

INTERROGATING “THE EAST,” “CULTURE,” AND “LOSS,”
IN ABDUL HALIM SHARAR’S *GUZASHTA LAKHNA’U*

C. M. Naim

Abdul Halim Sharar, born in Lucknow in 1860, spent several boyhood years in Matiya Burj, outside Calcutta, where his father was in the service of Wajid Ali Shah, the deposed King of Awadh,¹ As an adult, Sharar lived in Hyderabad at various times, working in different capacities for either the Nizam or one of his nobles. He also traveled to England as a tutor to the noble’s son, a student at Eton. Sharar remained in England for less than two years; the bulk of his life, however, was spent at Lucknow, where he died in 1926. By then, he had become an exceptionally famous literary figure in Urdu.

Sharar’s *oeuvre* consists of at least twenty-one biographies, twenty-eight historical novels, fourteen social novels, fifteen books of popular history, six plays, much poetry, and innumerable essays, only some of which were collected and published in eight volumes. He also receives credit for introducing blank verse in Urdu. During his life Sharar edited and published several journals that he also entirely wrote, the most famous being *Dilgudaz* (“Heart-Melting”). Most of Sharar’s writings were initially serialized in his journals.

Sharar’s outstanding study of Lucknow’s arts and culture at the middle of the 19th century was originally serialized in *Dilgudaz* from 1913 to 1920, under the title “*Hindustan Men Mashriqi Tamaddun Ka Akhiri Namuna*” (“The Last Example of Eastern Culture in Hindustan”). When, some years later, the articles were put together in a volume in the multi-volume edition of his selected essays, it was either the publisher or Sharar himself who expanded the title by adding “*ya’ni Guzashta Lakhna’u*” (“i.e. Lucknow of the Past”). Since then the book is simply referred to as *Guzashta Lakhna’u*, and has never been

¹ I found the following useful on Sharar’s life and work: (1) Ja’far Raza, *Abdul Halim Sharar* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988); (2) Mumtaz Manglori, *Sharar ke Tarikhi Navil aur un ka Tahqiqi wa Tanqidi Ja’izah* (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Khiyaban-i-Adab, 1978).

out of print.² In 1975, the book gained wider attention among scholars when an English translation came out entitled: *Lucknow: The Last Phase of An Oriental Culture*.³

As one reads the original Urdu title—*Hindustan Men Mashriqi Tamaddun Ka Akhiri Namuna* (“The Last Example of Eastern Culture in Hindustan”)—one is immediately impelled to ask, “Was Hindustan not a part of the East, or Indian culture of Sharar’s time not Eastern?” What follows below is an attempt to understand that puzzle of a title by exploring the key words in it. The exercise, it is hoped, would also throw some light on the overarching narrative of cultural and political “Loss” or “Decline” that so much dominated Urdu literary and socio-cultural writings in the late 19th and early 20th century, and to some extent still does in some quarters.

The first word in the title, *Hindustan*, is now generally translated as “India.” We must, however, recall that not too long before Sharar’s time, *Hindustan* equally commonly, if not more so, referred to a smaller, culturally defined area of North India, namely the *doaba* or the Gangetic plain of Uttar Pradesh. The area was perceived as culturally and linguistically distinctive—frequently, even normative—not only by its residents but also by many other people across India. The narrower meaning of *Hindustan* was functionally prevalent in both Hindi and Urdu throughout the 19th century.⁴ One quotation from Syed Ahmad Khan can exemplify both uses:

“The Bengalis, our brothers in Hindustan, are the pride of all communities [*qaum*]; they have struggled and produced a dozen ‘civilians’ [i.e. civil servants]. But their brothers, be they of any country [*mulk*]

² Two particularly useful editions presently exist: (1) Abdul Halim Sharar, *Guzashta Lakhna’u*, ed. Rashid Hasan Khan (New Delhi: Maktaba-i-Jamia, 2000), and (2) Abdul Halim Sharar, *Guzashta Lakhna’u*, ed. Muhammad Ikram Chaghatai (Lahore: Sang-i-Mil, 2006). All references below are to the latter edition; henceforth: Sharar, *Guzashta*.

³ Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, tr. and ed. E. S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain (Boulder: Westview Press, 1975). Henceforth: Sharar, *Lucknow*.

⁴ For some useful information on how the British historians and cartographers struggled with the two meanings of *Hindustan*, see Ian J. Barrow, “From Hindustan to India: Naming Change in Changing Names,” in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 26:1 (April 2003), 37-49.

