

# The time of the Prophet and the future of the community: Temporalities in nineteenth and twentieth century Muslim India

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## Abstract

The comparison of the present to the time of the Prophet could mean very different things at different times and for different people, in spite of the finite authoritative sources, the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet. The article argues that the time of the Prophet and the comparative standard it offered not only changed depending on the concerns of the present from which the authors wrote and the future they imagined, but also affected the present and the future of each community referring to it. In the colonial contexts of the nineteenth and twentieth century, this temporal comparison met with and integrated the model of the stages of development. Comparisons with Europe, standing in for modernity, became central for the location of the community on a scale of progress, but also for attempts to change this position by catching up, educationally, economically, and politically. They went hand in hand with a strong appeal to the emotions: The successful reform of the community or nation was what would make the difference between honor, hope, and pride on the one hand and despair, humiliation, and shame on the other, and it was the responsibility of the present generation to gain or lose the future. The article investigates two comparisons of

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the present with the early Islamic past, Altaf Husain Hali's *Musaddas*, a long poem on the *Ebb and Flow of Islam* (1879), and the speeches Bahadur Yar Jang delivered in Hyderabad in the 1930s and 1940s. Both, though in a noticeably different way, show a Prophetic time, which is not only situated in the past, but also the age of the most perfect form of progress (*taraqqi*). Reverting to the past thus also means advancing toward the future; comparing the present to the Prophetic times is an indication how far the community is ready to face the challenges of the future.

### Keywords

Altaf Husain Hali, Bahadur Yar Jang, India, Hyderabad, emotions, temporalities, comparison, Urdu

Islamicate societies have brought forth a wealth of complex historiographical texts, which still await their exploration under the questions raised by the recent interest in time and temporalities.<sup>1</sup> Early on, Muslim scholars have developed methods for a critical reading of sources to determine the authenticity of the orally transmitted traditions of the Prophet; they have produced whole libraries of biographies of the Prophet and his companions. Besides, there also exist many histories that we might classify as "secular," chronologies, annals, histories of cities, and world histories, to name just a few. This continued right into colonial times, taking up European models,<sup>2</sup> but also bringing them into conversation with the Islamic tradition of history writing.<sup>3</sup>

Popular Muslim understandings of time focused on God's history with the world. According to this belief, God never left a people without guidance. From the beginning of time, he sent prophets to reveal the true path and the moral law. Humanity, however, has an innate tendency toward forgetfulness and decline. This increases with the temporal distance from the last revelation, its degradation needing ever-new revelations. Muhammad was the end point of this development. He was not only the last prophet, but also the seal of prophets, meaning that his perfection and the perfection of the Quran would remain unsurpassed for all times. This put the Prophet and the commonwealth he created at Medina at the center of Muslim temporal imaginations. It was not only a Golden Age and the period of pristine purity, but also one of the most important standards against which every individual and every society would be compared and compare themselves, irrespective of their own temporal location. The Prophetic time was thus both located in a specific moment in history and also universally accessible and from any given moment, providing a guide for every human's actions in the world.

However, as this article argues, while this importance of the time of the Prophet for any discussion of individual virtue and communal well-being was given, it still could mean very different things at different times and for different people, in

spite of the finite authoritative sources, the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet. The article shows how the time of the Prophet and the comparative standard it offered not only changed depending on the concerns of the present from which the authors wrote and the future they imagined, but also affected the present and the future of each community referring to it.

Under colonial rule, the model of the stages of development offered an alternative temporal imagination to Muslim societies. This attempt by the Enlightenment philosophers organized the geographical diversity, encountered and brought to the attention of the European public by travelers, missionaries, and colonialists since the beginning of the eighteenth century, by ordering the different societies along a time line, reaching from savage hunters and gatherers to the civilized and commercial people of the European present. This time line was universal, as each society had to move through the same stages, but it could account for simultaneous differences, as societies entered the picture at different moments and traveled at dissimilar speeds. In theory, at least, each present was an improvement over the past and each future better than the present (in reality, the cyclical images of rise and especially of decline continued to create anxiety in even those countries that prided themselves of their civilization and progress). This left the past in an ambivalent position, as it could no longer constitute a model and guide for the future, and certainly not a model endowed with moral authority (Pernau et al., 2015).

