

literary conventions it sought to break with. Its innovative character can also be seen in the context of its own relationship to the images of the past it created.

The priority of the written word in the *Musaddas* is thus reflected in a number of ways, from the central place of the Hadith as a surviving monument of Islam's classical age, to the concern with the transmission of news rendering the world transparent. It was also bound up with Hali's attempt to create a new sense of propriety in Urdu literature. The image of self-reflexivity, of a world becoming transparent unto itself, is a potent one for the technological impact of British imperialism. Hali's deft use of this image to express both reflection and transparency captures perfectly the effect this had on notions of identity. Indeed, in the First Introduction Hali refers to the poem as a house of mirrors which Indian Muslims 'may enter to study their features and realize who they were and what they have become.' As points of comparison and contrast are multiplied in a world rendered increasingly transparent by news, identity necessarily becomes more self-reflexive. The *Musaddas* recognizes that this can have a destabilizing effect. In a section of the poem entitled 'The decay of Islam', the poet writes of how the Muslim community 'was now fashioned as if it had begun to break up' (M107). The sense of simultaneous fragmentation and construction is in part expressive of the poem's concern with historical possibilities—the Muslim community might go either way—but it also expresses the sense of continual self-renewal and fashioning which the age of modernity seems to demand for survival.³⁹ At one poignant moment of the poem, another historical possibility is faced, namely the extinction, or at least superseding, of the Muslim community (M230):

*Nabuvvat na gar khatm hoti 'arab par
Ko'i ham pai mab'us hota payambar
To hai jaise mazkur Qur'an ke andar
Zalalat yahud aur nasara ki aksar
Yunhin jo kitab is payambar pai aati
Vo gumrahiyan sab hamari jataati*⁴⁰

The distancing effect created by imagining this historical possibility fits in with the poem's general concern with historical possibilities and refashionings. These, in part at least, were made imaginable by the processes of imperialism and historical decline which Hali himself was witness to, and which were quite central to the changing self-perceptions which the poet was working through in the *Musaddas*.

³⁹ For a full discussion of the role of self-reflexivity in modernity, see Giddens 1994:36-45.

⁴⁰ If the office of Prophet had not come to an end with the Arabs, and if some prophet were to be sent to us, / Then, just as the general ruin of the Jews and Christians is recorded in the Quran, / So the Book which would be revealed to that prophet would make known all our acts of wickedness.

3:6 Carrion progress

As has been discussed in 3:1 above, the sense of historical decline in the poem is intertwined with the presentation of historical progress. However, while scholars have stressed Hali's ambivalent attitude to the world of classical poetics he sought to supplant (Steele 1981:12, Pritchett 1994:39, 43, 163, 182), less attention has been paid to his ambivalence towards the icons he created and lauded in his work. This is notably the case with the notion of progress in the *Musaddas*.

First, at one point in the poem progress is likened to the carrion corpse of a female dog (*murdar kuttia* M138). Although the context here is the failure of Muslims to recognize what progress is, to describe progress as 'carrion' is more suggestive of enervating decline than invigorating progress. This is a clear instance in the poem where the value system of the text, apparently so much weighted in favour of progress, becomes blurred. There is a sense in which throughout the poem Hali is offloading his own resentments against the carrion corpse called progress onto the Muslim community, rather than owning up to his resentments himself.

Secondly, the verses ostensibly praising the Europeans are sometimes ambiguous. For example, verses 102 and 104 are at pains to point out the debt that Europe owes to the achievements of classical Islam. In the section on medicine (M101-M102) the names of famous schools and physicians are listed, and the poet then adds that 'it was through them that the boat of the West got across' (*Unhi se huā par maghrib ka khevā* M102). The poignancy of this image is sharpened by the fact that the condition of the Muslim community at the commencement of the poem is represented in terms of a ship which is about to sink into a whirlpool, its crew asleep and oblivious to their impending doom (M3). The use of a similar image to illustrate the contrasting fates of Islam and Europe highlights the historical irony Hali draws attention to; namely that the Western ship got across with the help of the Arabs, while the Muslim ship itself sank. Hali might also be thinking here of the superior naval power of the British on which much of their empire rested, at least in part. More significantly, though, the general anxiety of the poem to gather up traces and signs of past Islamic achievements might also be explained by Hali's awareness of how the narrative of progress was being re-written as a European story which made no mention of the significant Arab contributions to important branches of learning (Turner 1994:31-2). This is reinforced by M104, in which the powerful nations of the time are reminded of their permanent debt to the Arabs.