Punjab or Hindustan—and be they Muslim or Hindu, do not feel any shame in being left behind.”⁵

The narrower reference had not disappeared in Sharar’s time. For example in the following Persian verse of Sharar’s peer and friend, Shibli Nu’mani, written in 1911: *za bamba’i chun ba hindostan rasam shibli // za bada baguzaram baz parsā gardam*, “When I leave Bombay and reach Hindustan, I give up wine and become pious again.”⁶

The same situation was also found in Sharar’s time concerning the derived form, *Hindustani*, “Indian/Hindustani.”⁷ The word alleged attributes of identity and culture that were actually regional but presumed to be pan-Indian by many North Indians. Additionally, for many “nationalist” Muslim authors, *Hindustani* was often synonymous with the expression, *ganga-jamni*, i.e. a product of the co-mingling of the Hindu (Ganga) and Muslim (Jamuna) traditions. For some other Muslim intellectuals, however, *Hindustani* stood for a linguistic variety rival to their own Urdu as it allegedly contained a disproportionate percentage of what they regarded as “Hindi/Hindu” elements. To sum up, in the early decades of the 20th century, the word *Hindustan* and its derived adjective were contested semantic fields, and for Sharar and many other authors of his time both *Hindustan* and *Hindustani* were not necessarily always as pan-Indian in reference as we now commonly assume.⁸ We may safely assume that

⁵ Syed Iqbal Ali, *Sayyad Ahmad Khan ka Safarnama-i-Panjab*, ed. Shaikh Muhammad Isma’il Panipati (Lahore: Majlis-i-Taraqqi-i-Adab, 1973), 107-108. Elsewhere in the same book: “Islam does not ask: Are you a Turk or a Tajik, and Arab or an African. ... It does not ask: were you born in Punjab or Hindustan” (p. 13). Similar examples can also be found in Hindi writings of that time.

⁶ A more poignant example is found even later in this verse of Fani Badayuni (d. 1941): *fani dakan men a-ke ye uqda khula ki ham // hindostan men rahte hain hindostan se dur*, “When I arrived in the Deccan this enigma dawned on me: I lived in Hindustan, but away from Hindustan.”

⁷ Even now the narrower reference is used to distinguish the *Hindustani* or North Indian classical music from the South Indian musical tradition. On the other hand, a pejorative use of the word is often found in the anti-Muhajir polemics in Pakistan.

⁸ The situation did not totally change with the passage of time. In September 1947, in the legislative assembly of what is now Uttar Pradesh, an MLA could say the following and be fully understood: “As a matter of fact, if you ask a Bengalee ‘what will you call me?’ he will say, ‘I would call you Hindustani.’ If I were to answer that question myself ‘what are you,’ I would call myself Hindustani for lack of anything better.” Quoted in Gyanesh Kudaisya, “‘Aryavarta,’ ‘Hind,’ or ‘Uttar Pradesh’: The Postcolonial Naming and Framing of a ‘Region,’ in D. Chakrabarty, R. Majumdar and A. Sartori (eds), *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in*

Sharar used *Hindustan* in the title to refer to the sub-continent as a whole, but some presence of the earlier, not-so-inclusive reference cannot be entirely ruled out. At least its imperatives of cultural uniqueness and superiority could lie behind some of Sharar's hyperbolic claims for Lucknow.⁹

Paradoxically, while Sharar used *Hindustan* in an expanded and inclusive sense, his use of the word *Mashriqi* ("Eastern") in the title was curiously exclusive, separating India and Indian from the East. What could he have in mind? In what sense India, for Sharar, was not a part of the East? And how was mid-nineteenth century Rajputana, for instance, not as "Eastern" in Sharar's sight as the Lucknow of the Nawabs?

As one proceeds to read the opening sentences of the book, one becomes more intrigued. Here is my literal translation:

Perhaps no one would hesitate to concede that the last example of Eastern culture [*mashriqi tahzib-o-tamaddun*] seen in Hindustan was the former court of Awadh. Some relics of the past are still found at several courts [*darbar*], but it was the court [of Awadh] with which ended old culture [*tahzib*] and social behavior [*mu'asharat*].¹⁰

Fakhir Hussain, a proud native of Lucknow, who finalized the English version and wrote its explanatory notes, adds in a footnote, "The reference [to other courts] is mainly to the Muslim Princely States of Hyderabad, Bhopal, and Rampur which were flourishing in India during the author's lifetime and lasted until 1947."¹¹ Hussain does not explain why Sharar could not have also meant one or two of the major non-Muslim courts at the time, such as Mysore, Jaipur, and Travancore-Cochin. Sharar, however, makes his point of view quite clear some fifty pages later:

Transition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 266. I thank Mohinder Singh for this reference.

⁹ One might also argue, however unconvincingly, that by making the claim for Lucknow being the "the last example" of a particularly Muslim culture in "Hindustan," Sharar left open the possibility for Hyderabad to be considered as a flourishing example of the same in India.

¹⁰ Sharar, *Guzashta*, 53. In Sharar, *Lucknow*: "It is unlikely that anyone will question the statement that the late court of Awadh was the final example of oriental refinement and culture in India. There are several other courts to remind us of former times, but the one in which old culture and social life reached its zenith was this court of Awadh... (29)"

¹¹ Sharar, *Lucknow*, 234.