Stages of development converted a geographical difference into a temporal one. Geographical regions in the present came to stand for certain times—Europe showed how modernity looked, the Islamic world represented the Middle Ages, and Africa stood for the savage origins of humanity, the argument ran. This meant that temporal comparisons were happening not just locally, between the present and the past of the same region, but also geographically across regions: A comparison between Britain and India was intended and read (also) as a comparison across epochs. Especially for colonized countries like India, comparisons were thus central for the location of the community on a scale of progress, but also for attempts to change this position by catching up, educationally, economically, and politically. Nothing less than the future was at stake here. Comparisons therefore went hand in hand with a strong appeal to the emotions: The successful reform of the community or nation was what would make the difference between a future marked by honor, hope, and pride on the one hand and despair, humiliation, and shame on the other. It was the responsibility, and the burden, of the present generation to gain or lose this future.<sup>4</sup>

Comparative practices provided a framework situating the actors and their present in time and the world, but this commonality should not obscure the deep reaching differences. The futures hoped for, but also what hope meant at a specific time and place, how it felt and how it was to be created, changed from author to author, as did the interpretation of the past. Comparisons with the time of the

Prophet had been central to Muslim conceptions of history, but also to theological and ethical discussions. They became even more important with Islamic reformism since the second half of the eighteenth century, which had shifted the emphasis from philosophy, often in dialogue with the classical Greek tradition, to the revealed sciences (*manqulat*). The study of the Traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*) and of his biography (*sirat*), which has always been an essential element, became the linchpin around which reformist theology revolved. At the same time, this created a highly emotionalized relation between the believers and the Prophet, which in turn powered what Annemarie Schimmel has called the “imitation Muhammadi” (1975: 144–58), the effort to model one’s personal life as closely on the Prophet as possible, annihilating historical distance.

What changed in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, this article argues, was the embedding of the comparison with the age of Medina into the other comparisons offered by colonial conceptions of time. This transformed its character in a rather fundamental way. In the following, I will offer a close reading of two authors from the Urdu-speaking sphere in India between the late nineteenth century and the Second World War, both of whom were hugely popular and influential in their times. The aim is not so much to contribute to the scholarship on these figures (Hali, at least, is already one of the better-researched Indo-Muslim authors). Rather, I aim to show that the way they compared their present with the same Prophetic time still led to results that allowed for a radically different imagination of the present and the future.

### **Altaf Husain Hali: Education and civility**

Born in 1837 to an educated but impoverished family in Panipat, about one hundred kilometers toward the north of Delhi, Altaf Husain received his education at the Husain Bakhsh mosque in Delhi, which was known for its connections to one of the Islamic reformist movements. This qualified him for jobs in the lower to middling colonial administration, where he learned about European knowledge in Urdu translation.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1870s, he met Saiyid Ahmad Khan, the leading figure of a different kind of Muslim reformism. After the failed Revolt of 1857, and even more so in the years of high imperialism, the only option to (re)gain political influence on a global scale for the nation, and on a national scale for the community, was seen in rapidly following the path traced by the “advanced” nations, adopting their civilization and knowledge. This was especially true for the Muslims, whom the colonial power dubbed as “fanatics,” “bound in conscience to rebel against the Queen” (Hunter, 1871), and mired in dreams of lost glory.

Starting from the premise that the work of God, revealed through science, and the word of God, revealed in the Quran, could never contradict each other, Saiyid Ahmad Khan strove for a reconciliation of Muslim theology and Muslim worldly

knowledge with Western sciences. At the same time, the education he wanted to impart to the Muslim community went far beyond this knowledge and encompassed a broad program of civilization, which, he argued, would allow the Muslims to overcome their inertia and start progressing along the time line toward a bright future. Central to this project was the foundation of the Aligarh College, aiming to create a new generation of young men who were as modern as they were Muslim.<sup>6</sup>

