DEHLIVIYAT: THE MAKING AND UN-MAKING OF DELHI’S INDO-MUSLIM URBAN CULTURE, C. 1750-1900

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Abstract

This dissertation is a socio-cultural history of Delhi from the mid eighteenth to the early twentieth century. It traces how the city came to have a distinctive identity as a center that was simultaneously both Muslim and cosmopolitan, and considers how, and to what effect, this city identity was challenged from the late nineteenth century onwards.

The dissertation analyzes Delhi’s cosmopolitan Muslim culture under the rubric of Dehlviyat, and outlines its emergence against the backdrop of the disintegrating Mughal Empire, and the development of regional polities and cultures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first three chapters identify three axes around which Delhi’s distinctive identity or Dehlviyat congealed. Chapter One is about the role of memorialization in the making of Dehlviyat, wherein the remembrance of Delhi’s past as a revered center of sufi Islam and as the capital city of numerous Muslim emperors fed a city based identity from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. Chapter Two looks at the connection between the Mughal Emperor and Delhi city, and considers how the imperial establishment sustained Delhi’s cosmopolitan Muslim culture until the time it existed. Chapter Three looks at Delhi’s cosmopolitan urbanity, its shehriyat (inhering in features such as the near universal craze for Urdu poetry at Delhi and for hobbies such as pigeon keeping etc.) as yet another feature of Dehlvi distinctiveness or Dehlviyat. The last chapter of the dissertation pertains to the unraveling of Dehlviyat. It talks about how faultlines of class and religion, internal to Dehlviyat, were widened in the altered political
climate of late nineteenth century Delhi when nationalisms of both anti-colonial and sectarian varieties began to put pressure upon a city based patriotism.

The study concludes by pointing to possible connections between more local Indo-Muslim urban patriotisms and twentieth century nationalisms in South Asia. Even as, from the late nineteenth century, wider identities of nation and community began to put local identities such as “Dehlviyat” into the shade, aspects of local patriotisms such as Dehlviyat were drawn upon to bolster both the more inclusive and exclusive imaginings of the nation in twentieth century South Asia.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation was long in the making, and along the way I collected many debts. It is an absolute pleasure to acknowledge them here.

First things first: I would never have turned to history, and this dissertation would never have been written without the spark ignited by my undergraduate teachers at Lady Sri Ram College, Delhi. That history was not just dates and facts but thoughtful analysis, came as a revelation to me. Professors Neena Gupta and Archana Sahai, in particular, through their teaching and mentoring, awakened in me a love for the discipline of history, and a respect for the scholar/teacher’s life.

M.A. at Delhi University proved an intellectually exciting phase because of two remarkable teachers. Professor Sumit Sarkar, inspiring teacher, historian, activist and person, showed how an individual could wear many hats, and all convincingly. His classes on the social history of modern India, and the rise of the modern West, were some of the best I’ve ever had. His lectures were never a narrative of “what happened”. They were problem-cracking sessions. We always began with probing questions, and systematically, and always in elegant language, went about answering them. Years later, after I started to be a teacher myself, I received a nugget of wisdom at a teacher training session—that every lecture must have a clear thesis. The principle seems obvious when stated, but is remarkable for how rarely it gets followed. Professor Sarkar, I was not surprised to discover, always knew and practiced it.
Professor Anil Sethi was the other inspiring teacher from M.A. days. The passionate debates and discussions his classes generated among us students were testimony to how well he was able to demystify history, to rescue it from its “pastness”, and to bring home its relevance to our present. Large, somnolent classes, which were quite the norm in D.U., would come alive with his conceptually rigorous but always accessible, invigorating, teaching. The painstaking, individual mentoring he offered to students was unlike anything I had seen before or since. It is my great good fortune that Professor Sethi has remained an intellectual mentor. In dark moments, when I have been stuck in my research, I have turned to him, and he has always been willing to lend an ear, read (oftentimes extremely unpolished garbled writing), discuss, and make general, and sometimes very specific suggestions, that have helped immensely with conceptual clarity and fixing of issues.

At Princeton, where I had many opportunities to take classes outside South Asian history, I felt my intellectual horizons expand. I have learnt and enjoyed immensely the classes I took with Professor Colley, Professor Greene and Professor Kotkin. Professor Greene’s classes on Ottoman history offered a useful comparative perspective to the reading of Mughal Indian history. My work on the Indo-Muslim culture of Delhi subconsciously drew upon insights gained from the knowledge of cosmopolitan urban culture under the Ottomans. I am grateful also for the probing questions Professor Greene has asked of my research, and the encouragement and support she has offered me.
My advisor, Professor Gyan Prakash’s classes on urban history, and his work on Bombay have greatly inspired my own work on Delhi. His ability (evident in his classes and his writing) to tell a great story, using varied and interesting sources, encouraged me to attempt somewhat similar methods in my writing, and the classes that I am now teaching. If the results don’t look the same, the failing is certainly not his.

At Columbia, the Urdu Readings course I did with the very learned, and intellectually generous, Frances Pritchett, was a valuable lesson in reading and evaluating Urdu sources. Some of the discussions I had with Professor Pritchett in the early days of my research proved very useful when I started writing my dissertation. Her promptings and questions pushed me to think of specific axes around which I could peg the more amorphous notion of Dehlvi identity.

I want to thank the staff at the numerous libraries where I worked to finish this study. I owe a debt of gratitude to staff at the Firestone Library, Princeton; Dilli Urdu Academy Library, Delhi; National Archives, Delhi; Ghalib Institute, Delhi; Hardayal Library, Delhi; Marwari Library, Delhi; and India Office Library, Britain. It is the good fortune of graduate students in the History Department at Princeton that it is run by a most efficient, helpful, and largely cheerful bunch of women. Over the years I have owed many favors to Audrey Mainzer, Judith Hanson, Kristy Novak and now Jackie Wasneski. Thank you all!
A long running dissertation probably strains the emotional and mental health of the author as few other things do. A great family and supportive friends have sustained me through a process that has sometimes felt like an ordeal.

“No problem can remain too big if one has a large enough circle of aunts to turn to for help”—is a piece of wisdom that I am going to gratuitously offer to anyone who cares to listen. My aunts have been a real support system in the many years that I have been trying to “finish”, with two children in tow. Pinky mausi and Bhandari auntie repeatedly came up with ingenious ideas to arrange great childcare for my kids when they were very little, and frequently ill. As any parent of a little child knows, this can be the single biggest help anyone can give them. The two resourceful ladies also said prayers and sought blessings for me in all the different temples and dhams they visited over the years. Those prayers took a long time to be effective, but at least we can all now say—bhagwaan ke ghar der hai, andher nahin. I can never thank them enough!

Baby mausi and Mausaji, Ayush and Anshika, and Ankur and Mohini have been my family in the US. Their optimism, encouragement, cheerful needling (when will you finish?!?) and constant exhortations “not to give up”, helped me to keep going. For the many chuttis, meals and outings we have shared, to say nothing of the constant and passionate discussions of politics and history that I have had with Mausaji in particular, I want to thank them all most warmly. My thanks also to Shreya, Puju and Mamiji, all remarkable women who sent me their love and support from different corners of the globe.
In India, Niraj and Swati have been great friends who have helped in many ways, big and small. I have shared much laughter, good food, and mad-cap “grand plans” with them. Barka da has been mystified by how long my Ph.D has taken, but I know he’s also proud of “professor sahiba”—as he sometimes calls me.

Bhaiya has been my spiritual guru, and with his calm reassurances and wisdom, unfailingly soothed my nerves each time I have had a panic attack. Guria—my keeper of secrets, banisher of woes, and silver lining to every cloud, is the most giving person I know. Gyan saan has been a cheerful presence. His equilibrium in the midst of madness, and the delight he takes in little things are moving, and yes, inspiring. Along with the siblings I want to also acknowledge my friend Pey-yi—my one great find at graduate school, on the personal front. Her companionship, the Soviet history class we shared, the “so what” questions she asked about my dissertation subject, the readings she voluntarily and cheerfully made of my dissertation chapters, and the solidarity and good advice she has offered through all my struggles, made graduate school enjoyable and manageable.

My kids, Ishaani and Ekaansh, were born while I was writing my thesis. The thesis and the kids ate into each other’s time, but the journey seems worthwhile at the end. That the kids didn’t care a bit about my unfinished Ph.D., and loved me the same at all times, was a relief and real blessing.
This project would never have seen the light of day, it would not even have been conceived, but for Ajay. Many moons ago, it was Ajay who opened my eyes to Delhi in the memorable walk he led through “Dilli 6”. He got me interested in the city that I had up until then dismissed as merely loud and boorish. My *hum-nafas* and *hum-nava*, he has been so close to the project that he has felt every frustration and excitement of the journey almost as keenly as I have.

My parents’ unstinting love and support have sustained me, this project, and my family through all the years I have worked on it. Thanking them seems strange, and utterly inadequate. As a small gesture, I dedicate this dissertation to them.
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Introduction

This dissertation ‘Dehlviyat: The Making and Un-making of Delhi’s Indo-Muslim Urban Culture, c. 1750-1900’ looks at how a locally rooted patriotism—Dehlviyat (literally a sense of Delhi-ness)—emerged at Delhi between the eighteenth and the mid nineteenth century period, and started to come apart in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century conjuncture.

Dehlviyat, or Delhi-ness, is a term that was first used in early twentieth century literary criticism to distinguish what was believed to be the ‘essence’ of Delhi’s Urdu poetry from Lucknow’s.\(^1\) However, a sense of distinctiveness, going well beyond Delhi’s literary traditions, animates works from earlier periods as well. A fairly sharply articulated sense of the uniqueness of Delhi, a sense of ‘Delhi-ness’, animates several eighteenth and nineteenth century Persian and Urdu language texts produced at Delhi.\(^2\).

In the writings of eighteenth and nineteenth century Delhiwallahs such as Mir Taqi Mir, Insha Allah Khan Insha, Mirza Sageen Beg, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Munshi Faizuddin

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\(^1\) Carla Petievich’s *Delhi, Lucknow and the Urdu Ghazal* (Delhi, 1992) discusses the terms Dehlviyat and Lakhnaviyat that were used in twentieth century Urdu literary criticism. Her thesis is that there is no *objective* basis for speaking of a Dehlviyat (distinctive essence of Delhi’s urdu poetry) or a Lakhnaviyat (a distinctive essence or style of Lucknow’s Urdu poetry). From my point of view however, what is more significant is that these terms were widely used by Dilliwallahs and Lucknow-wallahs themselves. So ‘objective’ differences between Delhi and Lucknow may have been few or non-existent, but the ‘felt’ differences between them were enormous nonetheless.

\(^2\) For Persian texts from the eighteenth century I have used their English or Urdu language translations.
etc., one finds a celebration of Delhi’s history, a love of its territory and local language Urdu, veneration for the sufi saints and scholars of Islam, and Muslim emperors of its past and present, and a pride in Delhi’s urbanity—its vibrant socio-cultural routines, public fairs and celebrations, and its arts and artistic traditions. Such writings on Delhi do not consciously use the term Dehlviyat. But what their authors describe can be called nothing but Delhi-ness or Dehlviyat—the qualities and excellences that define Delhi in their imagination.

But why has this sense of Dehlviyat, if it is so pervasive in Dilliwallah texts, not been studied earlier? Why has it taken a twenty first century latecomer like me to discover it?

The reason for this lies in the paradigm within which Delhi’s eighteenth-nineteenth century history has remained locked so far. Mainstream histories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see Delhi as part of larger narratives of Empire—either the crumbling Mughal Empire or the emerging British one.

In earlier eighteenth century historical accounts such as those of Jadunath Sarkar and William Irvine, eighteenth century South Asia appears as a ‘dark age’. In these accounts, the Mughal center Delhi in particular comes across as a city in chaos—multiple emperors ascend the throne and are murdered, Delhi is frequently sacked by armies from outside, there are soldier mutinies in the city—and much general turbulence. Revisionist

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3 See Mir Taqi Mir’s Zikr-i-Mir; Insha Allah Khan ‘Insha’, Darya-i-Lataaafat; Mirza Sangeen Beg’s Sair-ul-Manaazil; Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Asaar-us-Sanaadeed
4 Jadunath Sarkar, The Fall of the Mughal Empire 4 Vols (Calcutta, 1932)
5 William Irvine, The Later Mughals 2 Vols. (Calcutta, 1903)
The general consensus now has shifted from the earlier view of the period as one of abrupt discontinuities, political strife and moral and economic decline. There is broad agreement now that for several regional polities throughout South Asia – such as Bengal, Hyderabad, Awadh, Mysore, and the Maratha kingdoms (which rose on the debris of the Mughal Empire), the eighteenth century was a period of growth and development. However, for the Mughal center Delhi, the decline paradigm still stands.

On the other hand, English language histories of Delhi for the nineteenth century, based largely on the colonial government’s records, revenue settlement reports, municipality records, English newspapers and travel accounts—mostly European, are literally and figuratively about the British takeover of the city. Narayani Gupta’s *Delhi Between Two Empires* and Percival Spear’s multiple volumes on Delhi are largely politico-administrative accounts. They speak of growing British control in Delhi-- about how

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6 The view of the eighteenth century as a ‘dark age’ has had supporters among imperialist, nationalist and marxist historians of South Asia. For specific examples of works that propound this view, and for a good analysis of the shifts in eighteenth century historiography of South Asia see Richard B. Barnett's 'Introduction' in his edited volume *Rethinking Early Modern India* (Manohar, 2002).

7 Amongst the most influential revisionist studies are Richard Barnett’s, *North India Between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals and the British, 1720-1801* (Berkeley, 1980); C.A. Bayly’s *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion* (Cambridge, 1983); Stewart N. Gordon, *The Marathas, 1600-1818* (Cambridge, 1993) and Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-1748* (Delhi, 1986).

8 Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires: Society, Government and Urban Growth* (Delhi, 1981)

British “peace” revived Delhi, land prices rose, trade improved etc. On the social and cultural side they highlight Delhi’s “renaissance” under the British by focusing on the introduction of new technologies such as print, new representative bodies such as the municipality, new kinds of voluntary associations and clubs such as the Delhi Archeological Society, and the dissemination of new knowledge, especially western science, at the Delhi College. I do not mean to suggest that such accounts are crudely valorizing of the British. Yet, it is the British-- their actions, the reactions of people to their policies, and British collaborators etc. who people these accounts.

However, if one were to change the optic, and shift the focus away from empire to the locality; move to the center sources produced by the locals in their native languages; and study not just politics and administration but everyday socio-cultural life at Delhi, then a very different picture of the city emerges. There is the need to move beyond the big ruptures and revolutions of eighteenth and nineteenth century Delhi. As Lefebvre says—“the theory of superhuman moments is inhuman. Man must be everyday, or he will not be at all.”¹⁰ Through a study of everyday life in Delhi it becomes possible to see that even as the Mughal Empire was declining, and the British were expanding their control over Delhi, a strong local patriotism—*Dehlviyat* --was developing in the city. And I have made this patriotism the focus of my study.