There were of course at that time many Hindu states, but the Muslim courts were the only ones which were considered refined and cultured [*muhazzab aur sha’ista*]. The Hindu rajas themselves admitted that they could not surpass the Muslim courts as regards culture [*tamaddun*] and social behavior [*mu’asharat*]. The idea of reviving their old civilization [*tahzib*] and providing for themselves a new culture [*tamaddun*] and literature came to them only later and as a result of English education.¹²

But if *mashriqi* and *muslim* were synonymous for Sharar, why did he use the former in the title and not the latter? Also, were Harcourt and Hussain right when they translated *mashriqi* as “Oriental?” The answers require a brief digression.

For the generation preceding Sharar’s, *mashriq* meant “East,” a point on the compass, while *mashriqi* was merely its adjectival form. However, for the same people—i.e. men like Syed Ahmad Khan, Altaf Husain Hali, and Nazir Ahmad—the word *purab* (“East”) carried much additional meaning. For them, *purab* and *purbi* designated the people and culture of the region that is now covered by central and eastern Uttar Pradesh and North Bihar. Going back several centuries, when a Tughluq Sultan of Delhi appointed a commander for his territories east of Delhi, he gave him the title *Malik-al-Sharq* (“Master of the East”), where the word *Sharq* stood for the indigenous *purab*, referring to the region and not the direction. After the commander’s death, his two adopted sons and their descendents ruled as independent Sharqi kings, i.e. the kings of the Purab. When Shahjahan reportedly claimed, “Purab’ is our Shiraz,” he had in mind Jaunpur and its surrounding area. On the other hand, when Mushafi (d. 1824), two hundred years later, accused the “amirs of *purab*” of being pusillanimous, his target was the nobility of Awadh.¹³

While the rich connotations of *purab* and *purabi* had survived for Sharar and his peers, something new and equally powerful developed at the turn of the century vis-à-vis *mashriq* and *mashriqi*. The two became linked to the discourse of the European Orientalists whose studies had focused on Islam and the Middle East, and for whom “the

¹² Sharar, *Lucknow*, 78. I have added Sharar’s actual words within brackets. Sharar, *Guzashta*, 112-3.

¹³ Mushafi described the nobles of Awadh as “Bengali mynahs”—*bangale ki maina hain ye purab ke amir*—for they said only what their British masters taught them.

Orient” exclusively denoted the Islamic Middle East, primarily the Arab lands. The Arabs, in turn, called these scholars *Mustashriqin*, i.e. those who studied the *Sharq* or *Mashriq*. Harcourt and Hussain, therefore, made no error when they used “Oriental” as the equivalent of Sharar’s *Mashriqi* in the title. Sharar would have done the same. In fact, he would have placed, I believe, the definite article “the” before the word, instead of Harcourt and Hussein’s indefinite “a.”¹⁴ The translators, working nearly five decades after Sharar, felt compelled to give recognition to other areas of “the Orient,” but for Sharar and many of his learned Muslim peers “Orient” or, more correctly, *Mashriq* was only what was “Islamic” or “Arab.” That had been the practice of the people writing in Arabic, like Jurji Zaidan and Rashid Rida in Egypt, and it was readily accepted in Urdu by people like Sharar and Shibli Nu’mani in India, who read the Arabs and often interacted with them.¹⁵

As surprising as the adjective, *mashriqi*, is the noun that the adjective qualifies in the title, namely *tamaddun*.¹⁶ What struck me first was the fact that Sharar had used it by itself, and not in combination with the word *tahzib*.¹⁷ In present day Urdu one comes across *tamaddun* either as the second element in the expression *tahzib-o-tamaddun* (lit. *tahzib* and *tamaddun*), or hardly at all. The phrase, however, must have been already common in Sharar’s days, for it occurs in the opening sentence of the book: “*is ke taslim karne men shayad kisi ko ‘uzr na hoga ki hindustan men mashriqi tahzib-o-tamaddun ka jo akhiri namuna nazar aya wo guzashtha darbar-i-awadh tha.*” Harcourt and Hussain translate the sentence as: “It is unlikely that anyone will question the statement that the late court of Awadh was the final example of oriental refinement and culture in India.” The translators, obviously, were being meticulous, and used two English words for the two in Urdu.

¹⁴ *Mashriq* in the original Urdu carries the force of definiteness. In Urdu, indefiniteness is indicated in various ways, while definiteness is expressed by the absence of any marker.

¹⁵ Sharar and Shibli Nu’mani (1857-1914) were good friends. It was through Shibli that Sharar had met Syed Ahmad Khan at a crucial moment in his own life.

¹⁶ F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*: “Residing in a city; dwelling together in large bodies.” “Urban or urbanized culture” would be the closest meaning to its modern usage.

¹⁷ Steingass, *Comprehensive*: “Purifying ... adorning ... amending; correction ... refinement.” Today, it is commonly translated as “civilization.”

But I suspect Sharar would have been perfectly happy had they used just one word, "culture," as I did in my translation earlier.

To confirm my impression that *tamaddun* was no longer common in ordinary Urdu, particularly by itself, I tried a little experiment. I sent a request to 20 well-educated Urdu speakers, asking them to translate into Urdu the following two sentences, one of which contained the words "refinement and culture."

