] Prasād, *Guldastah*, 64–5.0.

no one needs to be the slave of his disposition—this is where the polishing of the character and moral education come in.[38] Parents, and elders more generally, play an important role in the education of their children, providing them with the requisite knowledge (*ʿilm*) on good and evil, but also training their behaviour (*ʿamal*) so as to impart them with good habits—education, especially the education of emotions and virtues, was always perceived as a combination of *taʿlīm* (instruction) and *tarbīyat* (training). For the last generation, scholarship has pointed out the increasing importance accorded to mothers, especially during the first years of a child's education. What has been more infrequently addressed so far is the outstanding significance accorded to the company children and young people keep, which parents were always admonished to select carefully. If it is not possible to limit the interaction to the extended family, friends should come from well-known homes of an equal social status so as to ensure their respectability and education. This carefulness continued, as we have seen, into adult age. Choosing friends is not a matter of bestowing affection upon someone indiscriminately—even if the emotions defy reason once the relationship has been established, this does not (or should not) apply to the selection process.

What makes friendship and sociability (*suhbat*) so important is a perception of the self, which is not yet fully closed to its environment, but imbibes emotions and virtues (or vices) from its surroundings.[39] As Nazir Ahmad explained to his son: 'Perhaps you do not know the saying yet that whoever looks at a musk melon catches its colour. But think about its implications. You catch up the habits of the people you interact with, as you catch an infection. If you want to have good habits, you have to have the society of good people.'[40] Unlike a European, post-Enlightenment take on emotions, which sees them both as located inside the individual and also constituting his most personal and private self, to which he can at will grant or refuse access, this concept sees emotions as floating between persons, moving freely into them and from one to the other. If the article quoted in the beginning asked with reference to love: 'what is this thing (*chīz*) which links one man to the other,' it viewed emotions as an almost material object. The individuals can to some extent chose to which influences they want to expose themselves—but once this exposure has taken place, they cannot avoid the emotional infection as long as they remain in the situation.

Education and sociability are thus seen as a crucial means of bringing forth virtues in general and compassion in particular. How does this relate to what since Greek antiquity has been perceived as the most important training ground for virtues, the theater, and its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century avatar, the novel? In her much-discussed book, *Inventing Human Rights,* Lynn Hunt claims that the

[38] Das, *Guldastah-yi Akhlāq*, 1–12.
[39] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*; Brennan, *Transmission of Affect.*
[40] Ahmad, *Chand pand*, p. 26.

French declaration of universal human rights would not have been possible without the previous training of the collective imagination through the sentimental novel. It was this specific literary genre, she claims, which allowed readers to access the interiority of people with whom they usually did not interact, and thus acknowledge and empathise with their suffering—to the extent that they were willing to grant them rights.[41]

While journal articles lack the space needed to develop the narration of suffering in a way to draw the reader into the story, tales of woe are not unknown to the genre, particularly if we look beyond *Tahzību-l Akhlāq* and its predominantly male audience to women's journals. Drawing on melodramatic conventions,[42] in 1916 a lady who prefers to remain anonymous tells her life story in *Tamaddun*, a journal edited by Rashid ul Khairi, popularly known as the painter of grief (*musawwir-i gham*).[43] Already at her birth, the family started lamenting. The anonymous author was the fourth child, the first girl after three boys. As her brother was not yet weaned at her birth, the grandmother decided that she would be reared on cow-milk so as not to endanger his digestion. The pattern continued. When the children were hungry, the boys were fed; when it was time for their education, the family sold land to send the sons to good schools but refused the modest sum a female teacher for the girl would have cost; when the boys had time for play, at the age of twelve or thirteen she worked for twelve hours during daytime and four during the night, sewing, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of her younger siblings. This pattern continued through marriage: except for three or four short hours of sleep, she works incessantly, while her husband has time to experience the joys of sociability. As he is not unkind and they are rich enough to be able to afford servants, the world thinks her life is not so bad, after all, and does not see her suffering.[44]