But why the eighteenth century? Does not a sense of the distinctiveness of Delhi exist prior to the eighteenth century moment? It indeed does. The sixteenth century text *Ain-i-

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Akbari, for instance, talks of the Empire of the Mughal Emperor Akbar as an interlinked set of distinct regions and places, each with its unique products, climate, specialties, holy men etc.\textsuperscript{11} Delhi’s uniqueness too is emphasized here—the city finds mention as a place of great antiquity, as the capital of many Empires of the past, and as a place made holy by the many sufis saints buried there. But in texts such as the *Ain*, place specific distinctiveness is subsumed under the larger unity of Empire. Eighteenth and nineteenth century texts, of the sort mentioned above\textsuperscript{12}, are by contrast, not so much about Empire (even though a diffused sense of earlier imperial unities is not completely absent here) but far more about the city of Delhi itself.

For this to happen, for Delhi to emerge from the shadow of Empire, a localization of Delhi was important. Delhi had been the capital of the Mughals since 1639. But with the dismemberment of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century, Delhi—the grand ‘imperial metropolis’ was localized, and a city-centered patriotism—*Dehlviyat*—could emerge.

As the Mughal Empire foundered, imperial nobles and adventurers began to set up independent polities in different parts of India, and to found new urban centers such as Farrukhabad, Aaonla, Hyderabad, Murshidabad and Lucknow. The culture fostered at these new eighteenth century cities (unlike the cities such as Calcutta and Bombay that developed under British colonial influence) did not represent a break from the Indo-

\textsuperscript{11} Abul Fazl’s *Ain-i-Akbari* tr., H. Blochmann (Calcutta, 1893)
\textsuperscript{12} See footnote 3 above.
Muslim culture that had achieved prominence under the Mughals. Elements of the Mughal administrative system, and of the courtly culture elaborated under them, were adopted at the new centers as well. Thus, ideas of *akhlaq*, or good governance and sound polity, derived from Greek, Arabic, Persian and Indic texts; a certain notion of social hierarchy that privileged nobly born Muslims and those with traditions of military-administrative service to the Mughals (both Muslims and non-Muslims); the dominance of the Persian language, its literary classics, and a craze for versification; the favoring of certain kinds of knowledge (such as that of Muslim theology, Greco-Arabic medicine and logic) and forms of entertainments (such as Hindustani music and dance, chess, bird fighting, pigeon keeping etc.) were common to centers of Indo-Muslim culture throughout the sub-continent. However, founders of new eighteenth century polities, conscious of tying themselves more closely to the regions under their control, also encouraged aspects of local culture. When shared features of Indo-Muslim culture were grafted onto a love for and celebration of the local territory, monuments, notable

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13 Indo-Muslim culture is a term that denotes the amalgam that came about through a mixing of Muslim politico-cultural elements with Indic ones. The Indo-Muslim culture started to come together right from the twelfth century C.E. when Muslim sultans established their rule in South Asia. It however achieved its most sophisticated form under the Mughals (r. 1526-1858)—and especially under the ruler Jallaluddin Muhammad Akbar. The coming together of Indo-Muslim elements may be seen across varied fields such as ethics of rulership, language, traditions of art and architecture, sciences such as medicine etc. This culture can be understood as a very Indianized Muslim culture, in which the term “Muslim” denotes not so much the influences derived from the Islamic religion, as the influences that came with followers of Islam ---who were mostly from Persia and Central Asia, rather than Arabia. Moreover, while the Indic and Muslim elements did not combine in equal measure, with Muslim elements usually dominating, there were many non-Muslim adherents of the Indo-Muslim culture as well. In fact, this culture lent a sense of unity to the Mughals’ large and diverse Empire, in which, for centuries, Muslim sovereigns ruled over largely non-Muslim populations.
personages, customs and institutions--regional cultures and patriotisms emerged. *Dehlviyat*, or the Delhi patriotism, was one such.¹⁴

Treatises recording and celebrating the customs and art forms of different regions came to be written, as were works in the genre of ‘biographies of cities’--detailing political histories of regional dynasts, and incorporating accounts of important places (such as mosques, palaces etc.) and of the notables such as theologians, jurists, and saints of different cities. Regional courts, attempting to establish their validity vis-à-vis the Mughal center Delhi, became the nuclei for the promotion of regional cultures. Regional languages such as Punjabi, Oriya, Bengali, and Marathi came into their own. In this climate, with so many centers competing for cultural rivalry with it, Delhi came to stand less for the Empire and more and more only for itself.

Thus, as I see it, it was in this context of the fragmentation of the Mughal Empire and the emergence of regional polities and cultures that *Dehlviyat* came up -- both through an affirmation and celebration of local *Dehlvi* elements, and through an emphasis on perceived contradistinction to other urban centers such as Lucknow, which had emerged in the eighteenth century.

But what was *Dehlvi* distinctiveness or *Dehlviyat* premised upon? Here I have highlighted three things: the memorialization of Delhi’s great past (Chapter One); the Mughal Emperor (Chapter Two); and certain popular culture practices such as poetry in

³⁴ For more on eighteenth century regionalization of politics and culture in South Asia see Chapter Two below.
Urdu, pigeon flying etc. (Chapter Three). The first three chapters therefore concern themselves with seeing how Dehlviyat came together, and the axes around which it was articulated and defined.

In Chapter One—“History, Memorialization and Dehlviyat”, I have argued that an important component in the fashioning of Dehlviyat was the memorialization of Delhi’s pre-eighteenth century past. Even before Delhi became the capital of the Mughals in 1639, from C.E. 1192-1500, Delhi had served as capital city to several far-flung empires headed by Muslim emperors. As such, as chronicles and travel accounts over the ages suggest, certain images had come to be associated with Delhi in the popular mind from the fourteenth century onwards. These were of Delhi as daar-ul-hukumat or the imperial city par-excellence; Delhi as hazrat-i-Dehli (‘reverend Delhi’) or the city of sufis and mystics; and Delhi as a tehzeebee markaz or a center or fount of culture, from where Indo-Muslim urban culture was disseminated to other parts of Hindustan. I have discussed these popular images of Delhi for I think they constitute the ‘pre-history’ of Dehlviyat, and they fed conceptions of Dehlviyat as they developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Alongside of highlighting memorialization as an important component in the fashioning of Dehlviyat, in Chapter One, I have also tried to probe in brief the question of what allowed for Dehlvi past to become imbricated in its present. Dehlviyat was not a state sponsored ideology. It was not pushed through official histories or state education. How then was it able to fashion itself upon a past? In answering this question I have talked
about belief in the humoral nature of the world; a strong culture of orality; and also belief in pedigree as a marker of social worth as features of Delhi’s pre-modern world that enabled the close enmeshment of the past and the present in eighteenth-nineteenth century Delhi. The past was also relevant to the present because there was self-interest involved in memorializing it. Delhi’s scholar-gentry, military-administrative elites, as well as its poets and artists, throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, often found themselves seeking employment outside Delhi. Military attacks on Delhi or natural calamities such as famines compelled some of these moves, as did good opportunities that beckoned at the many new courtly centers that had emerged in the eighteenth century. For these Delhiwallahs seeking opportunities outside their city, highlighting Delhi’s long and ‘illustrious’ history became a way to claim distinctiveness for Delhi vis-à-vis the newly emergent courtly centers that had come up. For Delhiwallahs who could boast of long roots in Delhi, the city’s greatness became a way for them to claim greatness by association, and allowed them to stake claims for patronage and positions over hopefuls from other centers. So remembering Delhi’s past played an important role in the making of Dehlviyat. This past remained relevant to Dehlvi identity until the time pre-modern ways of being and of making sense of the world (belief in humors, culture of orality and significance of pedigree) still pre-dominated. This past also remained meaningful until such time when its remembrance allowed people to make certain claims for themselves.

In Chapter Two ‘Emperors and the City’, I have tried to show how 18th and 19th century emperors of a declining empire became important pivots in the emergence and
articulation of a distinctive Dehlvi identity. Eighteenth century emperors, unlike their predecessors, had become confined to Delhi. From 1712-1857 the Mughal emperors never had another capital other than Delhi, nor did they ever leave the city to go elsewhere—in part because other parts of the Empire were breaking away from them. I have shown how the sedenterization of the Mughal at Delhi, though a signal of imperial weakness, actually proved to be a boon for Delhi: Delhi stabilized as an urban center, its economy flourished, and specific elements of Dehlvi culture—the city’s Urdu language, its musical gharana or school of music, and several of its socio-cultural routines, written and talked about later as quintessentially ‘Dehlvi’, came up under the later Mughals, in the period of the Empire’s decline.

In the nineteenth century, under the three Mughals, when Delhi had passed under British control (1803-1857), I argue that the Emperor-city connection actually became stronger. As the British attempted to render the Mughals impotent, taking away all their administrative responsibilities, and controlling for them their relations with other powers in India, the Mughals were left with little choice but to pour all of their energies and their limited resources into cultural pursuits. The Mughal emperor’s role as a cultural patron within Delhi, that had begun to suffer somewhat on account of the disturbances in the city in the late eighteenth century, was revived in the early nineteenth century when Delhi passed under British rule. But all of this did not signify a ‘hollowing’ of the Mughal crown. Instead, I have shown that with the British takeover of Delhi there came about a kind of un-intended division of sovereignty in the city. The British exercised the administrative aspects of sovereignty—collecting taxes, manning borders, policing etc.
The Mughals, on the other hand, through their ritualized gift giving, charity, distress alleviation and engagement with the ritual and festal lives of the Dilliwallahs continued to uphold the more performative aspects of it. In the Indo-Muslim conception of ideal rulership both the administrative and performative notions of sovereignty were seen as important. But by the second-third decade of the nineteenth century, British rule had brought in such a sense of rupture, and the British rulers’ alienation from the socio-cultural lives of their Indian subjects had become so stark, that Delhi’s Mughal emperors by contrast came to be appreciated more. The traditional order felt so threatened by the British presence that the Mughal emperor more than ever came to be seen as the embodiment and upholder of the city’s ‘traditional’ Indo-Muslim culture. The Mughal emperor became a Dehlvi institution in ways he had not been before, and this precisely at the point when he was most powerless in administrative terms.

In Chapter Three, “Delhi: The Shehr or City Par-excellence”, I have looked at the notion of Delhi’s polished urbanity or shehriyat as a factor in the making of Dehlvi distinctiveness. What did Delhi’s shehriyat inhere in? And what was the nature of this shehriyat are the two questions I have engaged with in this chapter. I have argued that Delhis’ shehriyat was cosmopolitan and Muslim. A few popular culture practices at Delhi such as the craze for Urdu poetry and language, the hobby rearing of pigeons. While the first three of these have traditionally been spoken of in terms of the city’s elites, I have focused on the actions of non-elite segments of the city such as mendicants and kaarkhaandaars (or petty workshop owners and workers), and have tried to highlight the elements of circularity between elite and popular culture levels within Delhi. My
argument is that Dehlviyat, though most prominently articulated in works of the elites, was indeed a shared sentiment, a patriotism that non-elites too identified with. Popular culture practices such as the ones I have identified above, were at the heart of Delhi’s urban culture. These were seen as markers of Delhi’s distinctively shehri (city) charm—which drew into its ambit Dilliwallahs and non-Dilliwallahs, as well as people across class and religious boundaries very much shared in. Using case studies of a couple of Kayashtha and Kashmiri Hindu families of Delhi, I have tried to show the close identification among these groups with the ‘traditional’ culture of the city.

The first three chapters therefore speak of what brings Dehlviyat together, what makes it cohere. The last chapter, Chapter Four of the dissertation, is about the unraveling of Dehlviyat. It looks at how the local patriotism—Dehlviyat—starts to come apart in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century conjuncture. In this chapter I have argued that the contextual factors of the late nineteenth century – the experience of the Revolt of 1857, the emergence of a politically assertive and culturally intrusive British order, and the rushing of the city into ‘modernity’, all contributed to the decline of Dehlviyat. However, the chapter emphasizes that the local culture also came under strain because of the limits that were internal to it. The Dehlviyat that is celebrated from the eighteenth century onwards, and whose ‘demise’ came to be deeply lamented in Delhiiwallah texts by the late nineteenth century, was extremely hierarchical. It privileged a certain kind of Mughal administrative-literary elite (the shurfaa), and treated all others as raazils or commoners. Moreover, despite its justly heralded cosmopolitanism and liberalism, Dehlviyat represented a very Muslim urban culture, albeit one with many non-Muslim adherents.
and admirers as well. In the wider imagination, and in that of the Delhiwallahs themselves, Delhi, until the late nineteenth century, was basically a center or *markaz* of Muslim culture. And this was a reputation that was maintained and sometimes even aggressively defended against what were perceived as challenges. In this context I have discussed how a Hindu-Jain trader/money lender class at Delhi, that had enjoyed great economic clout right from the eighteenth century, was denied social respectability in the cultural order represented by *Dehlviyat*. The efforts of the trader-banker class to make themselves more visible in the public spaces of the city were rebuffed strongly; texts celebrating *Dehlviyat* make no mention of them; and belittling stereotypes about them also abounded. They were outsiders to what was believed to be Delhi’s “traditional” culture. The British felt differently about the trader-bankers. And with British backing this group began to question and overturn the system that had imposed a kind of ritualized social inferiority over them. After 1857, with the Mughals gone, and the older Mughal elites depressed--the trader bankers of Delhi came into their own. Such overturning of the traditional social order of Delhi created anxieties that the city’s culture, i.e. *Dehlviyat*, and the city itself was dying. But what was dying, or rather had been challenged was the once hegemonic perception of Delhi as a Muslim city.

This dissertation hopes to offer several fresh insights on Delhi in particular and South Asian history more generally. Most scholarly studies of Delhi for the eighteenth and nineteenth century deal with the city’s monuments, prominent personalities, anecdotal materials and political and urban history.\(^\text{15}\) While there are excellent monographs on

\(^{15}\) The best general surveys of the period under review are Percival Spear, *Delhi: A Historical Sketch*; Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals: Studies in Late Mughal Delhi*; Narayani Gupta, *Delhi
particular aspects of Delhi’s cultural life -- mostly about the city’s Urdu language and Urdu poetry,\textsuperscript{16} and about a handful of Delhi intellectuals\textsuperscript{17} -- a broader socio-cultural history of Delhi for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has not been attempted. My dissertation seeks to remedy this situation.

Writing this kind of socio-cultural history of Delhi also allows one to look at Delhi outside of the paradigm of Empire. Politico-administrative histories of the city have become histories of the fall and rise of empires. But a focus on socio-cultural life shows that underneath the overarching political revolutions, other important developments-- a celebration of the city’s language, institutions, its spaces etc., a celebration and articulation, in other words of \textit{Dehlviyat}—was also afoot. My work highlights this development—the making and un-making of \textit{Dehlviyat}—which in all the talk of Empire has remained occluded from the view.