It is the finest example of Islamic refinement and culture. It must be preserved.

In the twelve responses I received, "culture" was translated as *tahzib* six times, as *saqafat* three times, and one time each as *tamaddun*, *tahzib-o-tamaddun*, and *kalchar*. As for the word "refinement," it turned into a whole range of expressions, but never either *tahzib* or *tamaddun*.

Every Urdu speaker today would rightly call me a pedant if I were to translate *tahzib-o-tamaddun* as "civilization and culture." Use one or the other, he would insist. Further, he might point out that in contemporary Urdu one freely uses the English word "culture" (*kalchar*), adding that *tahzib* refers to things that possess considerable time-depth while *kalchar* encompasses what is contemporary or of recent origin (So, we write *Pakistani kalchar*, but *Islami tahzib*.) A different option for some would be to consider *tamaddun* as referring to the material culture of a people but *tahzib* to habits of public and private interaction. Lastly, a few learned souls might offer that while *tahzib* could be experienced even in remote rural areas, *tamaddun* is found only in cities.

A second experiment brought up something more fascinating, something I was not quite aware of. Using the search option, "keyword in the title," I did several book searches in the Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago. *Tahzib* brought up 106 titles, a solid hundred of them in Urdu, plus one each in Bengali and Pushto, with only four in either Arabic or Persian. *Tamaddun*, on the other hand, showed up in 96 titles, but most of them were in either Arabic or Persian. Of the 23 Urdu entries, four referred to Sharar's book, and two were old translations from the French. A third search, using the phrase *tahzib-o-tamaddun*, turned up only five Urdu titles. Further examination disclosed that while *tahzib*, by itself, occurred in 96 Urdu books, *tamaddun* was used in only 16 titles in that manner. Of the latter, three were written or translated around the same time in the first

two decades of the 20th century, and three more were written by people connected to the Nadwat-al-Ulama of Lucknow. Clearly, how the two words were used in Urdu required a closer look.

I don't have the resources to explore with any precision two inter-related key questions: (1) when exactly did Urdu intellectuals begin to write about "culture" and "cultural heritage;" and (2) when did the word *tahzib* first appear in Urdu denoting either "culture" or "civilization."¹⁸ I can only speculate, and submit that it was some time in the second half of the 19th century that the many diverse matters that earlier used to be considered separately under such rubrics as *adab* ("protocols"), *akhlaq* ("moral codes"), *a'in* ("administrative rules or constitution"), *rusum* ("customs"), *riwaj* ("local practices"), *riwayat* ("traditions"), *funun* ("arts and crafts") and so forth, began to be subsumed within one overarching word, *tahzib*, whose main function, it would appear, was to imply and then underscore a link between all of them and a single, and almost autochthonous, past.¹⁹ I further submit that the impulse to do so arose very much in reaction to the claim made by colonial authorities that their success in India was due to the unique superiority of their "Civilization." As a result, notions of cultural superiority and "civilizing" missions also crept in, particularly with some of those who preferred to use the word *tamaddun*.

Tamaddun, I speculate entered the language of social discourse in Urdu in 1896, when Syed Ali Bilgiram published his masterly translation of Gustave LeBon's *La Civilization des Arabes*, and called it

¹⁸ When Syed Ahmad Khan, in December 1870, named his famous journal *Tahzib-al-Akhlaq* ("Refinement of Morals"), he used *tahzib* as a verbal noun. But he chose it as his synonym for "Civilization" when, in 1874, he published the Urdu version of a portion of Henry Thomas Buckle's *The History of Civilization in England* and commented on it. (I owe this reference to David Lelyveld.) John T. Platts in his *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* (1884) glosses *tamaddun*: "Residing in a city or town; dwelling together in large bodies (men)." While his entry for *tahzib* treats the word as a verbal noun and gives the expected glosses: purifying, adorning, etc. *The Standard English-Urdu Dictionary* (1938?) published by the Anjuman-i-Taraqqi-i-Urdu, has entries for both "Civilization" and "Culture." Its primary synonyms for "Civilization" are *islah* and *tarbiyat*, after them comes *tamaddun*, and lastly *tahzib*. The entry for "Culture" does not mention *tamaddun*, but gives *tahzib* as the word's tertiary meaning. Evidently, the two concepts and associated words remained hazy for quite some time.

¹⁹ Earlier, people wrote about different arts separately, without projecting the notion of a unifying and unified culture. The only exception, to my limited knowledge, could be Abul Fazl's *A'in-i-Akbari*, but it claimed a unity that emerged from the genius of one man, the Emperor Akbar, and not a people or religion.