Thirdly, some of the other verses apparently praising the Europeans are also ambiguous in the sense that they paint a slightly comic as well as a rather unappealing picture. This is the case with verses 131-2, where their restless energy and capacity for hard work are apparently lauded. For example, the description of European peoples racing so fast along the way as if they still had very far to go, carrying on their heads every kind of load and burden, is suggestive of an undignified and rather childish game. Furthermore, the addition of the qualification 'as if they had far to go' (*Bahut dur abhi un ko jana*

hai goyā M131) suggests that their destination might also be illusory. The next verse on their inexhaustible energy shows them as admirable, but also as a little heartless and narrow in vision (M132):

*Kisī vaqt jī bhar-ke sote nahīn vo
Kabhī ser mīhnat se hote nahīn vo
Bīzā'at ko apnī dūbote nahīn vo
Ko'ī lamḥa be-kār khote nahīn vo
Na chalne se thakte na ukāte haiñ vo
Bahut barḥ ga'e aur barḥte jāte haiñ vo⁴¹*

In contrast to this picture, the languorous pose of Indian Muslims can almost seem positively appealing (M133):

*Zamāne se kuchh aise fārigh-nishīn haiñ
Ki goyā zarūrī thā jo kām karnā
Vo sab kar chuke ek bāqī hai marnā⁴²*

In part, too, this languorous pose seems to stem from a fatalism that the poem cannot entirely shake off. In many ways, the poem's apparent faith in progress is reflected in its endorsement of the values of self-help and hard work. Part of the Prophet's success lay in his imparting to the Arabs the 'keen desire and urge to work' (M41). Similarly, the poet describes a disinclination to work hard as one of the causes of the decline of any people (M153), while the verses on how the Muslim aristocracy of India has been reduced to beggary seem to further endorse the value of hard work (M144-M145, M150-M151). However, the poem's very title 'The flow and ebb of Islam' and its cyclical structure suggests a natural, cyclical process over which we have no power. There are in fact three images or senses of historical process in the poem; a cyclical image of natural tidal forces, a sense of the vicissitudes of fortune, and an image of linear progress. The sense of linear progress and development is only one of the senses of history in the poem, and its associated values of hard work are put into perspective, if not undermined, by the other images of history in the *Musaddas*.

Finally, there is one significant instance of where Hali uses a modified version of what Eleanor Shaffer in another context has called 'mythological doubling'. This refers to cases where one belief system represents the values or 'revelations' of other belief systems as disguised versions of its own unique revelation (Shaffer 1975:185). This occurs when the poet deals with the 'co-operative sympathy' of the people of Europe (*ahl-e Yūrap kī hamdardī*). Here the poet posits another historical irony, namely that the people of Europe

⁴¹ They never sleep their fill, they are never sated by hard work. / They do not squander their substance, they do not waste an instant uselessly. / They do not tire or get weary of going along. They have advanced a long way and keep on advancing.

⁴² We sit so careless of the world / That it is as if all necessary tasks had already been accomplished, and only death remains.

have got where they have because they, rather than Muslims, have followed the tenets which are implicit in the Shariat (M171):

*Shar'at ke jo ham ne paimān tore
Vo le jā-ke sab ahl-e maghrīb ne jore⁴³*

It seems that Hali's ambivalence towards the Persianate Muslim past in India was more than matched by his ambivalent attitude to the values of progress he lauds in the *Musaddas*. Furthermore, the bleak last section of the poem more than hints that the British, too, will meet the fate of decline. This is conveyed by the list of past civilizations in the penultimate verse of the poem, which refers to ancient Egypt, ancient Iran, the Chaldeans, and the Sasanians (M293). The verse before this expresses what the poet feels is the moral of the poem, namely that no people or community can escape the fate of decline. In a fitting image which concludes the thread of garden imagery running through the poem as a whole, the poet reminds his readers (M292):

*Bahut yāñ hu'e khushk chashmēñ ubal-kar
Bahut bāgh chhāñte ga'e phūl phal-kar⁴⁴*

The final couplet ends by stressing the transitory nature of the world and life itself (M294):

*Musāfir yahāñ haiñ faqīr aur ghanī sab
Ghulām aur āzād haiñ raftanī sab⁴⁵*

Whatever might have been Hali's attitudes to the classical poetry of the past, he had no hesitation reminding his present rulers in time honoured fashion of the transitoriness of worldly power; there is also a strong suggestion that the British, too, will meet the same fate that all other previous civilizations have suffered. In the final analysis, there is a sense in which the *Musaddas* gathers up the wisdom vouchsafed by historical decline, a wisdom as yet unavailable to the British as the foremost power in the world.