However, though this dissertation seeks to shift the focus away from Empire and from politico-administrative history in general, in covering certain themes in Delhi’s local history, particularly in looking at the relationship between Mughal emperors and the city, it does offer some insights into the nature of state power in South Asia under British colonial domination. My work on Delhi’s nineteenth century Mughal Emperors shows

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\textsuperscript{17} Mushirul Hasan, \textit{Moral Reckoning: Muslim Intellectuals in Nineteenth Century Delhi} (Delhi, 2008) and Margrit Pernau ed., \textit{The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State and Education Before 1857} (Delhi, 2006)
\end{flushright}
that even though British policies had tried to render them politically defunct, even the Mughals continued to exercise, what were seen by the populace at large, as “kingly functions”. This idea of continued Mughal relevance in British dominated Delhi queries the contention of historians such as Nicholas Dirks. Dirks is of the view that native rulers, left with merely cultural functions, were made irrelevant, their crowns ‘hollowed out’, so to speak, with the assumption of political power by the British.\(^{18}\) In Delhi, at least it seems that that was not entirely the case. State power did not come to reside solely in the British. Instead there seems to have been a division, albeit unintentional, of sovereignty. Sovereignty was not only about administrative functions. It encompassed the more performative or cultural aspects as well. While the British took care of policing, revenue collection, manning of borders etc., they did not care to cultivate other more performative aspects of sovereign behavior considered vital by natives of South Asia. Gift giving, charity, help in times of calamities, patronage of those with talent and learning, were all central to broadly held notions of good kingship in South Asia. But since the British did not care for these, their power was not seen as hegemonic. The Mughal on the other hand continued to perform these duties of kings right up to 1857, and to enjoy therefore a measure of legitimacy in public perception. It was precisely because the Mughal was not seen as politically irrelevant that he was made the leader of the very political anti-British Revolt of 1857.

A socio-cultural history of Delhi such as mine also allows us to engage with the issue of the historically changing perceptions about Delhi between the eighteenth to the early

twentieth century. This dissertation in many ways is as much about perceptions as it is about “objective reality”. Perceptions that cities generate, the imaginations they excite, give to them certain reputations or personalities in the public mind. The ‘imagined cities’, may be less about history and more about ‘fables’, and they almost certainly never encapsulate the entire reality of a place. Yet they are universally used as entry points into ‘knowing’ places.\textsuperscript{19} It is important to excavate the history of how a place comes to have a particular reputation, and how that reputation, if sustained, is reproduced. Also important to ask is what realities do dominant images of a place displace or suppress? And what happens when perceptions about a place—its dominant character—are queried, or put under pressure? These were the questions I have considered in my study of Delhi. Thus I have tried to show how Delhi gets its image as a cosmopolitan Muslim or Indo-Muslim urban center; how certain groups, both Muslim and non-Muslim do identify with this broader character or personality of the city, and how certain groups such as Hindu and Jain trader bankers do not. I also trace how Delhi’s reputation as a Muslim center comes under strain from the late nineteenth century when Hindu-Jain trader-bankers, considered outsiders to the Indo-Muslim culture of Delhi, begin to assert themselves in the city with active British backing. Delhi begins to transform from a center with an Urdu/Persianate, Indo-Muslim courtly urban culture, to one which was increasingly commercial, Hindu and Punjabi. This change was not affected overnight, and Delhi did not lose its Indo-Muslim character all at once. But the anxieties generated by the challenge to Delhi’s

\textsuperscript{19} I am indebted to two works for the notion of the city as ‘imagined’ city. The first is Jonathan Raban’s \textit{Soft City: A Documentary Exploration of Metropolitan Life}, and the other is Gyan Prakash’s \textit{Mumbai Fables: A History of an Enchanted City} (Princeton, 2010), which illuminates the ‘fables’ that the city of Mumbai (Bombay) has generated, and seeks to find out a history of these fables; and to understand what enables the composition of particular images/fables of the city.
traditional identity and personality caused many Dilliwallahs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to claim that the Dehlvi cultural tradition was dying. In my conclusion I point to how perceived change in personality of an important center such as Delhi may have impacted the rooting of later nationalisms on the Indian sub-continent.

This literature also contributes to the literature on cosmopolitanism in South Asia. Often when scholars highlight aspects of the socio-cultural life of Delhi before 1857, there is the overwhelming tendency to idealize and romanticize it, and to see the city’s culture as almost seamlessly syncretic or Ganga-jamni. But the treatment given to Delhi’s history and culture in the period I am reviewing is only symptomatic of a deeper malaise within the Indian historiography of Hindu-Muslim relations. The more communalist formulations, paint the history of Muslim rule in India as one of aggression and conquest, and/or of Hindus and Muslims as historically ‘omnibus’ communities or ‘two nations’, who never gelled, and were just waiting to go their different ways when the Partition came about in 1947. In more sober academic circles, such formulations may not carry much weight. But there are, as it were, different ‘levels of history’. Outside of ‘high’ academic history, there is also the history that permeates popular consciousness. And

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20 Ganga (Ganges) and Jamuna are two of the most important rivers of India. The term Ganga-Jamni therefore connotes the intermingling of two great streams—the Hindus and the Muslims of India. The Urdu Academy of Delhi’s reprints of late nineteenth and early twentieth century texts that speak of Delhi’s eighteenth and nineteenth century socio-cultura life are always prefaced with remarks about Delhi’s Ganga-Jamni culture. For two representative examples see Rashid-al Khiri’s Naubat-i-Panj Roza (Delhi, 1987) and Munshi Faizuddin’s Bazm-e Aakhir (Delhi, 1986). Also see Mushirul Hasan’s Moral Reckoning that discusses nineteenth century Delhi intellectuals such as Zakaullah Khan and Nazir Ahmad as products of a very catholic, shared, Hindu-Muslim culture of the city.

21 In South Asia, the term ‘communal’ and does not have the positive connotations of ‘community’ that it does in the west. In South Asia, ‘communalism’ stands for the politicization of religious difference.
when it comes to the popular view about the history of Hindu-Muslim relations, it is the more exclusivist notions about the historical relationship between the two communities, that seem to dominate. In part, to counter the out-right falsifications of communalist histories, but also in part to alter the general ‘commonsense’ about Hindu-Muslim relations, more secular historians often do three things: they point to the fragmented nature of communities in the pre-modern period (thus falsifying the idea of Hindus and Muslims being two ‘nations’); they stress the cosmopolitanism of the high culture fostered by the Mughals; and they highlight the history of sharing that existed at the popular level, because at that level religion has less to do with scriptures and prescriptions (where differences between faiths can be more stark), and more to do with practices that are more local and mixed. But the pressure from communalist historiography is such that other historians, while emphasizing the ‘sharing’ between communities, often elide, or sweep under the carpet, the differences that also existed despite the sharing. Such pressured writing does not make for great history. Moreover, as the rise of Hindu nationalism in India in recent years proves, ‘secular’ history does not prevent religious conflict either. My work on Delhi/Dehlviyat, which speaks both of the sharing and the boundaries, is an effort in the direction to present a more critical history of the South Asia’s ‘Indo-Muslim’, or shared Hindu-Muslim culture.

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22 Two classics of ‘secular’ historiography would be Muhammad Mujeeb’s *Indian Muslims* (London, 1967) and Tara Chand’s, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (Allahabad, 1963). For more recent examples see fn. 8 above.

23 For two succinct monographs on Hindu nationalism see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925-1990s* (Delhi, 1996); Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton, 2007)
The dissertation is based on an extensive use of Urdu language sources - mostly biographies, autobiographies, anthropological accounts, works in the genre of ‘biography of cities’, memoirs, and memorializing texts produced by Delhiwallahs in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. For the eighteenth century, where sources are mostly in Persian, I have depended on Urdu and English language translations of the same.
Chapter One: History, Memorialization and Dehlviyat

Allama Zaar Zutshi, a litterateur and poet of late nineteenth-early twentieth century Delhi, recounted to his son, Gulzar Dehlvi, an unforgettable poetic gathering (mushairaa) he had attended as a young lad. The *mushairaa* was held at the house of a Hindu notable in Dariba Kalan, Delhi. Zutshi recalled that after the “tumult, uprising and destruction of 1857”, no *mushairaas* or poetic assemblies had been held at Delhi. This *mushairaa* of 1879, that he was reminiscing about, was the first to be held, twenty-two years after the Revolt. A thriving institution of pre-Revolt, poetry-crazed Delhi, the *mushairaa*, Zutshi claims, had gone into abeyance with the shock of the Revolt. 2 It was now being revived,

1 Khurshidul Islam and Ralph Russel offer the following definition of a *mushairaa*: “*mushairaas*...were gatherings at the house or court of some eminent scholar or poet or noble—many nobles were in any case also poets—to which poets would be invited to recite their own work...Often the invitation would include a line of verse, and all who participated would be required to come with a poem incorporating this line, written in the same meter and using a rhyme scheme in harmony with it. The guests would be seated on a carpet and a candle would be passed round from one to another. As the candle came before him, each would recite his verse. The audience responded...in elaborately courteous etiquette...Polite exclamations of praise would greet a good line and the poet would bow and salaam in acknowledgement. Criticism could also be expressed or, more commonly, delicately implied. A courteous request to the poet to repeat a line often indicated that there was felt to be some defect in it, and a poet quick enough to detect the fault and versatile enough to correct it extempore might do so.” See Khurshidul Islam and Ralph Russel, *Three Mughal Poets: Mir, Sauda, Mir Hasan* (Delhi, 1969), p. 4

2 There is some question mark about Zaar Zutshi’s claim that absolutely no *Mushaairahs* were held at Delhi between 1857 and 1879. According to Pasha Muhammad Khan, a collection of poems written by different authors was published under the title *Fughan-I Dilli* (The Lament for Delhi). The collection was compiled by Tafazzul Husain Khan in 1863. While a review of the collection, published as part of the introductory section of the *Fughan*, claims that the poems were collected together from all corners of Hindustan, given that they are thematically united by reference to Delhi and to the turbulent events during and after 1857 in the city, and also share the same meter and refrain and rhyme word, Pasha Muhammad Khan postulates that the collection was “probably the result of some coordinated effort such as a *mushairaa*."

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and this was a joyous occasion. Both well-established masters in the art of poetry, and
novices learning the craft at their feet, were in attendance. After all attendees had read
their compositions, and Altaf Husain Hali and Dagh “Dehlvi” remained the only two who
hadn’t, the candle was placed before Maulana Hali. The Maulana started to read his
famous marsiyaa³- “Dehli Marhum” or “Late Delhi”---

Speak not, O friend, of the Delhi that is no more
I can’t bear to hear that story,
Sing not, O nightingale, a song of autumn
Now that we laugh and talk, don’t make us weep…
…
The traveller will bring back many scars on the heart
Watch out! Don’t venture into the ruins of this city,
At every step here, priceless pearls lie buried beneath the dust
No place could be so rich in hidden treasures⁴

“The mood of this lament”, remembered Zutshi, “the state Delhi was in…it changed the
atmosphere of the mushairaa. Nearly everybody became teary eyed, and some couldn’t
stop sobbing throughout….”⁵

³ A marsiyaa is an elegy, and is one of the major forms of Urdu verse.
⁴ Hali had apparently first read this composition at a mushairaa in Lahore in 1874. Given
Hali’s fame as a poet, and the popularity of Urdu poetry in the period under review (when
most native newspapers of north India vied with each other to present the latest
compositions of known poets for their readers), it is highly likely that those present at the
mushairaa of 1879 were already familiar with the poem Hali read out. Yet, as an indication
probably of how much the theme of the marsiyaa resonated with those present, people
were moved to tears and sobs when it was read out. The translation from the original Urdu
to English is mine. For the complete Urdu text, I have depended on the version that appears
at the beginning of Narayani Gupta’s, Delhi Between Two Empires, 1803-1931 (Delhi, 1981).
The book also carries an English translation of this marsiyaa by Dr. Yunus Jaffery.
⁵ This episode is reproduced by Gulzar Dehlvi in his article “Aakhiri daur men Dilli ki adabi
jhalkiyaan” in Tanveer Ahmad Alavi and Sayyid Zameer Hasan Dehlvi ed., Fikr-i-Nau:
Shahjahanabad Number (Delhi, 1978), p. 279
The marsiyaa is generally associated with the theme of lament at the martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandson Husain. Here the form has been adapted to lament the death of a city—Delhi—referred here as “Dehli-i-marhuum” or the “late Delhi.” To speak of Delhi in such a way had become commonplace in a particular kind of, quite voluminous, literature that emerged from late nineteenth-early twentieth century Delhi. The Dilliwallahs who authored this literature bemoaned the passing away of their city’s culture, its way of life, its institutions, and sometimes rather melodramatically, the death of their city itself. Hali here expresses his anguish in poetry, but echoes of these themes could be found in a whole range of texts—from relatively sober biographies of the city, works of literary criticism, personal memoirs, anthropological works to the more unabashedly sentimentalizing, memorializing ones.⁶

This was not the first time when Delhi had inspired poems of lament and a literature of decline. Right from the eighteenth century, chroniclers and socio-religious reformers, particularly those based at Delhi, frequently commented upon, and tried to address, what

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⁶Some examples of texts that remembered aspects of “traditional” pre-1857 Delhi, and Dehlvi culture would be: Munshi Faizuddin's Bazm-i-Aakhir (first published 1885); Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Sirat-i-Faridiya (first published 1898); Sayyid Ahmad Dehlvi’s Rasum-i-Dehli (date of publication unknown. Published before 1918); Ghalib’s (d. 1869) letters put together in several works such as Ralph Russel and Khurshidul Islam's Ghalib: Life and Letters (Delhi, 1994); Muhammad Hussain Azad's Ab-i-Hayat (first published 1880) and Divan-i-Zauq (undated, but would have been written before 1910); Bashir-ud-Din Ahmad’s Waaqiyat Darul Hukumat Dilli (first pub. 1919); Abul Kalam Azad’s Khwud Navisht etc. Apart from the above, there were many Delhi authors such as Rashid-al-khiri, Khwajah Muhammad Shafi, Nasir Nazir Firaq Dehlvi etc. who wrote several memorializing texts on Delhi. For these see f.n. 2, Chapter Four below. I am referring here mostly to works that came out before the Partition of India in 1947. The Partition proved in some ways the most tragic watershed in Delhi’s socio-cultural history, but it lies outside the scope of this study.
they saw as the problem of the decline of the Mughals, of Delhi, and of the Muslims in Hindustan: with these three categories often being used interchangeably. Closer to the late nineteenth century - the fall of Delhi to East India Company troops in 1857, and the vengefulness unleashed after the British takeover of the city, had brought forth a mood of deep pessimism and sadness in Dilliwallahs.\(^7\) In the immediate aftermath of 1857 there was much grief at the lives lost, at the defacing of large parts of the city, and at the disruption of familiar routines and established institutions of the city.\(^8\) But, earlier when people vented despondency, whether in the eighteenth century or after the Revolt, it was often in response to some immediate calamity say the sacking or looting of Delhi and massive loss of life and property. But the late nineteenth century situation was not the same.

By the late 1860s and early 70s, Delhi was on the mend. Parts of the city had been rebuilt, railways had arrived in Delhi, the city’s population boomed, and it had become a major center of trade in North India.\(^9\) Yet, the most visible writings on the city from even this period continued to be about the “deceased” city. Dilliwallahs insisted upon titles such as *Bazm-i-Aakhir* (The Last Gathering), *Dilli kee Aakhiree Shamaa* (The Last Flame

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\(^7\) The Revolt of 1857 and its bloody aftermath at Delhi have been covered in several monographs, including first person accounts on both the Indian and British sides. Two of the more accessible histories would be Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth* (Delhi, 1981), pp. 21-41; William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty: Delhi, 1857* (London, 2006).