Altaf Husain, who meanwhile had adopted the pen name Hali (the contemporary, the man of the present), became the poetic voice of the movement. At the request of Saiyid Ahmad Khan, he composed a long poem, entitled the *Madd o-Jazr e-Islam* (the flow and ebb of Islam), also known, by reference to its poetic form, as the *Musaddas*. Consisting of an introduction and 294 stanzas of six lines each, the poem is a passionate plea for the reform and renewal of the Muslim community. The publication gained immediate fame. It was recited at gatherings all over North India, moving the audiences to tears and paroxysms of passion; it sparked off numerous imitations, was adapted as a theater play, translated into other Indian languages, and rewritten for other religious communities.<sup>7</sup> Saiyid Ahmad Khan famously endorsed the poem and claimed that if God asked him what he had done on earth, he would reply “I made Hali write the *Musaddas* and nothing else.”<sup>8</sup>

The *Musaddas* is woven around a multiplicity of interlinked temporal comparisons. The introduction recounts the life of the poet, skillfully preparing the reader for the topics of world history. The time of his youth, he tells us, was spent in chasing after “untold emotions and uncounted desires” (89).<sup>9</sup> He assumed “the false part of a lover” (89), feeling himself into the hyperbolic emotional world of Indo-Persian poetry and wasting his youth: “When my eyes opened, I realized that I was still exactly where I had started from.” At this moment, an event happened, which divided his life into a before and after: “Suddenly, I beheld a servant of the Lord” (91), whom Hali never names, but who can be identified contextually as Saiyid Ahmad Khan. This encounter opened Hali’s eyes, and he “beheld the new pattern (*thath*) of the age” (93). When he recognized how much “the condition of our people is ruined (*tabah*)” (93), he also realized that everyone was called to do what they could. As a poet, his task was to awaken and educate the people, and that was exactly what the *Musaddas* set out to do:

This poem has not, however, been composed in order to be enjoyed or with the aim of eliciting applause, but in order to make my friends and fellows feel a sense of outrage (*ghairat*) and shame (*sharam*) (97).

The preliminary stanza of the *Musaddas* sets up the stage for the temporalities that mark the entire poem:

If anyone sees the way our downfall passes all bounds,  
 The way that Islam, once fallen, does not rise again,  
 He will never believe that the tide flows after every ebb,  
 Once he sees that way our sea has gone out.

Entering into the poem, the listeners have to confront the big question of their lives, framed as a call for comparison: “Who were you yesterday, and what have you become today!” (M4). The historical narrative starts with the Arabian *Jahiliyya*, the time before the arrival of the Prophet (M8-M20). As its name indicates, this was a time devoid of knowledge (*jahil*, ignorant, unlettered, and uncivilized). Arabia was a barren desert, with “no cultivation in the wilderness” (M10) and no “knowledge of the learning and art of Greece” (M11). As the Arabs were ignorant of the divine law, they not only worshipped idols but were also steeped in the depravity of barbarity: Their manners were savage (*wahshiyana*), their quarrels were relentless and made “the whole country burst into flame” (M16). They spent their days gambling and drinking.

There was pleasure-seeking (ta’ayyush), there was obliviousness (ghaflat), there was madness (divangi):

In short, their condition was iniquitous (burra) in every respect (M20).

All of this changed when God sent the Prophet:

Arabia, which had been covered with ignorance for centuries,

Was transmuted in a single instance.

The boat had no fear left of the wave of disaster.

The wind had quite changed about (M25).

The message of the Prophet “implanted a new passion in the hearts of all” (M30). He taught monotheism and God’s law to the Arabs, “the proper ways of carrying on their lives (*adab*), and instructed them in all the subjects of civilization (*tamaddun*)” (M40). As a result, they realized the value and worth of time (*waqt ki qadr o qimat*) (M41), became passionately keen on learning (M43), developed qualities of loving kindness (M44), and cultivated an ethics of hard work (M48). They set about to travel and explore the world and learned about the benefits of trading (M52). This spiritual, moral, and worldly progress continued in the age of the caliphs. Turning the gaze beyond the lands of Islam, however, revealed nothing but darkness:

Over every people lay the shadow of decline (*tanazzul ka saya*),  
 Which had caused them all to fall from the heights.  
 Those nations which are the stars of heaven today  
 Were all hidden in the twilight of degradation (*pusti*) (M62).

It was the advance of the Arabs which “kindled the radiance” (M70) in this world of darkness. It brought learning and art to the Christians and taught morality and manners to the peoples. They reached the pinnacle of progress and civilization, and, “after sampling its flavor themselves, they gave it to others” (M95); be it astronomy, history writing, eloquence, or medicine.