Tales of female woe could be told since the last decades of the nineteenth century (though the fact that they were told in such great numbers leads to the question of how far the melodramatic compassion aroused also contained an element of pleasure at the vicarious suffering depicted).[45] In this respect it fundamentally differed from any suffering through poverty and deprivation, which hardly entered Urdu literature until after the First World War. Charity certainly was perceived as the appropriate response, but neither in Urdu novels nor in journal articles did subaltern suffering lead to narrations from the perspective of the sufferer, inviting the reader to an imaginary identification. Charity continued as a unidirectional activity, in which the voice of the recipient could not be heard nor even imagined. In this respect, at least, the gap between classes seemed even wider than between genders.

[41] Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights.*

[42] For the evocation of compassion in the melodramatic novel see Oesterheld in this special issue.

[43] *Ibid.* for more on his novels.

[44] Anon., 'Aurat ke jazbāt', pp. 27–34.

[45] This in turn could be compared to the elaborate descriptions of pain in the sermons, which also contribute to an ambivalent pleasure in the audience. See Petievich and Stille in this volume.

Compassion, thus, can extend to a wide range of emotions, from the love of parents for their children, to those addressed to a few selected friends, to a general feeling towards all the members of a community, be it religious or national, and even become universal in scope. Many articles discussed these different variations and their ethical implications.[46] While all of them agreed that the intensity of compassion could and should be graded according to the closeness of a relation, the potential universality of love and compassion raised debates. Is it possible and admissible to love and feel compassionate towards those who belong to a different religion? Mishtaq Husain attempted to solve this problem by distinguishing between two kinds of love. The first one is the love Muslims bear towards each other, even if they have never met before. This love is based on religious feelings, and can only be shared by Muslims. But there is a second kind of love, which is common to all humans, irrespective of their faith. It is this love that links parents and children, husband and wife, but also neighbours and the inhabitants of a country. Though it is different from religious love, this love, too, is a gift from God and certainly allowed by Islamic rules. Fanatic fervor (*josh*) which wants to forbid this God-given love between Muslims and non-Muslim is no religious fervour, the author exclaims, but fervour for superstitious thoughts, which have nothing to do with the light of religion.[47]

Compassion is therefore different, depending at which persons it is directed, within or without the community. At the same time, however, the community itself was also reinterpreted as an object of love in its own right. In this respect, too, the article cited at the beginning can stand for many others. The individual instances of suffering are only building up the pace for the final argument: the *qaum* is suffering, the *qaum* is sighing. If its members fail to develop a compassionate heart and feelings of love, the community's welfare and progress will be at stake. It is the *qaum* which is the proper object of its members' devotion and love—it is for its sake that people should help one another. If the creation of an emotional community is often seen as involving a process of transferring emotions from a known, everyday context to a larger framework,[48] here it is the opposite which is taking place. Love and compassion for the suffering *qaum*, the desire to help it and to provide for its well-being, are the fountainhead of compassionate activities: helping one another, but above all contributing labour and money to projects which cater to the well-being of the *qaum*, and which ultimately create a felt community.

In the article quoted, *qaum* most probably refers to the Muslim community. The concept, however, still shows a considerable fluidity, and the links between compassion and the construction of a *qaum* are by no means limited to religious communities. In other contexts *qaum* would translate as nation, but it can also

[46] A very systematic and exhaustive treatment of different forms of *hamdardī* is to be found in Mirzā Sultān Ahmad Khān, *Akhlāq-i Ahmadī*, pp. 314–33.

[47] Husain, 'Ām muhabbat', pp. 169–74.