\(^8\) A collection of poems penned by Dilliwallahs called *Fughan-i- Dilli* voices many of these themes. Among prose accounts there are several that deal with these issues. Two of the best such accounts, that are also available in English translation, are the ones penned by Ghalib. He wrote a diary during the Revolt, which he later published as *Dastanbuy*. And he wrote letters to his friends during and after the Revolt, many of which can be accessed in Khurshidula Islam and Ralph Russel trans. and ed., Ghalib: *Life and Letters*

\(^9\) See Narayani Gupta *Delhi Between Two Empires*, pp. 70-97.
of Delhi), *Dilli kee Aaakhiree Bahaar* (The Last Spring of Delhi), *Dilli kaa Aakhiree Sambhaalaa* (The Last Recovery of Delhi) and *Dilli Jo Ek Shehr Thaa* (Delhi—Which Was Once a City), all of which talked about the city’s culture prior to 1857 and bemoaned the fact that that culture, which was centuries old, was now disappearing. Two authors in particular, Khwaja Hasan Nizami and Allama Rashid al-khiri, wrote a whole series of books about the revolt of 1857, and all it took away. Their books were, it seems, very well received, for they went into multiple editions.\(^\text{10}\) Thus, even decades after the Revolt the wounds from the event seemed not to have healed. People continued to talk of the passing away of a city and its culture. What is more, grief for Delhi also shaded into broader grief at the decline in India of Muslim civilization itself. To people at large, the putting down of the Revolt in Delhi signified, as one early twentieth century Dilliwallah, Nasir Nazir Firaq put it, that “the age when Muslims prospered [had] passed.”\(^\text{11}\)

Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali’s long poem, *Musaddas*, is a classic expression of this grief at the “decline” of Islam. Hali opens the *Musaddas* with the lines “If anyone wants to see how downfall passes all bounds/let him see how Islam once fallen does not rise again// He will never believe that tide flows after every ebb/ if he sees the way our sea has

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\(^\text{10}\) Khwaja Hasan Nizami wrote a set of twelve books between 1920-22 about the Revolt of 1857 and its effects on Delhi. Some of these titles were: Aansuon ki boonden; Angrezon ki Bipta; Muhaasirah-I Ghadar Dilli ke Khutoot; Ghadar-i-Dili: Ghiraftat Shuda Khutoot; Bahadaur Shah Zafar ka Roznamcha; Bahadur Shah Zafar ka Muqaddma; Beghamat ke Ansoo; Dilli ki Jaakini. Allama Rashid al-Khiri's most famous works on pre-Revolt Delhi were *Dilli ki Aakhiri Bahaar* (1900) and *Naubat-i-Panj Roza* (1928)

\(^\text{11}\) The words he used in the original Urdu essay, first written around 1925, were ‘meri nazar men Musalmaanon ki daulatmandi ka ahd phir gaya’. See Nasir Nazir Firaq’s ‘Baiswin Rajab ke Kunde’ reproduced in Shamim Ahmad (ed.), *Marhum Dilli ki Ek Jhalak* (Delhi, 1965), p. 56
receded.”¹² And Hali was not one particularly sensitive poet disturbed by what he saw. From what we know of the public reception of the Musaddas, it is clear that Hali’s poem resonated with all kinds of people. Often when it was read out in large gatherings, it would reduce people, including peasants and other non-elites, to tears.¹³ It can not be a coincidence that Hali, and many others who wrote most movingly about Muslim decline, and later became reformers of their community, came from, or identified with, the older courtly centers such as Lucknow, and even more Delhi. Some of the greatest elite Muslim reformers of the late nineteenth century, men such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), Maulana Hali (1837-1914), Nazir Ahmad 1830-1912), Zakaullah (1832-1910), Muhammad Hussain Azad (1830-1910) etc., were men from Delhi, or were at least closely associated with Dehlvi culture. All of these reformers were convinced after 1857 that Muslim fortunes in Hindustan had hit a nadir, and made it their life’s mission to exhort Muslims to rise from “slumber”, reform themselves, and attempt to retake the place of prominence they had lost in the world. Certainly, these elites’ world view would have been shaped by the world context of the decline of political Islam, and by western

¹² The original Urdu text is from Hali’s Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam trans. and ed., Christopher Shackele and Javed Majeed (Delhi, 1997), p.102. The translation from Urdu is mine. The Musaddas was first written in 1879.
¹³ Maulana Abdul Haq in his article for the centenary edition of the Musaddas recalled the first time he heard the Musaddas recited as a young boy. This was in the 1880s, in a village in Ferozepur, when Abdul Haq was visiting an uncle for a family function where people from three villages, mostly farmers, had gathered. As was a common practice in functions held in the households of the Indo-Muslim elites, a tawaaif (literally a prostitute, but in practice tawaaifs were often accomplished dancers and musicians) had been invited from Lahore to entertain the mehfil (gathering). Abdul Haq mentions that the tawaaif in question was a poet herself whose poems had been published in literary journals of Lahore. She took one look at the gathering, he says, and started singing the first lines of the Musaddas. “Until she finished her song, there was pin drop silence. Some people were swaying in rapture, others had tears in their eyes. That scene is still vivid before my eyes...I think to myself – what was it about that poem which so touched those uneducated rustics that they couldn’t hold back their tears.” See Abdul Haq in Musaddas-i-Hali centenary edition; ed. Sayyid Abid Hussain (Delhi, 1935). For more about the ‘impact’ of the Musaddas see Shackele and Majeed Hali’s Musaddas: Flow and Ebb of Islam, pp. 36-49
colonial discourse of Islam versus Christianity, and of the “degeneracy” of the former. But the Revolt and developments of the succeeding decades in Delhi also played a seminal role in shaping their mindsets.14

What was it that was being lost in Delhi in the later half of the nineteenth century? Raising a dirge for a city which, going by the yardstick of the population and the economy, was on the upswing, clearly indicates that what was being grieved was not always the material city or the “hard city”, but the “soft city” of the imagination. The Delhi that had begun to emerge from the debris of 1857 was an expanding, modernizing city, where many new fortunes were being made.15 But this rebuilding of Delhi was also a kind of re-invention that old time Dilliwallahs were deeply uncomfortable with. In the late nineteenth century, in absolute terms, Delhi was not "finished". But, as some of the responses discussed above show- changes in late nineteenth century Delhi had set off fears of decline of the city and of Muslim power in Delhi as well as wider Hindustan.

But does all change elicit this kind of anguished response? Change, brings with it, displacements and anxieties. But what can explain, the deep sense of trauma that change had caused in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Delhi? The answers to these questions lie not only in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century context but also in the history of Delhi leading up to the nineteenth century. To understand why people thought Muslim power had declined, it is important to see what had allowed for the imagination

14 For some representative works on the Muslim social reformers and intellectuals of nineteenth century Delhi see Mushirul Hasan, A Moral Reckoning: Muslim Intellectuals in Nineteenth Century Delhi (Delhi, 2005); Lelyveld, Aligarh’s First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India (Delhi, 1978); C.F. Andrews, Zakaullah Of Delhi (Cambridge, 1929)
15 For this see Chapter Four below.
of Delhi as a ‘Muslim city’ to take root in the first place? What weight of history lay behind this imagination of the city? In order to understand that, one would need to look at Delhi’s sedimented history over centuries, to see how this history was remembered in the period under review, and to understand what encouraged and made possible the remembering of this history.

*Delhi: The City of Muslim Glory*

The association of Muslim glory and Muslim culture in India with the city of Delhi was an old one. Muhammad Ghori, a Turkish Muslim chieftain, defeated Delhi’s Hindu Rajput ruler Prithviraj in 1206, and by 1211, under Sultan Iltutumish, Delhi was referred to as *Daar al-mulk-i-hindoostaan* (the capital of Hindustan) and the honorific *hazrat* (reverend) was added to its name.\(^{16}\) With these developments Delhi embarked upon a long imperial career. Hitherto, public memory of Delhi had been that of a venerable ancient city. It was believed, on the strength of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, to have been the Indraprastha of the Pandavas.\(^{17}\) It was also referred to in Jain texts as Indraprastha and Yoginipura or “fairy town”—a place of pilgrimage.\(^{18}\) But in the historical period, including the phase immediately preceding the Ghorian conquest, Delhi had never been more than a provincial capital, or at best the capital of small kingdoms.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{17}\) Persian histories of Hindustan from the earliest period record the tradition of the *Mahabharata* and identify Delhi as Indraprastha, the capital of the Pandavas. Ibn Batuta mentioned this as early as 1325. See *Travels of Ibn Batuta A.D. 1325-1354* trans. H.A.R. Gibb (Cambridge, 1971), vol. III, p. 619.


\(^{19}\) For a brief survey of the early history of Delhi see H.K. Kaul ed., *Historic Delhi: An Anthology* (Delhi, 1985), pp. 19-22
But all of that changed in the twelfth century. Between c. 1192 and 1500, under its Muslim sultans, Delhi enjoyed an unbroken stint as capital of various far-flung empires. Several of these empires covered practically all of north India, and occasionally parts of the Deccan (south India) as well. Delhi became an imperial city par-excellence. And it came to enjoy prestige not only within Hindustan (India), but also became a center of some prominence in the wider Islamic politico-cultural world. How did this happen?

While the Sultans of Delhi were cementing their rule over Hindustan, the Mongols under Chengiz Khan and his successors were raiding into submission Central Asia, China, Persia, Iraq, much of Asia Minor, and large parts of southern Russia throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The sack of Baghdad in 1258, when the Abbasid caliph was killed, along with hundreds of thousands of others, brought to an end a dynasty that had ruled the core regions of the Islamic world since the middle of the eighth century. This development, along with the sack of numerous cities from Central Asia to the Mediterranean, devastated the focal points of Islamic civilization. The Mongols, as Muslim chroniclers never tired of repeating, were the “scourge of Islam”. Scholars, bureaucrats, artists and savants from these Islamic lands, who were fleeing Mongol persecution, sought the protection of the Delhi sultans. Under the sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban (r. 1265-1287), apparently, no less than fifteen muhallaas (neighborhoods) were

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20 The different dynasties that presided over empires in Hindustan (India) with Delhi as their capital are together clubbed as the Delhi Sultanates. These ruling dynasties in chronological order were as follows: Slave Dynasty (1206-1290); Khalji Dynasty (1290-1320); Tughluq Dynasty (1321-1413); Sayyid Dynasty (1414-1450/51); Lodhi Dynasty (1450-1526). Of these, the Khaljis, and the Tughluqs until Muhammad bin Tughlaq ruled over the most far-flung empires. But imperial strength was greatly weakened by Taimur Lame’s 1398 sack of Delhi. The last Tughluqs and the Sayyids and the Lodhis presided over considerably smaller territories. With Sikander Lodhi the capital of the Sultanate was moved from Delhi to Agra in 1504 A.D.
established in Delhi to house immigrants from Central Asia, Iran and the Middle East, giving the city a rather unique cosmopolitan character.  

The chronicler Al Minhaj Bin Siraj, who visited Delhi in 1237, was moved to observe: “the capital city of Dehli,…is the seat of government of Hindustan, and the center of the circle of Islam…the retreat and resting place for the learned, the virtuous, and the excellent of the various parts of the world; and those who, by the mercy of God … escaped from the toils of the calamities sustained by the provinces and cities of Ajam, and the misfortune caused by the (irruption of the) infidel Mughals [Mongols], made the capital—the asylum of the universe…” (Square brackets and emphases mine.)

Even in terms of its material culture and built environment Delhi had come to be seen as a great Muslim urban center by the fourteenth century. A visiting Arab scholar noted appreciatively, “There are one thousand madrasaas (schools and colleges) in Delhi…There are about seventy hospitals (bimaaristaans)…Besides there are two thousand khaanqaahs and serais (sufi saints’ hospices and inns) in Delhi and its suburbs. There are huge buildings, extensive bazaars and numerous hammaams (baths) in the

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22 Major H.G. Raverty trans., Al Minhaj Bin Siraj’s, Tabakat-i-Nasiri: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia. 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1881). Raverty's translation was prepared from a Persian manuscript of the work that was first penned down in A.D. 1236.
Little wonder then that the celebrated Moroccan traveller Ibn Batuta, who had been travelling across the Muslim lands, and came to stay in Delhi from 1334 to 1342, thought the city “vast and magnificent”, and the “largest in the entire Muslim Orient.”

Thus, Delhi had become an imperial city, and had also come to be perceived as a place of significance in the Islamic politico-cultural universe. But to say that Delhi had become a Muslim, imperial, city is not to say that that was the only kind of perception the city generated. A Sanskrit inscription from the time of one of the early sultans, Sultan Balban (r. 1266-1287), refers to Delhi in entirely non-denominational terms. It says, “Under this king, Hamira Ghiyasuddin [Balban] and Lord of many a hundred of great towns, prospers the heart ravishing great town of Dhilli, a deadly arrow to his foes. Like the earth she is the receptacle of sundry jewels; like heaven full of joy; like the town of the lower worlds, an abode of demons—and like illusion full of fascination.” Thus, people from varied backgrounds had their own take on Delhi. And it may well be true to say, as has been argued, that Delhi’s perceived Muslimness was a complex affair—it was a view that a certain variety of Central Asian scholar-gentleman, fleeing from the core regions of Islam, had put forward. Yet it is also important to acknowledge that Delhi—the imperial Muslim civilizational center (tehzeebi markaz)—was an important and influential new image that had become associated with the city by the fourteenth century.

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25 Epigraphica Indica, Arabic and Persian Supplement, 1913-1914, vs. 12 (p. 41, 44)
26 Sunil Kumar, Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate, 1192-1286 (Delhi, 2007).
This was an important image for it endured, or was at least never seriously questioned, even through periods when Delhi was provincialized and not the capital of empires.

No provincialization happened until the fifteenth century. Up until then, Delhi remained a great imperial city, apart from also being the foremost center of Islamic religion and culture in India. But between the fifteenth to the early years of the sixteenth century (when Mughal power arose), the Delhi Sultanate declined, making way for many independent regional kingdoms.\(^\text{27}\) Delhi’s pre-eminence waned and did not immediately recover when empire building re-started under the Mughals in 1526, for the early Mughals preferred Agra and Lahore as capital cities. Thus between the fifteenth and the mid seventeenth century, Delhi frequently did not serve as the capital of kings. And when not the capital city, it also shrank in size and diminished as an urban center when the imperial camps moved to other locales.\(^\text{28}\) Yet surprisingly, despite its frequent provinciality and the rise to prominence of other urban centers the “imperial city” tag continued to be attached to the city. Travelers and historians continued to make observations such as, “the kings of India are here to be crowned or else they are held usurpers,” and that “it [is] regarded as a religious duty that the kings of India should be crowned in this city.”\(^\text{29}\)


\(^{28}\) For some figures of population fluctuations in Delhi depending on the presence or absence of the imperial establishment in the city see Spear, “Delhi -- The ‘Stop go’ Capital” in R.E. Frykenberg, *Delhi Through the Ages*, pp. 322-23.

\(^{29}\) The first of these comments is from William Forster, *Early Travels in India, 1583-1619* (Delhi, 1968), p. 156. And the second was made in 1631 and has been taken from Joannes
Thereafter, in 1648, partly because of its long-standing reputation as an imperial city, the Mughal emperor Shahjahan, shifted his capital to Delhi. From this date to the end of the Mughal dynasty in 1857, Delhi remained the capital of the Mughals. Of course Delhi saw many turbulent times between the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century period too. The eighteenth century was a particularly volatile century for Delhi: the Mughal Empire disintegrated, Delhi was sacked and attacked several times, and the city transformed from a great imperial city to a city state. Yet, despite this, in public perception Delhi remained *Daar-ul-hukumat-i-Hindustan* or the “center of the empire of Hindustan”.