But this flow did not last. “When the spring of purity became muddied” (M106), evil times befell the Muslims:

Science and arts took leave of them one by one.  
 All their virtues were destroyed by degrees.  
 Neither religion nor Islam was left.  
 Only the name of Islam was left (M108).

This account is followed by a long description of the present-day condition of the Indian Muslims, who have not a trace of nobility left, “no honor among peoples,” “no love for our own people,” but “sloth in our hearts, arrogance in our brains, baseness in our thoughts and hatred for all excellence” (M122). This decay shows as much in moral depravity and the absence of civilization and education, as in the loss of worldly power and of the desire to explore the world in travel and trade. Again, comparison allows to locate the present on a time line, but here the time line is the Islamic one. It shows that the condition of the Indian Muslims has reverted to the *Jahiliyya*, as if the Prophet had never brought them the divine message—though they could not claim ignorance of His message. But it was not only Muslims that comparison allowed to place on this time line. Looking at the qualities embodied by the Europeans and even by the Hindus in the present age shows that they were the ones living according to the standards of the Prophet:

Those covenants of the Holy Law which we have broken  
 Have all been firmly up held by the people of the West (M171).

They embody “the patriotism (*hubb ul vatan*) [which] is the sign of true believers” (M173), and they possess the philanthropic spirit which marked the community of the Prophet. Compared to them—and thus also to the time of the Prophet and of the caliphs—the Indian Muslims present a picture of utter degradation, which Hali hammers in, stanza after stanza, sparing no profession

and no social group in his scathing criticism. Thanks to the benevolence of the British Government, the pathway to progress is wide-open, but still, sunk in dreams of past glory, the Muslims refuse to embark on this route.

We can thus note a number of entangled temporal and geographical comparisons: Following the Islamic tradition, Hali shows the transformative arrival of the Prophet, which divides history into a before and after, comparing the *Jahiliyya* to the perfect community that the Prophet established and the caliphs continued. This flow was followed by a new ebb, which in turn is compared both to the ideal polity in Medina and to the *Jahiliyya*. This poetic movement could still fit into the cyclical worldview suggested by the title of the poem. However, it gets complicated by the introduction of other peoples: The Europeans, steeped in darkness, also become enlightened through the encounter with the Islamic culture. As shown by comparing their state before and after this engagement, it is by becoming Muslim in everything but faith that they reached their present heights. Two time lines are informing the comparisons at the same time: The time line of the stages of developments establishes the Europeans at the spearhead of progress, anticipating the future. It provides a geographical-cum-temporal comparison with present-day Indian Muslims, which shows the belatedness of the latter. The same characteristics, applied to the Islamic time line, show the present Europeans as matching the qualities of true Muslims of the Prophetic time, which they learned from them earlier.

Both the Enlightenment and the Islamic time line depended on a number of criteria in order to decide where to place a people. The Prophetic time, to which corresponds the position at the vanguard of progress, is marked by moral and emotional qualities: First, piety, as an orientation toward an ethical way of life, compassion, and patriotism, as the love of the community and the nation; and second, the appreciation of time and the willingness to work hard, leading to material progress. These values are inculcated through the education of an elite whose task is to keep the arts and sciences bright and to develop them further, but also through the reform of the entire community, transforming them into moral subjects.

Both time lines also place a premium on habitual emotions observable in a society for its classification (Pernau, 2014). The emotions of the *Jahiliyya* and the age of barbarity are uncouth and lack refinement. Subjects have never learned proper discipline or to strive for a balance; they are overwhelmed by what they feel at any given moment and thus neither able to control their passions nor to sustain beneficent emotions over a longer period. They cannot resist the urges of their lower soul nor of their body. The emotions the Prophet taught his community, and through them, the whole world, as well as the emotions of a civilized and progressive society are well-balanced without being lukewarm. Even passionate feelings for the community or the nation or for those in need of help and

solidarity remain in control of rationality and the will and never cross the boundaries set by the moral and religious law.