[48] This is one of the important arguments in Bénéï, *Schooling Passions.*

refer to the smaller, caste-like communities, which can be found among Muslims, notably, but not exclusively, below the level of the *ashrāf*. Like castes, *qaums* are neither unchanging nor do they go back into times immemorial. Rather, they develop at specific points in time through specific practices, among which philanthropy, I would like to argue, performs an important role.[49]

Charity and Community Building: The Panjabi Traders of Delhi

The community of the Panjabi traders in Delhi (*qaum-i saudāgarān-i Panjāb*, or *qaum-i Panjābī*) is a well-documented case. While the group today numbers only about four thousand persons, mostly small traders and shop owners, before Partition they were among the city's wealthiest Muslim inhabitants, controlling trade routes from Karachi, Lahore, and Afghanistan in the West to Calcutta, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan in the East. From the early nineteenth century onward they were renowned for their patronage of religious reform in general and more specifically the radical branch of Shah Wali Ullah's school, which fought first against the Sikhs, then against the colonial power at the North West Frontier. The identity formation of this group partly relies on the recollection of their collective history.[50] More interesting for the questions we are following here is the way philanthropy was used, on an individual as well as a collective level, to transform economic power into social capital and to wield together different groups into a closely-knit community.

As converts, the Panjabis were not counted as members of the elite in the traditional social system, which distinguished the immigrants from the heartlands of Islam from the local converts. Their conversion was too well-known to permit the usual, post-fact reinterpretation of the community's origins. The alternative strategy was to emphasise not descent, but essence. The existence of an ethical self was usually tied to genealogy and thus reserved for the social elite, as we have seen above. However, the Panjabis were able to challenge the link between descent and character by associating the ethical self and its qualities to a demonstrative personal piety (theologically accessible to everyone). The voluminous biographical dictionary of the community[51] includes many people holding religious titles, Sheikh, Hāfiz, and Hājjī being among the most common. It also recounts in detail the philanthropic activities of the leading men of the community. To give just some examples: Sheikh Nur Illahi Munsarim, who had not had much of an education himself, decided to help others and in 1902 founded a primary school named Mazharu-l Islām,

[49] The research on Muslim philanthropy has largely focused on the creation of waqf. See Kozlowski, *Muslim Endowments and Society*, and *idem,* 'Religious Authority'. For a comparative perspective on other Indian practices of gifting see Haynes, 'From Tribute'; Sharma, *Famine*; Palsetia, 'Merchant Charity'; Kasturi, '"All Gifting is Sacred"'; and Watt, 'Philanthropy and Civilizing Missions'. For a recent overview see Ure and Frost, *The Politics of Compassion*.

[50] See the articles in Bāghpatī, *Tārikh-i qaum-i panjābi saudāgarān*. I have explored this on another occasion, Pernau, 'Religion und sozialer Status'.

[51] Rafī, *Barādarī ke marhūmon ka tazkirah.*

followed by another school in Farrashkhāna. He gave up his business to devote all of his time to the administration of these schools.[52] Hajji Muhammad Sadiq Chāawala founded a school in the neighbourhood of Phātak Habsh Khān, the Siddiq High School, which provided both religious and worldly knowledge. He bore all the costs and helped poor students.[53] Sheikh Abdul Haqq Tezabwala provided for the teaching of the Prophet's traditions in his house, for both women and men, and founded two mosques with adjoining madrasas and libraries, which he generously endowed with a waqf. He supported countless orphans and widows, financed the Hajj for many poor Muslims, and every year during Ramadan fed thousands of them.[54] Many more instances could be cited—practicing pious philanthropy was important for many Panjabis, and this is what they wanted to be remembered for.

Philanthropy here plays a double role. On the one hand, it appropriates the traditional legitimation of the ruler and the nobles as the fountain of compassion, depicted in biographies and chronicles as the feeders of the poor, the providers for widows and orphans, and the generous patrons, notably of scholars and religious figures as well as of schools and mosques. The traders tap into these resources and images to claim an ethical essence based on compassionate emotions on par with them and to depict themselves as quasi noble. On the other hand, philanthropy and notably philanthropy based on religion endows its practitioner with a personality that can be used to distinguish them from the old elites, and even claim superiority over them. Again it is their emotions and their character of which the charitable activities are a proof, but now opposing an image of decadent nobles only caring for their pleasures with pious middle-class asceticism and discipline. This restraint of overtly displayed emotions is no less emotional for that fact: leading a well-ordered life, saving money, and organising systematic rather than random acts of philanthropy, can be displayed as an even greater compassion with the plight of the poor and of the community.