Fariduddin Ahmad Khan grew up to manhood in a Delhi that was first under Maratha control and then passed under British control. The decline of the Mughal Empire which had fragmented to make way for many smaller kingdoms and powers all over Hindustan, the diminution in the power of the Mughal emperor who still resided at Delhi, and the loss of stature for Delhi itself within the broader affairs of Hindustan were all too evident to contemporaries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. By comparison,

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De Laet's, *The Empire of the Great Mogol* (Bombay, 1928), pp. 48-9. Neither at the time of William Forster’s travels to India, nor in 1631, was Delhi a capital city.

30 Starting from about the third decade of the eighteenth century the Mughal Empire had begun to fragment to make way for several smaller polities all over Hindustan. Between 1760-1782 Delhi ceased to the capital city of a large empire and became instead the center of a small kingdom of Delhi. By 1784, Delhi was no longer even an independent kingdom. Though the Mughal remained at Delhi, the city and its environs were administered by the Marathas from 1784-1803, and from 1803 onwards by the British. For the decline of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century see Chapter Two below.

31 For a good brief survey of political developments in Delhi in the late eighteenth—early nineteenth century see Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls: Studies in Late Mughul Delhi* (Cambridge, 1951)
Lucknow in this period was a larger, more prosperous city than Delhi, and though its Nawab was also under the thumb of the British, he was in possession of much greater financial resources and powers than the Mughal at Delhi. This state of affairs was not hidden from anyone clued into the Indian political scene in this period. Indeed Fariduddin Ahmed himself had been educated at Lucknow for several years and had worked for the British in various capacities including as Superintendent of the Calcutta Madarsa. Yet, even though Delhi was little more than a small kingdom or small principality by the late eighteenth century, in people’s imagination it still remained large. In his writings, when Fariduddin Ahmad Khan talks of Delhi and Lucknow, he consistently refers to Delhi by the high sounding title Daar-ul-Saltanat (imperial capital), and to Lucknow by the more underwhelming epithet Daar-ul-Riyaasat (provincial capital). Coming from a politically well-connected and well informed person such as Fariduddin Ahmed Khan this seems surprising, but the degree to which Delhi remained the imperial city in the imagination of the general public was still greater.

Evidence of this comes even from the unlikely source--Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s *Asbaab-i-baghaawat-i-Hind*.\(^{32}\) Meant to educate the British about the reasons for the Revolt of 1857, Sayyid Ahmed also wrote it to exonerate the Muslims (especially of Delhi) from blame for the Revolt. He wanted to emphasize that the Muslims of Delhi had not rebelled against British authority to re-store the powers of the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah

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\(^{32}\) Sayyid Ahmed Khan’s *Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind* was written in 1858 and appeared in English translation as *The Causes of the Indian Revolt. Written by Sayyid Ahmed Khan Bahadur, C.S.I, in Urdu, in the Year 1858 and Translated into English by his two European Friends* (Benaras, 1873). Sayyid Ahmed was an East India Company employee at the time of the Revolt, and he wrote the *Asbab* as a British loyalist, to educate the British about how their unwise policies had created the crisis of the Revolt of 1857. One of the aims of the tract was also to
Zafar. Thus, Sayyid Ahmed says that in 1857 the Mughal at Delhi was old and senile, and not only powerless, but his pathetic state of powerlessness was also well known to Delhi people at large (though why when they knew this, they should have rallied around the senile Emperor during the Revolt is less explained.) But even Sayyid Ahmad does not deny that “people outside the walls of Delhi, who were less informed about his conditions…and his [the Mughal’s] general incompetence” still believed that the empire existed and that he [the Mughal] was emperor, and the “East India Company they believed to be his viceroy.”

So in popular imagination, until the Revolt in 1857, Delhi was seen as daar-ul-hukumat-i-Hindustan, or the center-of-the-polity-of-Hindustan. And Hindustan (India), and its capital, Delhi, continued also to be viewed as integral parts of the broader Muslim politico-cultural universe. In the eighteenth century, when the Mughal Empire was disintegrating, and Delhi was often under attack by outside powers, the city was no longer spoken of the “center of the circle of Islam.” But a sense of its membership within the larger Muslim world, and of its past as a glorious Muslim one, remained intact.

Many eighteenth century works of history (as was common to medieval histories of India even earlier) begin with an invocation to Allah; they then move to the early caliphate phase of Islamic history, before at some stage diverting to Hindustan, and to the inauguration there of Muslim rule, tracing the history down from the Sultanate phase to

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33 Sayyid Ahmad Khan's *Asbab-i-Baghwat-i-Hind*, p.1. The book was written in 1858, and translated into English in 1873
34 For developments in eighteenth century Delhi see Chapter Two, pp.
the Mughal one until the reign of the current ruler.\textsuperscript{35} This way of recording history, in which rulers’ political descent was traced to Muhammad and the Caliphs, was followed until way into the nineteenth century, and reveals the wider “imagined community” to which the Muslim states in India were believed to belong.

From the nineteenth century, one starts to find for Delhi works in the genre of “biography of the city”. Here the city, rather than a dynasty or Sultanate, forms the subject of the book. The early nineteenth century work, \textit{Saïr-ul-Manaaizil}, which describes the physical spaces of the city, its prominent buildings, neighborhoods, markets etc. is one such.\textsuperscript{36} The \textit{Saïr} sketches Delhi’s history from the ancient period. Sangin Beg, the author of the \textit{Saïr}, mentions Indraprastha (on the basis of the epic Mahabhrata); the ruler Dehlu’s founding of \textit{Dhilli}; the city under the Tomar Rajputs; and Qila Rai Pithora of Prithvi Raj Chauhan as the early cities of Delhi. But Chauhan’s defeat in 1192 C.E. at the hands of Shahabuddin Ghori is recorded as the day when “Hindu \textit{hukuumat} (rule) of the city ended” for good, and as the “blessed day from which point on Muslim control was established at Delhi.”\textsuperscript{37} It is important to emphasize here that such remarks were not crude expressions of Muslim triumphalism, or of rancor towards Hindus. They merely express, in matter of fact manner, the widely held belief of the state as Muslim, and of its

\textsuperscript{35} For a few representative examples see H.M. Elliot’s & John Dowson’s \textit{The History of India as Told by its Own Historians: The Muhammad Period} part ii and iii. (Calcutta, 1875). Some specific examples would be \textit{Burhun-ul-Futuh} whose descriptions are available on pp. 25-28, part. 2, and \textit{Farhat-un Nazairin}, pp. 11-12, part iii.

\textsuperscript{36} Morza Sangeen Beg’s, \textit{Saïr-ul-Manaaizil} trans. from Persian to Urdu by Sharif Hussain Qasmi, (Delhi, 1982). The book was originally written in c. 1827.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Op. cit.}, 145-46
capital Delhi, as a Muslim center. Indeed, that there was nothing necessarily sectarian about such beliefs may be gauged from the fact that many non-Muslim historians too, shared these views.

So the consciousness that Delhi had a grand imperial past, and the consciousness that it was a Muslim imperial past had come down to the nineteenth century. But the remembered glory of Delhi’s past did not merely, or even primarily, pertain to the city’s Islamic imperial antecedents. Delhi’s personality, and its place within a wider world was also determined by its stature as Hazrat-i Dehli (Reverend Delhi)—a sacred place, particularly, though not exclusively, for Muslims within and outside the Indian subcontinent. Already by the fourteenth century one finds chroniclers such as Al Minhaj Bin Siraj and Shams Siraj Afif using the epithet hazrat (reverend) — normally reserved for mystics and noblemen — for the city of Delhi itself. The fourteenth century poet administrator Amir Khusrau, believed to be the author and composer of many famous qawwaales (sufi devotional songs), that are sung for sufi saints even today, also spoke of

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38 For a fuller discussion of the Muslimness of the Sultanate and Mughal states at the level of norm, and of popular perception, see Harbans Mukhia, “For Conquest and Governance: Legitimacy, Religion and Popular Culture” in The Mughals of India (Oxford, 2004), pp. 14-72. Mukhia also makes the interesting point that the Akbar Nama, written under the rule of that archetypical model of "syncretic culture," the emperor Akbar, departs from the practice followed by the usual histories. The Akbar Nama traces Akbar's lineage not to Muhammad and the Caliphs but to Adam. “From the groove of Islam he [the emperor] was placed within the frame of a more universal history.” See Ibid, p. 17. For a longer and very sophisticated discussion on the subject see Muzaffar Alam's The Languages of Political Islam in India, c. 1200-1800 (Delhi, 2004).

39 See for instance 'Tazkira of Anand Ram Mukhlis' trans., ed., H.M. Elliot& J. Dowson The History of India By its Own Historians, Vol. VIII, p. 88

40 See for instance Minhaj Bin Siraj’s, Tabaqat...pp. 171, 172, 174, 179 and Shams Siraj Afif’s Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi (Calcutta, 1891), p. 22.
Delhi in terms of profound devotion. To him Delhi, the city of his preceptor Nizamuddin Auliya, was holier than Mecca. “Delhi,” he said, “the refuge of faith and equity/Delhi is the garden of paradise/May its prosperity be long lived/If Mecca happens to learn about this garden/It may circumambulate around Hindustan”.  

Here again an important factor in the elevation of Delhi to this venerable status was the destruction of other great Islamic cities such as Samarqand, Bukhara and Baghdad by the Mongol invasions of Central Asia, Iran and the Middle East. Delhi became a place of refuge for Islam. Here the religion still flourished, the name of the Caliph was still mentioned in Friday sermons and it was displayed on coins. But above all else, Delhi became hazrat Dehli because of the many sufī saints who came and settled here. Delhi became famous as a city of charismatic Muslim mystics.

Starting with Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1235), Delhi was “blessed” by the presence of a series of brilliant sufī saints such as Nizamuddin Auliya (d. 1325), Nasir ud Din Chiragh Dehlavi (d. 1356), and Khwajah Baqi Billah (d. 1603). But who were these sufī saints? And why did they become so important to Delhi?

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41 See R. Nath and Faiyaz Gwaliari, *India as Seen by Amir Khusrau in A. D. 1318* (Jaipur, 1981), p. 120

42 See pp. 2-3 above.
The *sufi* saints mentioned were orthodox (*ba-sha’ra*) Muslim mystics from the Chishti order. They were defenders of Islam, and committed to the ideal of increasing the ranks of the “faithfuls.” Yet, despite the saints’ fidelity to their religious mission, their appeal transcended religious boundaries. Their personal piety, charity, perceived miracle working powers and their preference for a style that was both more accessible, and accommodative of religious difference, won them a large following amongst the masses, including the non-Muslims. This popularity with the masses and their religiosity made the saints attractive to the early Muslim sovereigns of Hindustan. The early Muslim sultans were struggling to establish their rule in a land where the overwhelming majority of the population was non-Muslim. The narrowly juristic interpretation of the *sharia* (Muslim law) by the *ulema* (Muslim religious scholars) who were guardians of juristic

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43 There are four main *sufi* orders in India: Chishtis, Suhrawardis, Qadri and Naqshbandi. Among these, the Chishti order has the reputation of being the most liberal with its shrines open to people of all faiths.

44 Both Muzaffar Alam and Raziuddin Aquil have argued that in celebrating the “syncretic” style of certain *sufi* saints (such as Bakhtiyar Kaki, Nizamuddin etc.), historians of “composite culture” have sometimes been guilty of romanticizing their liberalism. Both have emphasized that while such (*ba-sha’ra*) saints probably had a broad appeal among different sections of people, and may have borrowed or shown an interest in the techniques and austerities practiced by Hindu *yogis* (saints), and may themselves have endorsed practices that the orthodox *ulema* objected to (such as the practice of *sama*—devotional singing leading to a trace like state), ultimately they too “highlighted the finality and truth of their own faith.” While they “believed that an infidel or non-believer (*kafir*) could be a monotheist and a Unitarian, and that all religions were in essence the same, they deemed it their duty to show others the path of Islam, which in their view was the straightest, smoothest and safest way to the truth.” Also their discourses with Hindu mystics were quite often held in the spirit of religious disputation and competition, meant in the final analysis to establish the superiority of Islam. Sufi literature also reveals that the most catholic of Chistiyya sufis (such as Nizamuddin Auliya) were not “averse to the idea of conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, either directly at the hands of a leading *pir* (saint), or through a long process of Islamic acculturation in localities made sacred by the shrines of medieval saints.” See Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India, c. 1200-1800* (Delhi, 2004), pp.151-168; and Raziuddin Aquil, op. cit., pp. 42-3.
sharia, offered little practical guidance to Islamic sovereigns.\textsuperscript{45} Thus the Sultans sought to cultivate sufi mystics. The latter’s support helped to legitimize the Sultans’ rule in the eyes of Muslims, and made it more palatable to non-Muslims as well.

As a result, with masses flocking to them, and Sultans sometimes courting them, the early Chisti sufis of Delhi achieved a very high stature. Much like the sultans, charismatic sufis (not just in Delhi, but all over the Muslim world) were also seen as rulers. They were rulers of the spiritual realm as the sultans were of the temporal one. And like temporal rulers who controlled specific territories, sufi saints too were associated with particular wilayats (territory/ domain). If a saint was a popularly revered one, his wilayat became intrinsically associated with him in public imagination. The saint was seen as the protector and guardian of his wilayat and the wilayat was believed to prosper by his blessings (barakat). The first three saints of the Chishti order in Delhi were charismatic men who made Delhi “the foremost sufi centre” in South Asia, and came to be seen as guardians of the city.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{45} The rigidly doctrinaire stance of the ulemas of early Sultanate Delhi and their inability to tailor their advice according to circumstance and context is revealed in the following incidence narrated by the chronicler Ziauddin Barani: The Sultan Illtutmish (r. 1211-36) was approached by a group of the leading ulemas of Delhi, early in his reign. These theologians exhorted him, as a pious Muslim Sultan, to act according to the dictates of the Sharia and to offer to the Hindu population of his realm the choice of “Islam or death”. This put Illtutmish in a quandary. He could neither practically give in to the demand of the ulemas, not could he summarily set it aside. So he thought it best to dissimulate. Illtutmish replied that since Hindustan had just been occupied and the Muslims in the land were so few compared to the Hindus present in overwhelming numbers, that they were no more than “salt in a dish.” Offering ‘death or Islam’ to the majority would only invite trouble. But in a few years’ time when the numbers of Muslims would have grown, he would put the recommended choice before the Hindus. Ziya nud-Din Barani, Sahifa-I Na ‘t i-Muhammadicf., Alam, Languages of Political Islam...p., 83

Several famous stories/traditions emphasize the special relationship between Delhi and its sufi saints. These traditions were first recorded in Sufi hagiographical literature, but gained wide currency even outside sufi circles. Stories about the “foundation” of Delhi, about the tussles between the sufis and sultans, where the sultans’ power and pride came to naught, gained wide popularity. They became part of the oral archive of the city. They were handed down generation to generation and played a role in deepening the sense of Delhi as a sacred place blessed by charismatic saints and mystics.