3:7 Chaos and order

This ambivalence towards 'European' values of progress is just one major instance of the ambiguities in the *Musaddas* at key points of its rhetoric and

⁴³ Those covenants of the Holy Law which we have broken, have all been firmly upheld by the people of the West.

⁴⁴ Many springs have welled up here only to run dry, many gardens have bloomed and blossomed only to be cut back.

⁴⁵ See, here are rich and poor but travellers all, departure is the rule for free and thrall.

narration. Such ambiguities are indicative of the way in which the oppositions on which the poem's rhetoric is based are shown to be dependent on each other—as exemplified for example in the interleaving of images of progress and decline—or are otherwise blurred by the poet's own ambivalences. The unravelling of the opposition between progress and decline leads us to consider a related opposition in the poem, namely that of chaos and order. This opposition is central to the moral polemic in the poem, and is exemplified in the contrasting images of pre-Islamic Arabia and the message of the Prophet, as well as in the images of the dissolute lives of Muslim aristocrats and the ideal moral life of responsibility.

In many ways, the rhetorical power of the constructed image of classical Islam in the poem is dependent upon the contrasting image of the chaos of pre-Islamic Arabia. This chaos encompasses in the broadest sense the lack of civil society. In the poem, this is seen to be obvious in the continual tribal conflict of the period, as well as the absence of any concept of law (M15-M17). The Prophet's main achievement was the inculcation of the values, both legal and moral, which made society possible.⁴⁶ The significance for the poem of welding warring tribes into a united *qaum* has been discussed above. In this context, the Prophet's message is associated with creating the order which made society and the existence of a *qaum* possible. It is this legal and moral order which forms a contrast both with pre-Islamic Arabia and the dissolute lives of Muslim aristocrats in nineteenth century India.

In this context, the figure of the Prophet embodies an idiom of reform which owes just as much to Victorian values as to any putative Islamic ones. This is evident in the stress on values of frugality, cleanliness, sobriety, self-discipline, and self-improvement (e.g. M51-M52). A particularly distinctive touch is the urging of the poor to improve their lot through hard work, and the encouragement of charity among the rich towards the poor (M48-M49). The benefits of—presumably free—trade also have a place in the Prophet's message (M52). Whilst the concern in the poem with details of personal moral conduct can be seen as a continuation of a trend which first became evident in the early nineteenth century (Robinson 1993:241), in part, at least, the Prophet's message in the *Musaddas* has a Victorian tinge to it. It is as though a Victorian idiom of reform is being legitimized and redeployed in the figure of the Prophet, who strikes the reader as somewhat akin to the stereotype of a Victorian social reformer. Much of the moral polemic of the poem stresses those very virtues which Samuel Smiles emphasized in *Self-help* (1859), an enormously popular text in Victorian Britain which promulgated the contemporary spirit of self-help and personal initiative in an idiom of political and social reform (cf. Dennis 1987:50-57). Just as the Shariat and Hadith are seen to prefigure significant aspects of the European rhetoric of progress and liberalism, so, too, the values

⁴⁶ See e.g. M31 on the teaching of the Holy Law, and M56 regarding obedience to (religious) commandments, also M41 on the value of hard work and self-discipline, and M48 on urging the poor to work hard.

of British imperial culture of the time are seen to be foreshadowed by the morality of the Prophet's message. At this level at least, the *Musaddas* appears to be rebutting the stereotypes of 'Orientals' as lacking those personal virtues of self-discipline which the Victorians so much prided themselves on, but it does so by reinscribing those virtues as part of the Prophet's original message, which Indian Muslims themselves need to be reminded of.⁴⁷

It is important to note that in the works of thinkers as diverse as Hegel and James and John Stuart Mill, as well as Max Weber and Karl Marx, it was the purported absence of civil society in Islamic states which was used as a foil to the development of civil society and liberal individualism in Europe (Turner 1994:21-35). Whilst it is highly unlikely that Hali was directly acquainted with these works, he was at least aware of how the word 'liberalism' had become a term loaded with a sense of cultural superiority in a European lexicon. This is evident in the *Musaddas* when, in depicting the Hadith as creating a sense of critical history, he issued that challenge 'Let those who are pre-eminent in liberty today say when it was they started to become liberal' (M97). Here the terms 'liberal' and 'liberty' have been borrowed directly from English (cf. section 2.4 above), thus highlighting Hali's sense of both the importance of these terms in the cultural politics of the time, and their distinctiveness as embedded in European self-perceptions. The stress on the impact of the Prophet's mission in terms of creating the values necessary for the existence of a coherent society can thus also be seen as a reaction against the culturally supremacist views of European intellectuals at the time, as well as an internalization of those values, albeit in a redeployed and disguised form.