Though a significant part of the philanthropic activities throughout the nineteenth century went towards the support of reformist religious movements, notably the Ahl-i Hadīs, pointing to the important link between these radical reformers and the groups which were aiming at an upward social mobility, their efforts were by no means restricted to these ventures. Their financial engagement in the foundation of mosques and madrasas brought them into close contact with those whom the British considered the leaders of the Muslim community of Delhi. The co-option of Panjabi traders into the managing committees of the main mosques of the city was an important milestone in the recognition of their social respectability, as was their appointment as Honorary Magistrates and Municipal Councilors by the colonial power.[55] But they also expanded their network into the national movement,

[52] *Ibid*., pp. 126–7.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 132.
[54] *Ibid*., p. 135.
[55] See Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires*, pp. 125–57 and 236–7.

as shown by the case of Shaikh Hajji Fazl Ilahi, who financed the Delhi activities of the Khilafat movement after the First World War, an action which earned him the title of *Fakhr-i Qaum* from Muhammad ʿAli and brought him into contact with the movement's main actors at the national level. As his biographer proudly records, the leaders not only met in his house, but Gandhi even blessed his children and took his son to his lap.[56]

In all of these ventures interests of course played a central role on both sides. The financial power of the wealthy traders made them important figures to woo, for the colonial power no less than for the different Muslim groups. But neither social capital nor social respectability could simply be bought. As we have seen above, charity and the compassionate feelings, which are deemed to be its foundation, are read as important indicators of the personality and character of the men who display them. The colonial power aimed at appointing men to the different representative institutions, who had not only proven their civility by showing compassion, but who also displayed a sense of responsibility for the public good, as the British understood it. Within the Muslim community, it was their piety and their religious fervour, the fact that they were the men whose blood had not turned white yet, but who felt with and for the community, which allowed them to assume a position of leadership. The financial contributions were important, but as indicators of these character traits as much as for their own sake.

Compassion and philanthropy directed to a large variety of people not belonging to the *qaum-i Panjābī* thus not only helped make the community visible, but also decisively contributed to its upward social mobility. But of course not all charity went to non-Panjabis. The organisation of philanthropy within the community has to be viewed in relation to the efforts since the beginning of the twentieth century to reform the *qaum* and consolidate its inner structure. Like many of the Muslim communities, the Panjabis, too, traditionally had been organised in a way recalling Hindu caste structures, with a *chaudhurī* and a *panchāyat* who held the power of excommunication. While this system had worked well for the resolution of day-to-day disputes, other structures were needed to implement the project of religious reformism that involved the entire community and forged it into a closely-knit unity. In 1905, the *Anjuman-i vakīl-i qaum-i Panjābiān*, an association which from the beginning followed two closely interlinked aims, was founded. The first aim was directed towards the reform of the customs of the community. As in many other communities, these concerned mainly the celebration of life-cycle events that were classified as superstitious, un-Islamic, and wasteful: large-style celebrations of engagement and weddings and the births of children, as well as the increase in dowry, which usually went hand in hand with the social mobility of a community. Already in 1906, binding rules were proclaimed for the celebration of the festivities, the number of guests, and the value of gifts exchanged; a fatwa by some of the

[56] *Ibid.*, pp. 163–7.

community's leading ʿ*ulamā* sanctioned that excommunication for a contravention of these rules was in accordance with Islamic law.[57] Nevertheless, the struggle for their implementation continued at least into the 1930s and 1940s.[58]