Tamaddun-i-‘Arab.²⁰ Brought out in a lavishly illustrated edition, it must have been well received by the intellectual elite at the time due to Bilgirami’s status and fame.²¹ Before his death, Bilgirami had completed a translation of Le Bon’s similar book on Indian Civilization, *Les Civilisations de l’Inde*. Entitled *Tamaddun-i-Hind*, it came out posthumously in 1913.²² Between Le Bon’s two books came a book that was probably much more influential: Mohammad Halim Ansari’s translation in 1907 of two volumes of Jurji Zaidan’s Arabic bestseller, *Tarikh-al-Tamaddun-al-Islami* (“History of Islamic *Tamaddun*”).²³

Zaidan’s popularity among the Muslim/Urdu literati at the time has not been noted, and I am presently in no position to discuss it at length. I can only mention that his influential journal *Al-Hilal* was recommended with approval by Shibli in the account of his travels to Constantinople and Cairo, and in fact subscribed to by the Arabic

²⁰ Why Bilgirami chose *tamaddun*, and not *tahzib*, is a question I have not yet resolved. Most likely it was in imitation of the Arabs.

Gustave LeBon (1841-1931) was a self-taught polymath, now chiefly remembered as a great popularizer of academic theories related to several diverse fields. His neglect as an “Orientalist” is such now that Edward Said mentioned him only once in his famous book, and only with reference to LeBon’s racist anthropological theories. My limited knowledge of LeBon’s ideas comes from Robert A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave LeBon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London: Sage Publications, 1975).

²¹ Gustave LeBon, *Tamaddun-i-‘Arab*, tr. Syed Ali Bilgirami (Sargodha: Zafar Traders, 1975, reprint). Syed Ali Bilgirami (1851-1911), a polyglot/polymath person, was an influential figure in both Hyderabad and British India. He founded the Directorate of Arts and Sciences [*ulum-o-funun*] at Hyderabad in 1894, where Shibli Nu’mani was appointed in 1901 as the Secretary (Bilgirami had retired the same year.) He was also the author or translator of a dozen scholarly books that, one may safely assume, were carefully read by many during his distinguished life. But references to *Tamaddun-i-‘Arab* are rare, and its second edition came out only in 1936, with a useful biographical note by Nawab Jivan Yar Jang. I have used a new reprint of the second edition.

²² I use the reprint: Gustave LeBon, *Tamaddun-i-Hind*, tr. Syed Ali Bilgirami (Karachi: Book Land, 1962). No earlier reprint has yet been found. Besides the two books already mentioned, two other books by LeBon existed in Urdu translation in the 1920s, *Ruh-al-Ijtima’* and *Inqilab-al-Umam*, both apparently in the discipline of Social Psychology.

²³ Jurji Zaidan (1861-1914), *Tarikh-i-Tamaddun-i-Islam*, tr. Mohammad Halim Ansari, 2 vols. (Karachi: Sh. Shaukat Ali, 1964, reprint). The third volume of Zaidan’s History was translated by Aslam Jairajpuri and published the same year. I have not seen the original edition of Ansari’s translated volumes, but have seen the Jairajpuri volume. It uses movable fonts of the kind used in many publications of the M. A. O. College (*Madrasat-ul-‘Ulum*), and carries the Urdu name on the title page, without mentioning Aligarh. To my knowledge, the third volume, as against the first two, was never reprinted.

Club at Aligarh that Shibli had founded and mentored.²⁴ Shibli maintained contact with Zaidan for twenty years, and received copies of Zaidan's books as they came out. The two also corresponded.²⁵ Their relationship came to an end only in 1911, when Shibli savagely criticized the same *Tarikh* in a long Arabic essay published by Rashid Rida in *Al-Manar*. What actually motivated Shibli to react so, eight years after the book's publication, can only be speculated, but the reason offered was the book's increasing acceptance in Muslim circles in India.²⁶ Zaidan also wrote twenty-one historical novels, some of which were translated into Urdu and found wide circulation.²⁷

Le Bon employs an evolutionary concept of *tamaddun*: a culture moves from being simple to becoming complex, and thus progresses from being "barbaric" to becoming "civilized."²⁸ Further, Le Bon lays

²⁴ Zaidan's journal was the unacknowledged inspiration behind Abul Kalam Azad's Urdu journal of the same name that began in 1912. Azad's *Al-Hilal* was as concerned with the Ottoman Caliph and his empire as was Zaidan's, and its format, new for Urdu, was close to the Arabic original. Urdu scholars seem to have ignored Zaidan's influence on Azad, but Ian H. Douglas notes the matter briefly in *Abul Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography*, eds. Gail Minault and Christian W. Troll (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 141. My information on Zaidan is based on Thomas Philipp, *Gurgi Zaidan: His Life and Thought* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 1979).

²⁵ Shibli suggested improvements in the History's subsequent volumes after reading the first. Zaidan obliged. Shibli Nu'mani, "*Tamaddun-i-Islam musannifa Jurji Zaidan ki Parda-dari*" ("Ripping the Veil off the *Tamaddun-i-Islam* written by Jurji Zaidan"), in Shibli Nu'mani, *Maqalat-i-Shibli*, Vol. 4, ed. Syed Sulaiman Nadvi (Azamgarh: Dar-al-Musannifin, 1956 reprint), 139, f.n.