The moral rhetoric in the *Musaddas* can thus be read in terms of the redeployment of Victorian values in the guise of the Prophet's message. The *Musaddas* can also be seen to repackage through the model of classical Islam an ethic akin to the one Max Weber so famously described in *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (1904-5). This is ironic, given Weber's own views regarding the sensuality of Islam (Turner 1994:98). A major feature of the Protestant ethic is its ascetic attitude to the world and its pleasures, an attitude which plays a key role in fostering the virtues necessary for successful capitalist practice: 'The ideal type of the capitalist entrepreneur [is characterized by] a certain ascetic tendency', as well as by a sense of duty (Weber 1930:71, 54). Similarly, an important characteristic of the polemic of the *Musaddas* is its anti-hedonism. As Schimmel has put it, there is no place for eroticism and flirtation in the new poetry (Schimmel 1975:227). Cantwell Smith has discussed the virtues with which Indian Muslim biographers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries invested the figure of the Prophet. In this context, he notes that these virtues are typical of 'early capitalist society' and that the 'entire axiology may be subsumed under the liberal conception of duty.' The Prophet of these biographies is a 'liberal Muhammad within a capitalist society' (Smith

⁴⁷ For a powerful indictment of such stereotyping, see Said 1978, but for some differing perspectives on this, see Majeed 1992 and Mackenzie 1995.

1985:74, 76).⁴⁸ So, too, the Prophet of the *Musaddas* is a liberal figure embodying moral and economic virtues.

The link between the order the Prophet brings to the Arabian peninsula and the order the British bring to the Indian subcontinent is reinforced by the overlap in the depiction of the Arabs of the Jahiliyya and contemporary Indian Muslims, particularly aristocrats, who have yet to avail themselves of the benefits of 'European' progress. One of the significant characteristics of both the personal morality of pre-Islamic Arabian tribes and the dissolute life of Muslim aristocrats in nineteenth century India, is the lack of a cautious attitude to pleasure. The vices of the pre-Islamic Arabs include gambling and a fondness for wine (M20):

Juā un kī din rāt kī dil lagī thī
Sharāb un kī ghutṭī men goyā parī thī
*Ta'ayyush thā ghaflat thī dīvānagī thī*⁴⁹

Similarly, the degenerate young aristocrats of India fritter away their time in fairs and in assemblies where there is singing, dancing, and eating (M259, M265). Some members of this debauched group are also addicted to intoxicating drugs, such as hemp, cannabis, and opium (M257). Their aesthetic tastes are parodied by Hali, who uses the imagery of intoxication here as well to characterize these tastes, which supposedly reflect the dissolute nature of their lifestyles (M262). This use of imagery of debauchery to characterize aesthetic tastes is reinforced by an earlier verse which deals with poets themselves, where their artistic works are associated with courtesans and taverns (M256). In this way, the poem is careful to link literary styles and habits with dissolute lifestyles, just as it links lack of self-control with economic vices. In the aesthetic context, the assumption seems to be that literature and society are interdependent, that is, literature both shapes and reflects the nature of social life.⁵⁰

This overlap between the degenerate state of pre-Islamic Arabia and contemporary Muslim India is further reinforced by the mention of female infanticide in the case of the former (M19), a practice which the Prophet succeeded in abolishing. Although female infanticide in India is not mentioned in the *Musaddas*, in his ode to Queen Victoria on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee, Hali does list the suppression of female infanticide in India as one of the benefits of British rule (Sperl and Shackleton 1996b: no. 36, verse 9). Thus, the identification between the order which the Prophet brings and the order which the British brings touches upon not just moral virtues of self-control, but also the

⁴⁸ Commentators have discussed the increase in the number of biographies of Muhammad in nineteenth and twentieth century India (cf. Hardy 1982, Smith 1985:52-4, 71-4). It is clear that these biographies were in part a response to the polemic of Christian missionaries, who sought to represent the life of Jesus as exemplary (Troll 1978/79:39).