Emotions, we can conclude, are at the center of identity of a society and an age. Their comparison allows the establishment of a hierarchical order that establishes relations not only between epochs and between geographical spaces, but also between time and space. If emotions are one of the main standards for comparison, if not the central one, Hali's text has also shown that comparison itself is never devoid of them, but raises intense feelings of pride and shame, of hope and despair, and of longing and disgust. Hali virtuously played with all of these, and he considered himself successful in what he did. The second edition of the *Musaddas*, published seven years later, includes a new introduction, in which Hali reviewed the success of his poem and decided that the emotions it has aroused give cause for hope. "The community itself may be unchanged, but its attitude is changing. So even if the time for praise is not yet come, disapprobation ought certainly to be diminished" (101). He also added more stanzas to the poem, concluding on a much more promising note. While the flow of Islam had given place to the ebb, the ebb might still turn into a new flow—if the Indian Muslims followed the leadership of Saiyid Ahmad Khan and wholeheartedly took up the agenda of his Aligarh movement.

### **Bahadur Yar Jang: Military and manly virtues**

From North India in the 1880s and 1890s, we move to the princely state of Hyderabad, situated on the plateau of the Deccan, in the 1930s and 1940s. At first sight, this is a big step. Unlike the territory called British India, the 500 odd princely states, varying in size between large estates and Hyderabad, whose territory matched that of England and Wales put together, were still governed by Indian rulers. Though the British exercised a form of paramountcy, which ensured that they could always enforce their interests if they wanted, they made sure to preserve a certain autonomy for the states making up an "Indian India," if only to use them as a counterweight against the national movement. Hyderabad, one of the successor states of the Mughal Empire, prided itself in this heritage—many nobles and the ruler himself traced their ancestry to the Mughal court, and the courtly language and culture consciously kept a Mughal flavor.

In reality, the borders between Hyderabad and the rest of India had always been porous. Like a number of men of the Aligarh movement, Hali had been granted a stipend by the ruler of Hyderabad; others had moved to the Deccan in search of job opportunities and had distinguished careers in the higher administration of the state. They had notably contributed to the modernization of the state's administration and rendered it more efficient, though not necessarily more responsive to the public at large.

The mobilization of the national movement and the struggle for the inclusion of new strata of population in the political process, too, had an impact on Hyderabad in the twentieth century. This increased even further after 1935, when the new Government of India Act made a further devolution of power dependent on the creation of a federation encompassing both British India and the princely states. While the British hoped that the inclusion of the Princes would mean a strong conservative block in the center, for the political parties, this was an added incentive to push for constitutional reforms in the states, which would have given them a voice in the state governments and thus circumvent the British strategy (Bawa, 1992; Benichou, 2000; Pernau, 2000; Roosa, 1998).

It is against this background that the speeches of Bahadur Yar Jang have to be read. He was born in 1905 into a middling family of the nobility and received the traditional education and training of a noble. Early in life, he developed an interest in soldierly activities. After the death of his father, Bahadur Yar Jang took over the responsibility for his family and the estate, which, he discovered, was highly indebted. He started not only to reduce the expenses, and succeeded to pay off the debts in less than ten years, but also imposed a more austere Islamic code of behavior on the family. The reform of the lifestyle of the nobles, whom he saw as steeped in luxury, lacking moral virtues and manliness, and whom he therefore judged unfit to lead the regeneration of the Muslim community, became the central thread weaving through his work.

Bahadur Yar Jang was a brilliant orator, probably one of the best in Urdu in the twentieth century. He also was a successful organizer of associations and popular movements. In 1927, he founded the Hyderabad branch of the Tablighi Jama'at, a missionary organization addressing communities at the lower end and outside of the caste system, which also formed the target of Hindu reform movements. Traveling the countryside of Hyderabad for three years, he claimed to have personally converted more than 5,000 persons. He also established a branch of the Khaksar movement, a paramilitary volunteer organization in Punjab, which regularly held public parades and camps to train young men in military virtues. It aimed at building up their physical strength and their ability to handle arms and thus put them in a position to defend the community against real and imagined dangers, but also to transform their character and to enhance their masculinity. Finally, he founded his own political party, the Majlis-e Ittehad ul Muslimin (Association for the Unity of the Muslims), which took over the training program of the Khaksars and became one of the political forces to be reckoned with from the late 1930s onward. After the death of Bahadur Yar Jang in 1944, the party further radicalized, took over the government, and became one of the central reasons for the military intervention of the Indian Army in 1948 and the annexation of the state.<sup>10</sup>