²⁶ In another footnote (op. cit., 133) to his essay, Shibli mentions that Zaidan's book was widely popular (*kitab ghar ghar phail gai*), and was being recommended for inclusion in the syllabus for the *Fazil* degree (at the Nadwa?).

²⁷ Translations of Zaidan's novels were always listed in the booksellers' catalogs of my boyhood. One novel is preserved at the Jamia Millia Library, New Delhi. It had come out in 1907, only two years after the original publication, and translated by the same M. Halim Ansari (I owe this information to Professors Shamim Hanfi and Sarwar-ul-Huda of the Jamia.) Sharar published his first historical novel in 1888, and the popularity of his novels must have contributed to the easy acceptance of Zaidan's novels in Urdu. For a young girl's delight at receiving Zaidan's "historical books" in the 1930s from her famous father, the poet Yagana of Lucknow, see Sahil Ahmad, *Yagana* (Allahabad: Urdu Writers' Guild, 1986), 341.

²⁸ Shibli, in his essay, "*Hindustan men Islami Hukumat ke Tamaddun ka Asar*" ("The Effect of the *Tamaddun* of Islamic Rule on India"), writes, "The foremost effect of *tamaddun* is a sustained increment in life's necessities. For example, when life is plain, people sit on the ground, put food on a banana-leaf, and get done with their meal. But when *tamaddun* arrives it brings with it much more. First a cloth is spread out then a cover-sheet is laid on it, followed by a basin for washing hands Then a dining-cloth is spread out, on which are placed a variety of foods on colorful plates, each of a different shape and color suitable to the particular food." Shibli Nu'mani,

much emphasis on the physical environment within which a people develop their “essential” attributes, and their culture takes shape on specific lines. He is keenly interested in a people’s material culture, in particular architecture, and sees changes in it in terms of “progress” and “decline.” LeBon is also very much an elitist, and in some ways a frank racist.

Zaidan, who put Le Bon at the top of his list of the European scholars he used in his own work, is not prone to grand theories, but he does share with Le Bon the belief that “political power” leads to “cultural progress.” For both authors, expansions of political domination inherently contain a potential to launch and sustain a “civilizing” process among the dominated. What the two perceive as the most glorious phase of Arab/Islamic culture is inherently linked, to their satisfaction, with the Arab/Muslim imperial expansion under the Abbasids. Consequently, they also link a culture’s “decline” with its people’s loss of political domination.

For Sharar, too, the “progress” and “decline” of a culture are linked to the rise and fall of political power. According to Sharar, only when Delhi became powerless and its mercantile class asserted itself over Delhi’s nobility, did first Faizabad and then Lucknow become politically strong, and consequently capable of developing a distinct *tamaddun*. Later, when Lucknow lost its political power, its culture too went into a decline. Like Le Bon, Sharar uses architecture as a measure in that regard. For him, Asafuddaulah (r. 1775-97) and his father built the only buildings in Awadh that possessed historical significance and enduring strength; whatever was put up by Sa’adat Ali Khan (r. 1798-1814) and his successors possessed only a surface gloss, and had no lasting value.²⁹

As could be expected, for Sharar the *tamaddun* of the politically dominant also has a “civilizing” role in the dominated land. And so, in Sharar’s narrative, both Faizabad and Lucknow appear as blank slates on which Burhanul Mulk, Safdar Jung, and Shujauddaulah inscribed their *tamaddun*. It is as if Awadh had never been an integral part of the Sharqi Kingdom of Jaunpur, whose notable contributions in architecture, literature, and such industries as perfumery and carpet weaving could not have been unknown to Sharar. There is no reason to

Maqalat-i-Shibli, Vol. 6, ed. Syed Sulaiman Nadvi (Azamgarh: Dar-al-Musannifin, 1989 reprint).

²⁹ Sharar, *Lucknow*, 47-8, 52; Sharar, *Guzashta*, 75, 80.

think that the Sunni Sharar's neglect of the Shi'ah Sharqis was based on sectarian feelings—after all the Nawabs of Awadh were also Shi'ah. It reflects, I submit, a different but ingrained habit among the Muslim elite of North India.

Consider the opening nine lines of Fakhir Hussain's introduction:

Like all civilizations, the Indo-Mughal was grounded in a powerful set of ideas related to a specific social context. These ideas, expressed in institutions, ceremonies, ritual and language, underlined a markedly class-based society that, however unrepresentative and elitist, was in itself cohesive and harmonious. But inevitably, such a civilization could not remain static. New forces emerged, old ideas were challenged and the framework of the established order was disturbed. It is on this period of Indo-Muslim civilization, at its zenith which was also its last phase, when its centre was transferred from Delhi to Lucknow, that the present work concentrates.³⁰

Note the telling slippage. The "Indo-Mughal" of the first sentence becomes "Indo-Muslim" in the fifth sentence ever so casually. Of course, Fakhir Hussain only did what Urdu intellectuals of North India had been doing for over a century before him. Shibli, in the essay quoted earlier, writes, "Once Hindustan was in the state described by Babur—its people went around in loincloths—but now the Muslims created a thousand aspects of civilization and culture [*tahzib-o-tamaddun*] in each and every thing."³¹ For Shibli too, the Indo-Muslim was synonymous with the Indo-Mughal; the Muslim rulers preceding the Mughals seemingly made no difference to him in that regard.