⁴⁹ Gambling was their favourite pastime, day and night. Wine, one might think, had first been used on them as a pacifier in infancy. / There was pleasure-seeking, there was obliviousness, there was madness.

⁵⁰ For this assumption in other works of Hali, see Steele 1981:19, Pritchett 1994:179.

abolition of iniquitous social practices.

However, there are other aspects to the depiction of pre-Islamic Arabia and the degenerate state of Indian Muslims which need to be highlighted. The hedonism of both can come across as bright and lively, in spite of the poet. There is a festive energy to the picture of young blades roaming around fairs (M259), visiting wrestling pits and taverns (M261), indulging in the sports of quail-fighting and pigeon-racing (M257), loitering around affecting the pose of languorous lovers (M263), and uttering curses in the 'gatherings of the base' (M258). There is a similarly energetic edge to the description of the anarchic state of pre-Islamic Arabia. One particular instance of this occurs where the quarrelsome energy of their habits is combined with an evocation of the appealing simplicity of a pastoral and tribal lifestyle, again in spite of the poet's moralizing (M18). The suggestion of cattle grazing, horse racing, sword wielding, and watering, has a freshness to it which the moral rhetoric of the *Musaddas* cannot suppress. This freshness is not undermined but rather enhanced by the poet's comment on the fractious nature of these activities, which injects a sense of energy to the description. Similarly, the lifestyle of the degenerate aristocrats in the poem has an energetically anarchic side to it which also cannot be smothered by the poem's anti-hedonistic polemic. Some of their favourite pastimes have been referred to above; the description of their affectations in dress and demeanour adds a dash of colour to this (M168). In effect, the sharply defined moral rhetoric of the *Musaddas* magnifies the ludic quality of the pleasurable activities it condemns. The poem tries to neutralize the ludic quality of pleasure as it is manifested in literature and life styles, but in this attempt to do, it flirts with that quality in such a way as to enhance the pleasure of reading the text itself. The resulting effect is a sense of frisson, which emerges from the intertwining of moral disapprobation with the fecund possibilities of pleasure in the text. Laurel Steele has argued that ironically the structure of Hali's *Muqaddama* is reminiscent of a *ghazal* (Steele 1981:18). Equally ironically, the opposition between tight—moral—control and loose—immoral—pleasure in the *Musaddas* seems to replay on a different level the combination of tightness of form and disunity of content which characterized the classical Urdu *ghazal* as a genre (cf. Russell 1992:26-52). The opposition between moral control and pleasure in the *Musaddas*, their interdependence, and their proximity, is yet another typical instance of how the scheme of oppositions in the poem is subverted by the poet's own ambivalences, as well as the complexities of its historical contexts, both the context it tried to create for itself, as well as the context which was imposed upon it by the historical forces of the time.

3:8 Conclusion

These oppositions and ambivalences were to be replayed later in the *Muqaddama*. In some ways, this later attempt by Hali at an explicit formulation

of his poetics in a work of prose brings to the fore the didactic aspect of the *Musaddas* itself. This aspect is clearly signalled by the footnotes to the poem, which explain locations, scenes, and references in a textbook style. It is therefore not surprising that the poem became a textbook in the schools of the North-Western Provinces, a fact which Hali points to in the Second Introduction as evidence of the popularity of the text. Hali himself spent his four years at Lahore dealing with translations of textbooks. Perhaps the writing of a work on poetics also reflects some atrophy of Hali's creative poetic impulse, which was now replaced by an attempt to codify and regulate in prose. Since Hali was both a critic and a poet, the prosaic aspects of his sensibility often seemed to closely shadow his poetic creativity. Sometimes these prosaic tendencies and his poetic creativity illuminated each other, but occasionally the former overshadowed the latter. This comes to the fore in the *Muqaddama*, which might be said to represent the triumph of Hali's prosaic side, a side which notably surfaces in the Supplement (cf. section 2:3 above), besides much of his other later poetry (cf. Shackleton 1996a:240-1). On another level, though, the *Muqaddama* was to illuminate the complex poetic sensibility which produced the towering achievement in the *Musaddas*. The full story of that illumination must, however, be narrated on a later occasion.

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1 Haliyat

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TEXT, TRANSLATION AND HALI'S NOTES