The fourteenth century Siyar al-awliya, considered the most trustworthy account of the Chishti order and the medieval Chishti khaanqaah life, records what may be called a “foundation story” about “Islamic” Delhi.\(^{47}\) The account goes that Rai Pithaura, or Prithviraj Chauhan, the Hindu ruler of the territory of Ajmer (of which Delhi was a part) was unhappy at the presence of the saint Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer. On one occasion Prithviraj did something that annoyed Moinuddin greatly. The saint’s jalaal (anger) was incited, and he prophesized: “We will seize Pithaura alive and hand him over to the army of Islam.” Soon enough Muhammad Ghori marched out of Ghazna and defeated Prithviraj in the battle of Tarain and laid the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate.\(^{48}\) It is said that this event greatly enhanced Sheikh Moinuddin’s prestige in public eye, and his khalifaas (lieutenants) fanned out to spread the message of their order to wilayats.

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\(^{47}\) The Siyar al-awliya was written by Mir Khurd, a disciple of Nizamuddin Awliya. Annemarie Shimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, p. 356.

\(^{48}\) Mir Khwurd, Siyar al-Auliya ed., Chiranjilal (Delhi, 1885), pp. 45-47; cf., Alam, Languages...pp. 155-56.
(territories) they were assigned. The wilayat of Delhi was assigned to Bakhtiyar Kaki, who came as a representative of Moinuddin Chisti and became the patron saint of Delhi.

Another particularly celebrated story is about Nizamuddin Awliya (‘friend of God’), the successor of Bakhtiyar Kaki, who was said to have an especially strained relationship with the Sultan Ghiyas-ud-Din Tughluq (d. 1325). Some Sultans courted the sufi saints, but some were jealous of their power or intolerant of them. Such situations gave rise to stories that emphasized how pious, simple, saints brought over-mighty, haughty rulers to their knees. Such stories served to underline that the saints’ authority over their territories was greater than that of the Sultans. Thus the tradition goes that the Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq was returning to Delhi from a campaign in Bengal. He issued orders that Nizamuddin Auliya must leave the city before his return. The Sultan drew closer to the gates of Delhi city, and when Sheikh Nizamuddin was informed about the Sultan’s near approach he stayed put in his hospice, merely saying “hunuuz dehli dur ast” (Delhi is still far)--meaning thereby that Ghiyas-ud-din was still a long way away from Delhi. Ghiyas-ud-din, as it turned out, never did make it to Delhi. He was killed in an accident, right outside the city gates. The saint thus achieved “victory” over the all-powerful Sultan without so much as lifting a finger!49

Another famous tradition pitting sheikh and sultan concerns Sheikh Nasiruddin (the successor of Nizamuddin Auliya) and the brilliant but eccentric sultan—Muhammad-bib-Tughluq. Muhammad bin-Tughlaq is notorious in history as the Sultan who launched several impractical schemes. One of these was his decision to shift his capital from Delhi in the north, to Tughlaqabad in the South of India. When shifting the capital, the Sultan did not just move the administrative and imperial establishments to the south. He also ordered the entire population of Delhi to abandon the city and move to Daulatabad. He was not appeased, it is said, until he saw “neither smoke nor light emerging from the city.” Yet, however much he tried to intimidate, there was one lamp in Delhi that Muhammad Tughlaq could not snuff out: this was at the khanqah (hospice) of Nasir ud-din (the successor to Nizam-ud-din Auliya). Nasir-ud-din hereafter came to be called “Chiragh-i-Dehli” or the “lamp of Delhi.” Soon enough the Tughlaqabad experiment failed and people began to return to Delhi. Nasir-ud-Din’s khanqah then became the nucleus for the re-generation of the devastated city.50

Delhi’s fall to the “armies of Islam”, the accidental death of a Sultan outside the city’s gates, and the transfer of capital from Delhi to Daulatabad etc. were all important events in the city’s history. The linking of these (as also several others), in oral traditions, to Delhi’s sufis, enhanced the latters’ prestige. But it also created a distinctive history of the city and its Muslim community. It presented a past for Delhi in which, at seminal moments, the Almighty’s presence was made manifest through the actions of his saintly representatives. In this historical tradition the local was combined with the Islamic moral universe, making Delhi an important Islamic city.

50 K.A. Nizami, The Life and Times of Sheikh Nasiruddin Chiragh (Delhi, 1991)
For several centuries after the fourteenth, many sufis continued to make Delhi their home, adding to the city’s sacredness. While not many saints in subsequent periods could rival the charisma of the city’s first Chistiya sufis, the “Hazrat Dehli” reputation continued to hold. This was possibly on account of the belief that when saints passed away, they passed their charisma to the land they were buried in. As a result the barkat (blessing) of saints long dead was still believed to nourish the land. But Delhi’s reputation for sacrality also benefited from the Mughals’ special reverence for the Chishti sufi order.

The early Chishti saints had sometimes been courted by sultans but they had themselves always lived austere lives, and maintained their distance from the ruling powers. With the Mughals (1526-1857), however, the relationship between the rulers and Chishti sufis became very close, particularly from the period of the third Mughal Emperor—Akbar (1556-1605). With three of the five most charismatic Chishti sufis buried in Delhi, the city, even though it was not the capital, was bound to gain importance as a sufi center of pilgrimage. The Emperor Akbar visited the city in 1576, and paid respects at the tombs of

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51 Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond (New York, 2002), p. 4
52 It was in the house of a sufi saint that Akbar’s heir apparent Jehangir, was born. In gratitude, Akbar built a beautiful sufi dargah in his new capital Fatehpur Sikri (Agra). When Jehangir grew up he adorned Ajmer, the city of Moinuddin Chishti, with beautiful white marble buildings. The close association of the Chishti sufis with the Mughals is attested to, in many stories of Akbar and his successors. See Annemarie Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam (Carolina, 1975), p. 360.
53 The five great Chishti sufis were Khwajah Moinuddin Chishti (d. 1236), Khwajah Bakhtiyar (d. 1235), Baba Farid Ganj-shikar (d. 1266); Khwajah Nizamuddin Auliya (d. 1325) and Khwajah Nasiruddin Chiragh Dehlvi (d. 1356). Of these, Bakhtiyar Kaki, Nizamuddin and Nasiruddin lie buried at Delhi.
great holy men and *sufis*. A sixteenth century text, *Haft Iqlim* (lit. seven climes)--a work on different cities within each of the seven climes into which the world was believed to be divided, describes the distinctive characteristics of various cities. When discussing Delhi, under the “third clime”, the author Ahmed Amin Razi locates the city’s distinctiveness in its impressive architecture and the “intimate association of *sufis* with the city”.

Thus in the sixteenth century Delhi was already an important *sufi* center in Hindustan. But in the seventeenth century, Delhi’s reputation as a *sufi* center, particularly its reputation as a Chishti *sufi* center, went up several notches. Unfavorable political conditions in the Ajmer region had made access to the *dargaah* of South Asia’s foremost Chishti saint, Moinuddin Chishti, very difficult. As such, even more pilgrims flocked to Delhi, where the other great Chishti *sufi* masters were buried. Not only did pilgrim traffic into Delhi increase, Chishti Sufism itself revived in the city.

Under the charismatic presence of Kalimullah Jahanabadi (1650-1729) the Chishti order in Delhi attained the heights it had earlier under the fourteenth century saint Nizamuddin Auliya. Kalimullah was one of the foremost *sufis* of his times and certainly the most influential Chishti *sufi* of the seventeenth century. He wrote a number of treatises (such

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55 Sunil Sharma, ” ‘If There is Paradise on Earth, it is Here’: Urban Ethnography in Indo-Persian Poetic and Historical Texts” in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500-1800* (Durham, 2011), p. 244
as *Kashkul-i-Kalmi*), which are considered masterpieces of *sufi* thought. The Sheikh commanded great respect and reverence in all sections of the society including among the Mughal royal family and the nobles of Empire.\(^5^8\) His *khanqah* at Delhi was a large and influential *sufi* institution. Sheikh Kalimuthah Jahanabadi’s spiritual legacy at Delhi was carried forward by Shah Qutbuddin, Maulana Fakhruddin, and Kale Sahib. All these saints were well known charismatic teachers, they had reputations for piety, ability to confer *barkat*, and were deeply revered by the common population at Delhi, by the successive *badshahs*, and by other royals.\(^5^9\)

The enduring appeal of the Chishti *sufis* of Delhi is evident from the manner in which Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki’s and Nizamuddin Auliya’s tomb complexes, which originally came up in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, continued to receive the veneration and attention of devotees right up to the mid-nineteenth century. Signs that the Chisti order had revived in Delhi in the late seventeenth century is attested to by numbers of notables who chose to be buried next to these saints after this date. The Qutub Sahib complex (around Bakhtiyar Kaki’s tomb) at Mehrauli in particular seems to have become, by the eighteenth century, the favored final resting place for Mughal royals, and for nobles from outside Delhi.\(^6^0\) The Qutub complex also became the venue for the most

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\(^{58}\) Ibid., pp. 296-304.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., pp. 296-298 and 306-308.

\(^{60}\) Bakhtiyar Kaki died in 1235 and Nizamuddin in 1325. In the area around the Nizamuddin *dargah*, the poet Amir Khusrau was buried there (14\(^{th}\) c.), the tomb over his grave was added in 1588, and then repaired in 1605. Jahanara Begum (d. 1681), the favourite daughter of Shahjahan, and the emperor Muhammad Shah Rangila (1719-48) are buried within the same (Nizamuddin) complex. Two nobles of Akbar’s court (16\(^{th}\) c.) Atagah Khan and Adham Khan were also buried in mausoleums in the vicinity of *dargahs* of Nizamuddin and Qutb Sahib (Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki). In the Qutub Sahib complex, i.e. in the environs of Bakhtiyar Kaki’s tomb three Mughal Emperors-- Bahadur Shah (1707-1712), Shah Alam
popular public celebration of nineteenth century Delhi—the Phoolwalon ki sair. An act of thanksgiving that transformed into a full-blown annual fair—the celebration symbolized Delhi’s relationship to its patron saint. High and low, from the emperor and royal family—with their elephants and horses and fine equipages, to the commoners on foot, processed to the southern suburb of Mehrauli, to offer a fan made of flowers at the grave of Bakhtiyar Kaki. This was followed by three days of celebrations and festivities in which there were performances by dancers and musicians, by acrobats and mimics and a whole host of other entertainers. The wealthy stayed in the holiday homes they had built at Mehrauli, and the ordinary folk in roughly raised tents or under trees, during the three days of non-stop festivities. In thanksgiving and in merry making the emperor and commoner came together, every year, to the city’s guardian saint.  

There was thus a bond of long standing between Chishti sufis and the city of Delhi. But the Chishtis were not the only sufis to grace Delhi. From the eighteenth century Delhi also saw a series of very charismatic Naqshbandi sufis, and although Naqshbandiyya is a sober order, theoretically opposed to artistic performances, especially music, in Delhi the eighteenth century Naqshbandi saints had a great role to play in the development of Urdu poetry as well as music. Shah Gulshan, Khwajah Mir Dard and Mirza Mazhar Jaanjaanan II (1759-1806) and Akbar II (1806-1837) lie buried, as do many other members of the Mughal royal family. The Rohilla nawab Zabita Khan and the Nawabs of Jhajjar and Loharu are also buried at Qutub Sahib. For details on Bakhtiyar Kaki and Nizamuddin dargahs see Dr. Tanveer Ahmad Alavi (ed.), Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Asar-us-Sanadeed (Urdu Academy, Delhi, 2000), pp. 289-90, 305-06, 329-330; Stephen P. Blake, Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India1639-1739 (Delhi, 1993), pp. 152-153; and Shama Mitra Chenoy, Shahjahanabad: A City of Delhi, 1638-1857 (Delhi, 1998), p. 25  

61 Farhatullah Beg, "Phoowalon ki Sair" in Mazaaameen-i-Farhat (Hyderabad, 1927); and Munshi Faizuddin, Bazm-i-Aakhir (Delhi, 1986), ed., Kamil Qureshi, pp. 94-100. The Bazm-i-Aakhir was first published in 1885.
were famous Naqshbandi poet saints of Delhi. And apart from saints affiliated to big orders such as Chishti and Naqshbandi, Delhi was also home to a whole range of other Muslim divines. Shah Wali-allah, for example, was a sufi, a scholar of Islam and a widely respected teacher who tried to bridge the theological differences between the Chishtiyyas and the Naqshbandiyaas. Shah wali-allah’s seminary—the Madarsa-i-Rahimiyya—was one of the most celebrated centers of Muslim theological studies in Hindustan. Wali-ullah’s descendants for two further generations were eminent scholars, teachers of religion and revered sufis whose guidance was sought by people of all classes within Delhi. In Delhi therefore, it was not so much about one or another sufi or saint, but the sufi tariqah (the sufi way) as a whole, that held sway. Delhi had become so widely popular for its mystics and divines, that from the eighteenth century onwards, it came to be called Bais Khawajah ki Chaukhat or The Gateway to Twenty-two Divines.

So the memory of Delhi as an imperial center, as a city of charismatic sufis and scholars of Islam, and as a great center of Muslim/ Indo-Muslim culture, had survived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But it is one thing for a place to have a certain

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63 Barbara D. Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900 (Princeton, 1982), Chapter 1, pp. 16-45; S.A.A. Rizvi, Shah wali-Allah And His Times (Canberra, 1980).

64 These would include Wali-allah’s sons—Shah Abdul Aziz, Shah Abdul Qadir, Shah Rafuuddin; his grandson Shah Ismail; and grand son-in-law Shah Abdul Hai. For them see Farhan Ahmad Nizami, op. cit. and S.A.A. Aziz, Shah Abdul Aziz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemic and Jihad (Canberra, 1982).

65 Chaturman Rai “Chahar Gulshan”, fol. 33b cited in Blake, Sovereign City, p. 29
history, and another for this history to live on in public memory. How does this kind of history endure? What explains its hold on popular imagination?

Here I think four things were important: the humoral view of the world which dominated pre-modern thinking; a strong culture of orality; belief in pedigree as a marker of social worth; and remembrance and memorialization of greatness as a way for Dilliwallahs to make claims for jobs and positions when they had to leave Delhi to look for work elsewhere. I take up each of these briefly.

In ethical treatises across traditions (i.e. Indo-Muslim and Hindu), in histories and geographies, and amongst the populace at large, the humoral conception of lands and peoples was common from at least the fourteenth century onwards. It was believed that lands and peoples were composed of a mix of humors (air, water, land, fire), which imparted to them their unique characteristics. And both lands and peoples were believed to have the capacity to modify each other’s humoral composition. In this complex of ideas, a place’s past was deeply intertwined with its present. Charismatic saints, learned men of religion, great kings, erudite scholars etc. were believed to permanently touch their lands with their greatness. They were able to pass on their unique essences to their lands/watans and the barkat (blessing) so imparted to a place continued to positively affect the humors of future generations of those living on that land. 66 Thus, a place like Delhi, whose land was dotted with great monuments and the mausoleums of potentates and famous mystics, came to be viewed as great and sacred, as Hazrat Dilli or Dilli

66 C.A. Bayly, Origins of Nationality in South Asia: patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India (Delhi, 1998), pp. 12-20
Shareef (Delhi-- the noble). Merit was earned through association with such a place. Depending on their abilities, people commissioned works of charity in the city, repaired its holy places, made arrangements to be buried in its land, or at the very least visited it for pilgrimage.