The second aim was directed at the reorganisation and centralisation of the community's philanthropic endeavors. As is well known, all Muslims are supposed to donate a yearly zakat, 2.5 per cent of their property. While there are some rules concerning who may or may not receive zakat money, the donors can largely follow their own discretion as to the selection of the recipients, persons as well as institutions. From its foundation, the Anjuman tended to gain control over this money and its distribution.[59] At a slightly later stage, it also extended its influence over the waqfs established by members of the community.[60] While the biographical sketches still mention individual philanthropy throughout the twentieth century, the Anjuman seems to have been successful if not in monopolising, then at least in controlling a substantial portion of the money spent on charity within the *qaum*. This provided the Anjuman with a powerful means to effect a disciplining project within the community, involving not only what they understood as the proper forms of piety, but also of everyday behaviour according to ideas of frugality if not asceticism. This frugality made sense socially, as it helped underline the shift from away from demonstrative consumption to demonstrative pious self-denial alluded to above. But of course it also made sense economically, as it prevented the diversion of capital into demonstrative consumption, without risking it to appear as a sign of economic weakness undermining the credit of the family's business. Simultaneously, this control over the access to all forms of charity within the community established and reinforced hierarchies, against which resistance became increasingly difficult.

Conclusion

Compassion certainly has to be read as a social emotion in the time and region under consideration in this article. However, the detailed investigation of the different feelings and practices associated with it may cast some doubts as to whether it was such an unequivocally benign emotion as Martha Nussbaum makes it out to be.[61] Compassion is rarely universal in scope. In most cases, as we have observed in this article, it serves to construct a community and to negotiate and fortify its boundaries. But this same move results in the exclusion of others, not only from the benefits of philanthropy, but from other compassionate practices as well. Within the community, the perception of the pain of others is unequally distributed. While it had been evident for friends and peers for a long time, women's interiority

[57] *Ibid*., pp. 176–81.
[58] *Ibid*., pp. 250–2.
[59] *Ibid*., pp. 266–7, 293.
[60] *Ibid*., pp. 302–3.
[61] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*.

and emotions were displayed for identification and public consumption only more recently, while subalterns had to wait until after the First World War before being accorded the kind of subjectivity which turned them into legitimate objects not only of charity but of compassion. Simultaneously, while compassion and philanthropy certainly contributed to assuage distress, they were also effective means of strengthening the internal hierarchy of a community.

If compassion thus serves the interests of identifiable social groups, would it not make more sense to restrict our analysis to these interests and expose how emotions serve to veil them? Or to put the question even more fundamentally: does a history of emotions divert our attention from what really matters, interests and the way they were pursued? These are reservations which have to be taken seriously.[62] However, the division line between interests and emotions is itself highly ideological—it is premised on recognising certain emotions and not others, according to the degree of rationality perceived as inherent in them. Economic strategies aimed at increasing individual or collective wealth therefore appear to be a rational pursuit of interests; the same holds for the increase of power. Both, however, can hardly be read as devoid of emotions. The mobilisation of emotions in turn, as we have seen in the case of the Panjabi traders, can be an effective strategy for the pursuit of interests. Such a deconstruction, moreover, would presume the possibility to distinguish between authentic emotions, which arise spontaneously, and those which are faked or purposely evoked. This would not only create a methodological problem for historians. It could also lead to the assumption that emotions which fulfil a strategic function are therefore less 'real' or less intensely felt than 'authentic' emotions. While this may be so at times, a distinction between emotions which are the result of manipulation, whether by the actor himself or by others, and emotions emerging quasi naturally from the inner being and expressing an individual's core identity, is based on an emotion concept whose universal validity can hardly be assumed.

To conclude: on the basis of the texts analysed, we can observe the importance of compassion in the creation of community feelings, and the increasing intensity which was associated with emotions—linking *hamdardī* to *ʿishq* endowed it with a fervour which was no longer amenable to reason. Whether people 'really' felt so strongly about the community as they were exhorted to do is less important in this context than the fact that they acted as if they did, and that the appeal to compassion contributed to a both short- and long-term mobilisation. It would be surprising if these practices did not bring about the emotions they were supposed to represent—if not in all cases, then at least to a substantial extent.

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