In the following, I will look at three texts by Bahadur Yar Jang or his immediate surroundings in a chronological sequence. The first was a speech that Bahadur Yar Jang gave in 1933 in Delhi, after returning from a long trip that had led him through many of the Islamic countries from Afghanistan and Central Asia to Iran, Turkey, the Middle East, and the Hijaz. The speech was published widely in the Urdu Press under the heading “Where is Asia going?” (Ahmad, 1981: 341–366). While the interest of his travels had been focused on the twentieth century only, on its revolutions and their results (*inqilab o nata’ij*), Bahadur Yar Jang explained that “no true picture could be drawn without looking at the past” (345). Until the eighteenth century, the sun of the grandeur and magnificence of the East had shone brightly. Since then, however, decline (*tanazzul*) had set in. “Both the rulers and their subjects have become the prey of the worship of luxury (*‘aish parasti*) and the quest for repose (*aram*). ... Instead of war (*razm*), they enjoyed revelries (*bazm*). ... The successors of the rulers of old ... have become figures of chess and paper tigers,” thus allowing the West to seize power (346). But “the fire of the Great War has emblazed the dry wilderness of Asia with the sparks of passion (*ahsas*) and awakening (*bedari*)” (349). This awakening was not limited to politics, but encompassed also economic, and most of all, mental progress (*dimaghi taraqqi*). The history of the East shows that it has always been the cradle of knowledge and wisdom (*‘ilm, hikmat*). Through its laziness, it had lost its treasures to the West, but now is recovering its heritage, together with anything the West might have added (350). To someone raised on the imagery of Hali’s *Musaddas*, this speech would have sounded familiar. The language of battle is not absent in it, but it is still rather subdued—it is a battle for progress, rather than a military battle. The Muslims have forgotten their Islamic history, the many centuries that they ruled over Spain, Hindustan, Iran, and the countries of Arabia. Now, Bahadur Yar Jang exclaimed, “it is time to wake up. ... Islam is our support. This religion has once already initiated progress and will do so again” (363).

A short time later, the tone changed. In 1937, Bahadur Yar Jang gave a speech at a training camp for young volunteers in Hyderabad (Ahmad, 1981: 52–66). Again, we find the condemnation of luxury and repose—some of the young men seem to have complained about the hardship of the exercises. He reminded them about the despondency and shame (*zillat, sharm*) of the community, who had become strangers to the sword and spear and had instead taken up musical instruments. Instead, he urged them to recall the days “when the Lord of the Two Worlds and the Seal of the Prophets [titles of the Prophet Muhammad] had spent his nights on the back of unsaddled horses, staying awake through the nights, his blessed feet swollen,” and his followers were so hungry that they “tied stones on their blessed stomachs” (53). “The secret of strength lies in unity (*jam’iat*) and militarism (*askariyat*). ... History (*tarikh*) did not give Muslims a place on her forehead, until they took up the sword” (55). These are the secrets of life (*raz-e hayat aur sirr-e zindagi*) (53), the evolutionary laws established by nature (*fitrat*

*ke muqarrar kardah usul-e irtiqa'*) (57). Anyone, who wanted to know the conditions for a people to become victorious, had only to read the history of the world (62). As young men, Bahadur Yar Jang exclaimed again and again, their task was to prepare for the coming military battle, through service, obedience, fearlessness, and hard work.

These shifts in temporal comparisons were fully developed in 1941, in a history of the Majlis-e Ittehad ul Muslimin, the political party representing the radical Muslims of Hyderabad that Bahadur Yar Jang joined and reorganized in 1937. It cannot be ascertained whether Bahadur Yar Jang himself was the author of the text, but it certainly bears the imprint of his ideas and was checked by him before going to print (*Majlis-e Ittehad ul Muslimin, 1941*). In the time between the two texts, the political situation in Hyderabad had seen a deterioration of the relations between the Hindu and the Muslim communities, centering on questions of the constitutional reform of the State, but also leading to an increasing number of communal clashes. In the beginning, the Majlis had claimed to sustain the traditional structures of Hyderabad. However, from the end of the 1930s, their support of the ruler and his throne went only so far, as they could be seen as a symbol of Islamic government and as representing the Muslim community at large. Bahadur Yar Jang was increasingly willing to back up these claims through the power of the street—meaning that the battle, which had still loomed very much in the future in his speech of 1937, had become an everyday reality for the readers addressed in this text. Like for the other texts considered so far, here too the remembrance of the rise of Islam provides the starting point:

About 1400 years ago, and 571 years after the birth of Isa [Jesus], the Messiah, the cloud of God's mercy arose and spread all over the world. It shed its rain everywhere, and there was no grain of dust that was not touched by it. Iran, Turan, Africa, the Sahara, Spain, everywhere there was mercy and peace (*rahmat o rahat*). And not only the soil of the earth, but also the human heart and mind were irrigated by his mercy (17).

But unlike in Hali's text or even the earlier speeches of Bahadur Yar Jang, decay set in almost immediately. The Umayyad caliphs (661–750 C.E.) were the first to spoil (*gadla*) the message, which therefore never reached India in its full purity (17). From there, decline set in, long before the Muslims lost their power. Even the Mughals, for long the epitome of Muslim civilization and supremacy, were nothing but dirt (*alایشات*) (19) and forgot the divine message in their search for pleasure. Asaf Jah I, the first ruler of Hyderabad, saw the ruin (*tabahi*) looming and therefore proclaimed his independence. The wealth (*rafahiyat*), peace (*chain, sukun*), and freedom from care he and his successors provided for the Muslims of the Deccan, however, made them selfish and lazy, and here too, the decay set in (19–20).

For a fallen people wishing to rise again, Bahadur Yar Jang explained, it is important to have a correct feeling for their present condition, to remember their magnificent past, to aim at repeating the deeds of the ancestors, and to awaken the longing for glory in all members of the community. The memory of the past is more than the recalling of an interesting story. Only if it touches their hearts and raises their feelings of devotion (*fidviyat ka jazba*), will it provide material for insight and again lead them towards progress (20–21). Today’s gatherings, however, “are not concerned with how to transform the community; they do not cultivate ideas about the past (*mazi ka khayal*), nor feelings for the present (*hal ka ahsas*) or thoughts about the future (*mustaqabil ki fikr*)” (32). This needs to change, if the Muslims are going to face the battle for leadership, which has already begun. It is only by cultivating their feelings of sacrifice and devotion (*jazba-e isar o fidviyat*), filling their mind with restlessness (*iztirab o tarab*) and making their heart tremble during daytime and their eyes cry during the night (31), that they will come out victorious.

### Time of the Prophet—times of the Prophet?

Both in Hali’s *Musaddas* and in the speeches and writings of Bahadur Yar Jang, the comparison of the present to the past, and notably to the time of the Prophet, evoked strong emotions. This is not surprising, as the ideal of passionate feelings (*josh*) had gained currency in India (as in other parts of the world) since the turn of the century. If decay and degeneration were the problem diagnosed, passions were a central element of the solution. Only peoples who were young, virile, and hot-blooded had a chance to triumph in the struggle for survival, pitching nations and communities against each other (Pernau, 2019a). Both of the texts also agree in the central position they give to the time of the Prophet and to his example. From there onward, however, they increasingly diverge. Hali saw the Prophetic time as the beginning of a long flood, encompassing not only the early caliphs, but also the dynasties that followed them. Nor were Muslims the only ones who could embody the virtuous character that marked these times. Since the Renaissance had brought Europeans into contact with the teachings of the Prophet, their times, too, had become a standard for Muslims of the present against which to compare themselves. For Bahadur Yar Jang, on the other hand, the time appropriate for comparison had shrunk, first to Muslim empires of the past and then to only the time of the Prophet and his immediate successors.

To this corresponds the difference in the standards according to which the present and the past were compared. Hali insisted on education and civilization as the most important markers, hardly mentioning military conquest at all. This was very much in tune with the interpretation of the Aligarh movement, which saw education as the moving force of history, whether at the time of the expansion of Islam, in colonial rule over India, or in the recovering of the Muslims’ position at

the apex of society. Bahadur Yar Jang, after his speech from 1933, drops almost all reference to education—for him the Prophet was not the most civilized of human beings, but distinguished by his military virtues, by his willingness to sacrifice everything and to endure, even to revel, in bodily hardship. The conquests of the early Muslims were not due to their civilizational superiority, but to their manliness, which enabled them to wield military power. The time of the Prophet, depicted in both instances, looked so different to warrant the plural: times of the Prophet. If prompted, neither Hali nor Bahadur Yar Jang would have denied that the Prophet possessed the virtues the other ascribed to him. On their own, however, they did not accord them much importance. The authoritative sources depicting the Prophet, though limited, allow different emphases and a wide range of interpretations.