If greats of the past could positively affect the humors of a place in its present, misdeeds of the present, that tarnished the dignity of the past greats, could also disbalance the humors and create catastrophes. It was thus that as late as the 1920s, there were people in Delhi who believed that Delhi had declined, and the house of the Mughals had fallen, because of the affront to Nizamuddin Auliya by one of the later Mughals. Muhammad Shah Rangila, the later Mughal in question, is often seen as the Mughal emperor whose moral weaknesses pushed the Mughal Empire into terminal decline. But according to this particular Delhi legend, Rangila contributed to the ruin of his house not because of his morals (or the lack of them), but because he had himself buried between Nizamuddin Auliya and the saints’ most favorite disciple, the fourteenth century poet-administrator, Amir Khusrau. By separating the saint from his beloved disciple Rangila had incited the saint’s jalaal (just anger) and called ruin upon his dynasty and city.

Thus a humoral view of the world facilitated a close enmeshment of the past and the present. But so did the strong culture of orality that dominated pre-modern worlds, and possibly more so the pre-modern Islamic worlds. There is significant evidence to show that orality was still strong in nineteenth and early twentieth century Delhi. It was not

67 For the special place of orality in Islamic cultures see S.R. Faruqi’s 'Introduction' in Ab-e Hayat pp. 22-23
unusual to have people speak of events and people going back many generations, and to
speak of them with an immediacy that belied their pastness. Dramatic, calamitous events
would be recorded in verse form and this oral knowledge would be transmitted form
generation to generation for hundreds of years. Thus for instance, the chalisa famine was
remembered even a hundred and thirty years after it had happened; and historians were
able to collect songs about an early eighteenth century riot, remembered as the “shoe
sellers’ riot”, as late as the end of the nineteenth century. There was, it seems, a strong
impulse to record every news-making event and changing trend in verse. Thus songs
about the exploits of dandyish Englishmen, about the Revolt of 1857 and about Indo-
Muslim gentlemen seduced with western ways were all composed, remembered and

68 Thus, for instance, British officers gathering data for the Imperial Gazetteer encountered
many villages around Delhi in 1908 whose respondents dated the re-foundaation of their
villages in whole or part form this famine of 1782-83. See W.W. Hunter, Imperial Gazetteer
of India, Vol. XXI, (oxford, 1908), p. 318

69 William Irvine mentions this in his Later Mughals. This work was published as a
completed volume in 1921-2, but Irvine had collected his materials throughout the later
decades of the nineteenth century and had completed writing most of it by 1907. For the

70 William Fraser, one of the early British administrators in Delhi, had a reputation for over
assessing revenue and for pleasure seeking. Unlike the recent, rather sentimentalized
portrayal of him as a “White Mughal”, his reputation in native society was less than
flattering. His womanizing ways were parodied in songs that were well known to
Dilliwallahs until the late nineteenth century. Thus Server-ul-Mulk recalled the following
song about a Mewati lady, Serven, whom Fraser had “kept”:

From Calcutta far started Frazin [Frazier]// With Blessings of the five saints
Leave off sitting on the peerhi [ottoman] my Serven fair// And learn to sit on an easy chair.
For Fraser as a “White Mughal” (a white man assimilated into Mughal ways), a “type” of
European who, according to William Dalrymple, thrived in Delhi until the 1830s, see
William Dalrymple’s, “Transculturation, Assimilation and its Limits” in Margrit Pernau (ed.),
The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, The colonial State and Education Before 1857 (Delhi,


72 Sheila Dhar’s in her Tales of Innocents, Musicians, and Bureaucrats writes about her
grandfather who at the turn of the twentieth century had gone to study law in England.
Sheila Dhar’s grandfather came from a Mathur Kayashtha family—a group considered very
close to Indo-Muslim culture. Thus his journey to England in his youth—a sign of his
westernization-- caused quite a flutter in his community. It became the subject of many
sung by Dilliwallahs till the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Likewise, poetic compositions had very long lives with people familiar with and able to recite from the works of poets many, many generations removed from them. In a society where history as public memory was orally sustained, the past seemed less distant. And if this was the case with public history, personal history was even more orally transmitted, and still more intimately known.

An old style Delhi gentleman, from the early twentieth century, could speak almost in story fashion of his ancestors going back three hundred years. Likewise, when Maulana Azad was in jail as a political prisoner of the British in 1922, he was able dictate his family history, recorded as Khwud Nawaishit, to his friend, without the help of shijras (family trees) or any other papers or documents. And to discuss, for example, episodes from the life of a forefather, who was a contemporary of seventeenth century ruler Jehangir, and speak of intellectual debates the forefather had been part of, with complete engagement and familiarity.

But perhaps there is more to this fixation with history and legacy. People were aware of their legacy, and remembered it not only because they could (because they had good memory), or because their conception of time was not entirely sequential (so the belief

songs and ballads—the themes of which were sometimes grossly improper. One song referred to how he had learnt to ease himself standing up instead of squatting on the roadside like other natives. The sarcastic refrain of the song went that this was indeed a lesson worth crossing the seven seas for! See Sheila Dhar, Tales of Innocents, Musicians, and Bureaucrats (Delhi, 1995), p. 5.

73 See Chapter Three below.
74 Agha Haider Hussain Mirza, ‘Mere Chutpan ki Dilli’ in Delhi College Magazine: Special Dilli Number (Delhi, 1959), pp. 164-69
75 Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Khwud Navisht, pp. 37-39
that the present does not just come *after* the past, but the past and the present are interlinked), but also because pedigree was so important in this world. Being able to establish pedigree was definitely a way of making claims to property, but it was also possibly the most important way of establishing one’s social worthiness in the pre-modern world of Delhi. Being a stand alone, self-made person carried little meaning in the traditional culture of Delhi. Worthiness alone did not bring social status. Pedigree did.

The poet Ghalib and Zauq were contemporaries who were considered poetic rivals. Zauq was the Emperor’s *ustad* (teacher) in poetry and the poet laureate too, while Ghalib did not have steady patronage and always struggled on that account. Yet Ghalib, who came from an aristocratic family of Turkish warriors—men of sword who served the Mughals and then the British—was always able to pour scorn on Zauq (the son of a Mughal trooper), for his humble background. The Ghalib-Zauq poetic rivalry animated the cultural scene of mid-nineteenth century Delhi. There were face-offs between the two in the court as well, and on one such occasion when the two had gone back and forth several times boasting (in poetry form) about their compositions, Ghalib sought to close the contest with a mock apology, but not without taking a dig at Zauq for his humble ancestry and his claim to fame on the strength of poetry alone. Ghalib says—

The ustad of the badshah, [am] I am minded to contradict him,

Such courage, such guts, such strength, I lack

For hundreds of generations the profession of my ancestors has been soldiering
Shaairi [poetry] alone is not a source of status for me.\textsuperscript{76}

Thus people had to establish pedigree—imaginatively create a sharif (noble) genealogy for themselves if they did not have one, or assiduously maintain and preserve it if they did. So if people could speak from memory of their family trees going back hundreds of years it should be no surprise because in every family, family-trees or shijras were important documents—very carefully maintained. Speaking of the fixation with shijras, Mirza Asmatullah Beg says: “just as the Arabs value the family trees of their horses as they value life, in the same way Dilliwallahs, before and after the Revolt, in the matter of their family trees, were two steps ahead even of the Arabs.”\textsuperscript{77} People saw themselves as parts of silsilaas (chains)- they were one link in a chain that went back many, many generations. And silsilaa bandi (lit. chain-making) applied not only to familial relationships, but also to all kinds of ustad-shagird (teacher-pupil) relationships as well. Gharaanaas (lit. families) or silsilaas were spoken of with respect to one’s spiritual preceptors, but also in reference to one’s teachers in music, and sometimes also in other arts such as calligraphy or painting, or even the more mundane ones such as kite-flying!\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{76} The couplet quoted is from Frances Pritchett’s site on Ghalib’s verses \url{http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ghalib/ghazindex_ye_2.html}?

For Ghalib’s pride in his ancestry see Altaf Hussain Hali, \textit{Yaadgaar-i-Ghalib}, pp. 27-28

\textsuperscript{77} This was in an essay that Asmatullah beg wrote on his cousin Farhatullah Beg—a famous early twentieth century Urdu litterateur. Asmatullah mentions the shijrah fixation in reference to Farhatullah’s father—Ghiyasuddin Beg. See Muhammad Tufail ed., \textit{Nuqoosh: Shaksiyat Number 47-48}, January (Lahore, 1955)

\textsuperscript{78} To see how silsila bandi was established see Sayyid Ahmed Khan’s \textit{Asar-us-Sanaaadeed} for the manner in which individuals—whether they were sufis, or hakims (doctors) or musicians or calligraphers-- are introduced. Who they trained with or learnt from is treated as an integral part of who the individuals were. See \textit{Asar} part IV “About Delhi and the People of Delhi” pp. 453-691; Also see Sayyid Yusuf Bukhari Dehlvi ‘Dilli ki Patangbazi’ (Kiteflying at Delhi) in Shamim Ahmed ed., \textit{Marhum Dilli ki Ek Jhalak}, pp. 107-117
This fixation with pedigree was possibly one of the reasons why Delhi’s long history was also remembered and quoted. And pedigree had come to be especially important in the late eighteenth century. In this period many new urban centers such as Lucknow and Hyderabad had emerged to rival Delhi’s pre-eminence as a city. They were centers of more stable polities and had richer resources than late eighteenth century Delhi. But they lacked Delhi’s charisma, and the heft that came from a centuries’ long history. This was a fact that Dilliwallahs never failed to rub in. The city’s history was a key element in continuing to claim greatness and uniqueness for it in times when Delhi was no longer a great imperial city. And doing so—emphasizing Delhi’s greatness—was important, for there were many who sought greatness for themselves by association with Delhi. In the eighteenth century, when Delhi became one among many other cities where opportunities for patronage and service became available for service-gentry elites, members of this elite often left to seek greener pastures outside the city. For such Dilliwallahs, proclaiming Dehlvi greatness was a way to make claims to opportunities in new places.

It seems therefore that Delhi, up to the mid to late nineteenth century, was still a very pre-modern place. The humoral conception of the world, the strong culture of orality, and a sense of deriving worth from the past, all still dominated the world-view of the

79 For Delhi’s transition from capital city of a vast empire under Shahjahan in the seventeenth century, to center of a small regional kingdom in the late eighteenth century see Chapter Two pp. 7-32
80 For a specific example of this see p. 32 Chapter Two below for Sayyid Insha’s comments on non Dilliwallahs as mere “rustics” who having learnt a thing or two about correct speech and comportment from the Dilli people had begun to harbor the mistaken notion that they too were Dilliwallahs.
81 For the many Dilliwallahs who sought employment and patronage outside Delhi in the eighteenth century and found a warm welcome in the new kingdoms see Chapter Two below.
Dilliwallahs, and played a role in keeping the Dehlvi past alive in peoples’ memories. This intermingling of Delhi’s pasts with its present in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries proved crucial to the articulation of a unique city identity, or the expression of Dehlviyat, in at least two important ways. One, it gave Delhi a well-developed personality in the broader imagination as a Muslim cultural center. And two, a glorious history became a distinction that was uniquely Dehlvi, and set the city apart from the many new urban centers that had emerged in the eighteenth century.
Chapter Two: Emperors and the City

On September 1, 1863, the poet Ghalib, responding to a friend’s query about mystics of one particular sufi khanqah of Delhi, wrote in a tone rich with sarcasm:

“Bountiful master- do you think that Delhi still prospers, and that the Fort thrives and that the Empire continues, that you ask about the writings of Hazrat Shaikh [Kalimullah Jahanabadi] and for news of Sahibzada Shah Qutub ud Din, son of Maulana Fakhruddin...?¹ “The cow ate all this up, and the butcher killed the cow, and the butcher died on the road.”... All these things lasted only so long as the King reigned.”² [Emphasis mine.]

¹ These are names of famous sufi saints of Delhi from the Chistiya silsila. Shaikh Kalimullah Jahanabadi was born in Shahjahanabad (also known as Jahanabad or Delhi) in 1650, and was a sufi of great renown. Kalimullah wrote a number of treatises that were considered masterpieces of eighteenth century sufi thought. The allusion in the letter above is possibly to these writings that had been preserved in his family until 1857 [See S.A.A. Rizvi, History of Sufism in India Vol. II (Delhi, 1983), pp. 296-98]. For generations after his death in 1729, members of the sheikh’s family had lived in the area around his tomb, on the road between the Red Fort and the Jama Masjid, making up the population of a “good sized village.” After the Revolt of 1857, the British reduced this entire area to a “barren waste.” The Shaikh’s tomb was left standing in open ground, and his descendants, who had been keepers of his relics and his writings, either fell to British bullets or were scattered to different places of India. See Khurshidul Islam and Ralph Russel ed., and trans., Ghalib 1797-1869: Life and Letters (London, 1969), p. 291. The shaikh’s spiritual mantle at Delhi was adopted by his disciple Maulana Fakhruddin. Fakhruddin was succeeded by his son Ghulam Qutbuddin in 1785, and latter by his son, Ghulam Nasiruddin (alias Kale Sahib) in 1817. All three enjoyed widespread popular respect in Delhi as divines and learned men, but possibly part of their “clout” in Delhi also came from the fact that many royals, including the last three Badshahs, were amongst their followers. See Rizvi, History of Sufism...Vol. II, pp. 306-8.

In the quote above, Ghalib linked the fates of some famous sufi divines and establishments of Delhi with the Mughal Emperor and Fort. But at other places he makes a still broader connection—between the Emperor and Delhi’s “citi-ness,” its very “being” itself. In December 1859 he wrote, “Five things kept Delhi alive-- the Fort; the daily crowds at the Jama Masjid; the weekly walk to the Jumna Bridge; and the yearly fair of the flower men. None of these survives, so how could Delhi survive? Yes, there was once a city of that name...”\(^3\) (Italics mine.) At yet another place he says, “By God, *Delhi is no more a city*, but a camp, a cantonment. *No Fort*, no city, no bazaars, no water courses...”\(^4\)

Therefore, for Ghalib, who had lived in Delhi for more than half a century, the Fort and the King/Badshah were central to Delhi and its city-ness. And he was not alone in seeing things this way. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Dilliwallahs wrote several accounts that recalled the world of pre-Revolt Delhi in very similar terms. “Memorializing texts” project the last Emperors and members of the royal family as tragic, but popular figures, and Delhi under them as a “ravaged garden experiencing its last spring.”\(^5\)

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3 Russel and Islam, *Ghalib*, p. 224  
4 *Ibid.*, p.252. The Red Fort as a physical landmark continued to be part of the Delhi landscape even after the Revolt, though the British had blown up large sections inside the Fort. While the Mughal Emperor, his vast extended family, and their numerous servants (along with some Company officials) had lived at the Fort before the Revolt, afterwards it became a place for British military barracks and officers’ messes. So when Ghalib laments that Delhi now has “no Fort” the lament is for the Badshah and the Royal family, and even more for the Fort as a living institution in communion with the city.  
5 I am using the phrase “memorializing texts” to distinguish them from texts that can be credited with relatively greater historical facticity—genres such as memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, etc. The memorializing texts were a mix of fact and fiction. Most of those writing them were born in the late nineteenth century. So they were one generation removed from the world they were describing. Almost all writers such as Rashid al Khiri in *Naubat-i-Panj Roza*, Sayyid Zamir Hasan Dihlvi in *Dilli ka Aakhiri Deedar*, Farhatullah Beg in
In other Dilliwallah accounts, mostly memoirs, biographies and autobiographies, authors such as Ghalib, Abul Kalam Azad, Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Maulvi Zakaullah show a more complex approach towards the Mughal royals at Delhi. Ghalib, to a degree, and Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Maulavi Zakaullah even more, far from being sentimental loyalists of the Mughals, were great admirers of the British and saw the latters’ rule as a definite improvement over the rule of the Mughals. These authors are sometimes quite critical of the last Mughals. Yet even these “critics” acknowledge that the Mughals, while they were around, were central to Delhi’s socio-cultural life, and played a role in

*Dilli ki Aakhir Shama* and *Bahadur Shah Zafar aur Phoolwalon Ki Sair* and Khwaja Muhammad Shafi in *Dilli ka Aakhir Sambhala* say that they have based themselves on true accounts handed down to them by their own family members, or by “elders” within the wider Delhi community who had seen the pre-1857 world with their own eyes. These “true accounts” were then presented in dramatized fashion to inspire nostalgia, and elicit the greatest sympathy in the readers for the world of pre-Revolt Delhi and for the Badshahs who ruled then. The memoirs and biographies are on the whole more sober accounts. But they often corroborate what the more melodramatic, memorializing, ones say.