Returning to the title of Sharar's book, if we place together the two words, *mashriqi* and *tamaddun*, and ask what the phrase meant to Sharar, the answer, in the light of the above discussion, would be: *mashriqi tamaddun* = "Oriental Culture" = "Islamic Culture" = "Indo-Mughal Culture" = "Delhi Culture of the 18th Century" = "Lucknow Culture." The linearity of that process of thinking is breathtaking, as is the presumed co-equality within it—not to mention all that is left out. The habit has not disappeared entirely in Urdu historical writings, though notions of interaction and exchange, cooperation and inclusiveness have gradually gained wider acceptance. The change, one

³⁰ Sharar, *Lucknow*, 9.

³¹ Shibli, *Maqalat*, Vol. 6, 212. Shibli does not even pause to consider that Babur's description of India, if taken at face value, would also imply an indictment of all the earlier Muslim rulers for their failure to properly implement the "civilizing" role of the Muslim *tamaddun*.

might say, is perhaps reflected in the way *tahzib* has gained preference over *tamaddun* in Urdu and how the English word “culture,” has become an accepted Urdu word with accommodative connotations.

Lastly we take up the final two words in the original title, *akhiri namuna* (“the last example”), and ask: which Lucknow was the “last” for Sharar? Was it the Lucknow that Sharar declared ceased to exist after 1857, or was it the Lucknow that Sharar says was recreated in Matiya Burj by Wajid Ali Shah and came to an end only at the latter’s death in 1887?³² However, Lucknow, the physical city, had not disappeared after the dissolution of the kingdom. It had survived the Mutiny and was, by Sharar’s own evidence, very much alive and productive when he wrote his book.

It would be useful here to remind ourselves that Lucknow’s fate after the Mutiny had been quite different from Delhi’s, particularly concerning the Muslim population. In Delhi, the walled city was first held under siege and bombarded, and then the royalty and nobility were killed or imprisoned. The walled city’s Muslim population that had fled was not allowed to return for a long time. Even after reconquest, Delhi remained secondary to Agra as a seat of colonial authority. Lucknow, on the other hand, did not suffer a siege, and its populated areas suffered relatively less destruction during the Mutiny. Neither was its Muslim population forced to abandon the city for any extended period. More importantly, Lucknow swiftly gained new prominence as the major regional site of colonial authority, surpassing its two rivals, Kanpur and Allahabad. As a result, any number of big and small *ta’luqdars* and *zamindars* quickly set up establishments in Lucknow.³³ They brought money into the city, hastened its physical recovery, and provided patronage to its artisans and specialists.

Sharar, justly, could not find at the turn of the century much of what he had seen growing up in Lucknow and Matiya Burj, but he was not unaware that a great deal of the past still existed among the Hindu

³² “The fact is that due to the King’s stay at Matiya Burj a second Lucknow had come to be next to Calcutta, The real Lucknow had disappeared and its select people had moved to Matiya Burj. In truth, in those days it was Matiya Burj that was Lucknow, and not Lucknow itself (Sharar, *Guzashta*, 108).”

³³ Under official patronage, a formal organization of the *ta’luqdars*, “British Indian Association,” was formed in 1861; the same year its members were “ensconced in one of the more splendid palace complexes in Lucknow.” Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1856-1877* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1089), 221.

and Muslim elite of the city and those who catered to their needs. In other words, while mostly claiming to write about a past, Sharar was implicitly also writing about a present.³⁴

Our impression is confirmed by a book that comes sixty years later: *Qadim Lakhn'au ki Akhiri Bahar* ("The Last Spring of Old Lucknow").³⁵ According to its author, Mirza Ja'far Hussain, the old culture of Lucknow came to end only in the late 1940s!

For Hussain, the key word is always *tahzib*. This is how he introduces his book.

No one can deny that Lucknow, until some time ago, was the center for an extremely bewitching and valuable *tahzib*. The nawabs and elites of Lucknow, its rich and poor, scholars and illiterates, Hindus and Muslims, poets and mystics, *rishis* and *sadhus*, traders and beggars, soldiers and civilians, men and women—all had contributed, as dictated by their rank, size, and ambition, to the formation of that *tahzib*.