These differences played out with regard to the emotions ascribed to the Prophet and His companions, but also to those Hali and Bahadur Yar Jang aimed at arousing in their audiences. Both agreed on the need for passionate endeavors: Only a community that cared about their religion, their honor, and their place in the world to an extent that every individual was ready to sacrifice his all could aspire to the future God had prepared for them. But whereas Hali and the Aligarh tradition were still rooted in the ideal of civility, of balance, and of the transformation of the emotions into a beautiful and well-ordered garden, for Bahadur Yar Jang passions were no longer only a mobilizing force, but had acquired a valance of their own.

At one level, both the authors analyzed in this article can be read as responding to colonial knowledge. The Aligarh movement explicitly placed its hopes on the collaboration with the colonial government and was confident that this would enable the Muslim community to overcome its deficit in education. Bahadur Yar Jang did not mention Western knowledge, but he was obviously familiar with the debates on Social Darwinism and the survival of the fittest. However, the close reading of the texts has shown that their response was premised on the integration and reinterpretation of colonial knowledge into Islamic perceptions of history, theology, and moral philosophy that deeply transformed the British concepts, a transformation which went deep into their substance and not only cloaked them in some oriental garb.

Temporal comparisons, within a European framework, can be distinguished by their orientation toward the past, the model of the “Golden Age,” or toward the future; here, the concept of progress as a category of movement would be central. Neither Hali nor Bahadur Yar Jang can be subsumed under this distinction. The Prophetic time is at the center of their comparisons; it provides the standard for the evaluation of their present and the guideline for the future—even if the juxtaposition of the two authors shows how broad the range for an imagination of the past and the future could be. However, the Prophetic time is not only situated in the past but is also the age of the most perfect form of progress (*taraqqi*).

Reverting to the past thus also means, with one and the same movement, advancing toward the future; comparing the present to the Prophetic times is an indication how far the community is ready to face the challenges of the future.<sup>11</sup>

Expanding our horizon beyond European models may thus constitute a further contribution to the current efforts to problematize the distinction and unidirectional sequence of the past, the present, and the future. Practices of comparison succeed only to a small extent at keeping these categories separate—“this is how we were in the past, and that’s what we have become today.” More often, they show how much the past is informed by the present, if not by the future, and how much the present and the future cannot be thought without reference to the remnants of the past. Though the orientation to the past will often need the certainty of a singular, unequivocal time, the analysis of temporal comparisons shows the irreductibility of time’s plurality.

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### Notes

1. For a beginning, see [Bashir \(2019\)](#).
2. For instance, the monumental history of India in ten volumes by [Zakaullah \(1897–1915\)](#).
3. For a wonderful analysis of the work of Shibli Numani, see [Bruce \(2016\)](#).

4. For a case study on the emotions of temporal and geographical comparison, see [Pernau \(2019b\)](#).
5. Biographical accounts of Altaf Husain Hali can be found in the introduction of [Hali and Minault \(1986\)](#); the introduction of [Majeed and Shackle \(1997\)](#); and [Steele \(1981\)](#).
6. Still unsurpassed: [Lelyveld \(1978\)](#).
7. A detailed history of its reception can be found in the introduction of [Majeed and Shackle \(1997\)](#).
8. Quoted in [Tignol \(2016\)](#).
9. All translations are from [Majeed and Shackle \(1997\)](#), unless otherwise indicated. Numbers indicate page numbers, numbers preceded by M refer to stanzas.
10. There still is no study of Bahadur Yar Jang available in English. For publications in Urdu see the near contemporary biography by [Muhammad \(1973\)](#) and the magisterial three-volume work by [Ahmad \(1986\)](#).
11. For a more detailed investigation of the concept of progress in the Aligarh tradition, see [Pernau \(2019b\)](#).

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