Then, after listing over thirteen lines the many gifts that "Old" Lucknow bestowed on world's culture, Hussain concludes:

Lucknow's *tahzib* was in itself a beautiful and beguiling world that the rulers of Awadh had created and inhabited. They laid its foundation with such skill and with so much devotion and sincerity that its remnants could be seen even some eighty years after their rule ended. However, in the fourth decade of the 20th century what they had made disappeared in entirety.³⁶

The rubrics of *tahzib*—food, entertainment, courtesans, language, poetry, household goods, rituals and rites, and more—that Hussain covers in his book are much the same as defining *tamaddun* for Sharar. The only significant difference between the two authors is that while Sharar repeatedly brings up Lucknow's indebtedness to Delhi,

³⁴ The achievements of Asghar Ali and Ahmad Husain in specialty tobacco (Sharar, *Guzashta*, 304), Newal Kishore in book publishing (Sharar, *Guzashta*, 149), Ja'far Husain and Ali Husain in lithography (Sharar, *Guzashta*, 150), and various people in the art of cooking are some examples. Sharar is also proud of the Urdu of his peers in Lucknow, and finds no sign of a "decline" in it.

³⁵ Mirza Ja'far Hussain, *Qadim Lakhna'u ki Akhiri Bahar* (New Delhi: Taraqqi-i-Urdu Bureau, 1981). Hussain's book also began as an extended series of articles in the 1970s.

³⁶ Hussain, *Qadim*, 7-8. Some of the listed gifts, incidentally, are: *dopalli* caps, *churidar* pajamas, velvet quilts, shoes with silver buckles, gourmet food such as *mutanjan* and *shirmal*, the habit of saying *Adab* instead of *Assalam-o-Alaikum*, cut-throat kite flying and fighting quails, and educated and refined courtesans.

Hussain hardly ever mentions Delhi when rhapsodizing about Lucknow.³⁷ Nevertheless, Hussain is grateful to Sharar in the extreme.

May the Almighty reward Maulana Abdul Halim Sharar for his labors. In his invaluable book *Guzashta Lakhna'u*, there is abundant information about the ways of our ancestors But everything in that book was about the ‘time of the kings.’ Though, of course, a glow of that time still illumined the city in the waning years of the 19th century. I, on the other hand, witnessed [a later] time when all signs of our ancestors gradually disappeared, one after another after another.³⁸

Revealingly, in contemporary, nostalgia-filled accounts of Lucknow’s special but “lost and gone” culture that frequently appear in Urdu journals in India and Pakistan, both authors are accorded the same rank for truth-telling. Apparently, nostalgia becomes truly enjoyable to the nostalgic only when he manages somehow to convince himself that the “golden” past was totally lost and for good. That seems to be the case with both Sharar and Hussain. It is also the case with those now who adore the two books but see no contradiction in the separate claims both make of standing witness to the “final” days of a single fabulous Lucknow.

Bibliography

- Sahil Ahmad, *Yagana* (Allahabad: Urdu Writers’ Guild, 1986).
 Syed Iqbal Ali, *Sayyad Ahmad Khan ka Safarnama-i-Panjab*, ed. Shaikh Muhammad Isma’il Panipati (Lahore: Majlis-i-Taraqqi-i-Adab, 1973).
 Gustave Le Bon, *Tamaddun-i-Hind*, tr. Syed Ali Bligirami (Karachi: Book Land, 1962).
 ———, *Tamaddun-i-‘Arab*, tr. Syed Ali Bilgirami (Sargodha: Zafar Traders, 1975).
 Mirza Ja’far Hussain, *Qadim Lakhna’u ki Akhiri Bahar* (New Delhi: Taraqqi-i-Urdu Bureau, 1981).
 Mumtaz Manglori, *Sharar ke Tarikhi Navil aur un ka Tahqiqi wa Tanqidi Ja’izah* (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Khiyaban-i-Adab, 1978).
 Robert A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave LeBon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London: Sage Publications, 1975).
 Thomas Philipp, *Gurgi Zaidan: His Life and Thought* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 1979).
 Ja’far Raza, *Abdul Halim Sharar* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988).
 Abdul Halim Sharar, *Guzashta Lakhna’u*, ed. Rashid Hasan Khan (New Delhi: Maktaba-i-Jamia, 2000).

³⁷ Hussain, however, gives more credit to the writers at Delhi who, according to him, preserved their cultural heritage by writing about it, as against the writers at Lucknow, who did not.

³⁸ Hussain, *Qadim*, 9. He elsewhere makes it clear that he meant the first three decades of the 20th century (254).

- Abdul Halim Sharar, *Guzashta Lakhna'u*, ed. Muhammad Ikram Chaghatai (Lahore: Sang-i-Mil, 2006).
- , *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, tr. and ed. E. S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain (Boulder: Westview Press, 1975).
- Shibli Nu'mani, *Maqalat-i-Shibli*, ed. Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, Vol. 4 (Azamgarh: Dar-al-Musannifin, 1956 reprint).
- , *Maqalat-i-Shibli*, ed. Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, Vol. 6 (Azamgarh: Dar-al-Musannifin, 1989 reprint).
- Jurji Zaidan, *Tarikh-i-Tamaddun-i-Islam*, tr. Mohammad Halim Ansari, 2 vols. (Karachi: Shaikh Shaukat Ali, 1964).