6 Thus, for instance, Ghalib, whom I have quoted above, was no sentimental loyalist of the Mughals. Well before the Revolt he fully understood that the Mughals’ time was up. He even advised Saayid Ahmad Khan (in a Preface to a book written by Sayyid Ahmad) to focus on the rising power on the horizon—the British, rather than wasting his time over the spent glories of the Mughals. At many places in his letters Ghalib also expresses great admiration for British innovations such as post and telegraph, and for the city they had developed at Calcutta. He also freely sought the patronage of British benefactors, and even wrote and sent an ode to “mallika Victoria,” hoping for some reward. During the Revolt itself, Ghalib had in all likelihood stayed aloof from the upheaval. Maulvi Zakaullah’s case is even more illustrative. He was in British employment at the time of the Revolt and all through his life he remained a loyal British supporter, retaining a special devotion for Empress Victoria in particular. He wrote many works of history celebrating British triumphs, and the “boons” they had brought to India. He was severely critical of the “moral corruption” and “vacuuousness” of the Mughal Royals. Yet, in his *Tarikh-i- Hindustan*, even he concedes the brilliance of the culture inspired by the last Mughal ruler of Delhi. For Ghalib’s view see *Life and Letters*; for Maulvi Zakaullah’s *Taareekh-i-Hindustan* (the Sang-i-Meele edition which combines volumes 8, 9 and 10), pp. 346-47, and C.F. Andrews, *Zakaullah of Delhi*. For Sayyid Ahmad see *Asar-us-Sanaadeed* and his *Sirat-i-Faridiya.*
holding its “traditional” culture together. Delhi felt both alien, and in some ways poorer without them.

Yet this is not how Later Mughals have been remembered in mainstream English language histories. Their story is told as part of larger narratives of either the crumbling Mughal Empire, or of the growing British/East India Company’s colonial one which supplanted it. Historiography largely focuses on the Later Mughals’ politico-administrative incompetence and their financial woes- features seen both as causes and effects of the weakening and unraveling of the Mughal Empire.

But my project approaches Delhi not as city within an empire (whether the crumbling Mughal one, or the growing British one), but as a locality which became the focus of an intense patriotism, echoed in the writings of Dilliwallahs from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. And in the making of this local patriotism and identity, the

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7 By “traditional” Dehlvi culture, the texts imply the culture of pre-1857 Delhi. While most authors agree that this culture declined after 1857, the notion of when it started to develop is fuzzier. While some thought of Dihlvi culture as a mostly Mughal culture that developed from the period of Shahjahan onwards, many traced a longer pedigree for it, starting with the onset of Muslim rule in the city in 1192 A.D.

8 The epithet “Later Mughals” is used to denote all Mughals who ruled in the post Aurangzeb phase. Since Aurangzeb, the last emperor to be recognized as a “Great Mughal”, died in 1707, all Badshahs who followed were dubbed “Later Mughals”.

9 See, for example, the works of Willam Irvine and Jadunath Sarkar. They have used eighteenth century Persian chronicles to piece together their account of the Later Mughals in which the personal “weaknesses” of individual emperors, the factionalism of court politics, the financial crisis at the Mughal center, the erupting rebellions throughout the Empire, and the frequent mutinies of unpaid soldiers are highlighted.

10 A celebration of Delhi, of the city’s glorious past, the excellence of its language—Urdu, the fame of its scholars, theologians, mystics, poets and hakims, and belief in its status as a tehzeebi markaz or “school of manners” for the rest of Hindustan may be seen in a variety of different works. Among those originally produced in Urdu, or those whose Urdu or English
Later Mughals—symbolic heads of a declining Empire—and their imperial establishments, had a crucial role to play. This chapter will consider the role of the Later Mughals in fostering a *Dehlvi* identity in two parts. The first part concerns Delhi and its Emperors in the eighteenth century—a period when the nearly two hundred year old Mughal Empire, fragmented to such a degree that by the last decade of the century, the politico-administrative unity of the Empire was all gone, and a few square miles of territory in and around Delhi were all the Mughal Emperor could call his own. The next part deals with the nineteenth century, which opens with the British takeover of Delhi in 1803. Mughal emperors now became pensioners of the British, and their administrative powers receded further: from the city, they were now to confined merely to their Fort.

**Mughal Rulers and Delhi in the Eighteenth Century**

For *Dehlvi* patriotism to emerge, a localization of Delhi, the one time grand “imperial metropolis,” was an important step. This localization came with the dismemberment of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century. As the Empire foundered, imperial nobles and adventurers began to set up independent polities in different parts Hindustan, and to found new urban centers such as Farrukhabad, Aaonla, Hyderabad, Murshidabad and Lucknow.\(^{11}\) The emergence of these new eighteenth century cities (unlike the cities such as Calcutta and Bombay that developed under colonial influence) did not represent a

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translators are available would be Mir Taqi Mir's *Zikr-i-Mir*, Insha Allah Khan Insha's *Darya-i-Latafat*, Qateel's *Haft Tamasha* from the eighteenth century. Sayyid Ahmad Khan's *Asar-us-Sanaaded*, Muhammad Hussain Azad's *Ab-i-Hayat* and *Diwan-i-Zauq*, Sayyid Ahmad Dihlvi's books on the Urdu language, Farhatullah Beg's *Aakhiri Shama*, etc. are all nineteenth century works.

\(^{11}\) For a brief overview of the new towns set up by Muslim noblemen and adventurers in the eighteenth century see S.A.A. Rizvi, *Shah Wali-allah and his Times: A Study of Islam, Politics and Society in India* (Lahore, 2004), pp. 181-187.
break from the Indo-Muslim culture that had developed under the Mughals. Elements of
the Mughal administrative system, and of the courtly culture elaborated under them, were
adopted at the new centers as well. But the founders of new polities, conscious of tying
themselves more closely to the regions under their control, also encouraged aspects of
local culture. As such, the eighteenth century saw the emergence of several regional
cultures. Treatises recording and celebrating the customs and art forms of different
regions came to be written, as were works in the genre of “biographies of cities,”
detailing political histories of regional dynasts, and incorporating accounts of important
places (such as mosques, palaces, etc.) and of the notables such as theologians, jurists,
and saints of different cities. Regional languages such as Punjabi, Oriya, Bengali,
Marathi and Urdu came into their own. With the emergence of regional polities and
cultures, while Delhi still had its long imperial legacy, and also the ‘imperial city’ tag
(because the Mughal emperor still resided there), it came to stand less for the Empire and
more and more only for itself. What the Bangash Pathans were to Farrukhabad, the
Awadh Nawabs to Lucknow, Murshid Quli Khan’s descendants to Murshidabad, and
Nizam-ul-Mulk’s family to Hyderabad, the Mughals came to be for Delhi. As new

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12 Thus for instance Lachmi Narayan Shafiq Awrangabadi wrote *Maathir-i-Asafi* which was a
political history of the Nizams of Hyderabad. In 1799-1800 he also wrote a description of
Hyderabad, its mosques, palaces and gardens. Likewise *Tarikh-i-Farrukhabad* of Sayyid
Muhammad Wali Allah is a detailed description of the exploits of the Rohilla nawabs of
Farrukhabad. The *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, a history of Gujrat from the earliest times to 1761, was
written between 1757-61. It contains descriptions of the city of Ahmedabad, its
administration system, and of the *sufis* and *sayyids* buried there. The author Murtaza
Hussain Bilgarami served several masters: Saadat Khan and Safdarjang, nawnwabs of Awadh;
Muhammad Qasim Khan, governor of Bengal; Nawab Ali Quli Khan, a poet and leading noble
of the Mughal emperors Ahmad Shah and Alamgir II; and Nawwab Ahmad Khan Bangash of
Farrukhabad. His *Hadiqat-i-Iqlim* of 1776 was a social and political history of the various
cities he had resided in. In *Tarikh-i-Hindi*, aside from political history, Rustum Ali furnished
a detailed listing of the theologians, teachers, jurists and mystics who had enriched the
socio-cultural life of Shahjahanbad. See Rizvi, *Shah Wali-allah and His Times...* pp. 14-16, and
Chander Shekhar and Shama Mitra Chenoy (ed.), *Muraqqa-e-Dehli* (Delhi, 1989), p. 36.
kingdoms emerged and provinces melted away from the Mughal center to become independent, the once peripatetic Mughal emperors became confined to Delhi. Delphi became more than ever, the Emperor’s city. It was molded by his presence and distinguished by association with him.

Thus, some of the very processes that are symptomatic of the decline of the Empire in the eighteenth century also fed the emergence of distinctive local cultures in different regions. I will look at the later Emperors not to see how they epitomized and contributed to the decline and degeneration of Empire. Rather, my purpose will be to see how they contributed to giving the locality of Delhi a distinctive identity and culture.

**Historicizing the Emperor-City Relationship**

The city and the Emperor were conjoined from the start. Shahjahanabad, the Delhi under consideration in this study, was created by Royal fiat. Emperor Shahjahan ordered the shifting of his capital from Agra to Delhi in 1639. The Emperor, his family, and his nobles poured in immense wealth, and commissioned some of the grandest buildings, markets, mosques and garden complexes of Shahjahanbad. The new city was formally

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13 Stephen Blake has calculated that between 1556 to 1739 Mughal emperors spent nearly 40% of their time in camps, on tours often lasting a year or longer. Stephen Blake, *Shahjahanbad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India 1639-1739*, (Delhi, 1991), p. 97

14 Over the ages, on one triangular patch of land by the river Jamuna, rulers had chosen several different sites to build capital cities for themselves. Most of these cities such as Qila Ari Pithora, Tughlaqabad, Khiri, Dimpahan, Firozabad and Shahjahanabad, were either contiguous and overlapping. And while each of these cites began with separate names, in time they all came to be known by the name “Dehli”. For a brief account of the different cities of Delhi, see Kaul, *Historic Delhi* pp. 19-59
inaugurated with dazzling pomp ten years later in 1649. Shahjahanabad, literally “Shahjahan’s abode,” was so fundamentally shaped by the Emperor and his nobles that it has been called the “sovereign city” or the “Emperor’s City.” Such a description takes no account of the existing impulses and institutions that the new Delhi—Shahjahanabad--built upon, or the numerous “organic”, non-imperial, ones through which it expanded and grew. Royal fiat had not produced a city out of thin air. Rather Shahjahanbad had incorporated parts of an older Delhi (Firozabad), keeping several of its markets, shrines and populations intact. Even before Shahjahan moved his capital here, Delhi was at least a modest city, propped up by trade, and by its position as an important place of pilgrimage for the Muslims. It also had a formidable reputation as an imperial city par excellence. Shahjahan certainly drew on these existing strengths of Delhi when he decided to move his capital here. Yet, it was only after Shahjahan made Delhi his capital that the city rose from being a middling city into a world famous metropolis, whose grandeur were remarked upon in accounts left by travellers. Shahjahanbad, as one writer observes, was one of the “largest and most populous cities in the world; a place of

15 For the early development of Shahjanabad (lit., “Shahjahan’s abode”) under Shahjahan and Aurangzeb, and the idea of Delhi as the “sovereign city,” see Stephen P. Blake Shahjanabad: The Sovereign City Mughal India, 1639-1739 (Delhi, 1991)
16 Among devout Muslims of the subcontinent it was believed that pilgrimage to the dargahs of famous Chistiya sufis of the imperial Delhi-Agra region had to be undertaken in a particular manner: pilgrims had to first pay their respects at the dargah of Hazrat Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (Delhi), then at the dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya (Delhi), after that at the dargah of Hazrat Muiuddin Chisti of Ajmer and then come back to the dargahs of the first two saints again. See Chander Shekhar and Shama Mitra Chenoy, Muraqqa-i-Dehli (Delhi, 1989), p. 6.
17 For a detailed exposition of these ideas that contradict Blake’s idea of Shahjanabad as “sovereign city” see Shama Mitra Chenoy, Shahjanabad: A City of Delhi, 1638-1857 (New Delhi, 1998)
peace and beauty, a place that lacked none of the amenities of urban life. Neither Constantinople nor Baghdad could compare with it.”  

But Shahjahan had lived in Delhi barely ten years before he was dethroned by his son Aurangzeb and exiled to Agra. Delhi continued as Aurangzeb’s capital, but in 1679 Aurangzeb left for the Deccan (south India) to lead the military campaign that he was to wage in that area for the remaining twenty-eight years of his life. Throughout his absence, Delhi remained the capital of the Mughal Empire, but without the emperor in residence, the city’s fortunes sank. The seventeenth century French jeweler Jean de Thevenot noted, “The city appears to be a desert when the king is absent. If there have been 400,000 men in it when the king was there, there hardly remains the sixth part in his absence.”

So Delhi lost some momentum when Aurangzeb left for the Deccan. This Emperor, seen as the last of the great Mughals, died in 1707. Historians see this date as the point when the Empire started to descend into chaos. A series of fourteen emperors occupied the Mughal throne between 1707 and 1857. The period 1707-1757, when twelve of the

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19 Surendranath Sen ed., *Indian Travels of Thevenot & Careri* (Delhi, 1949), p. 61. Apparently, Delhi suffered so much neglect in this period that in 1798 Aurangzeb had to write to one of his high ranking nobles at Delhi asking about the extent of damage to the city's buildings and gardens, so he might make allocations for their repair. See Blake *Sovereign City...*p. 68.  
20 Delhi was not reduced to complete inconsequence in Aurangzeb’s absence. See below page  
21 Their names and dates are as follows: Bahadur Shah I (1707-1712); Jahandar Shah (1712-1713); Farrukh Siyar (1713-1719); Rafi-ud-Darjat (1719); Rafi-ud-Daulat (1719); Nekusiyar (1719); Muhammad Ibrahim (1720); Muhammad Shah 'Rangila' (1719-1748); Ahmad Shah Bahadur (1748-1754); Alamgir II (1754-1759); ShahJahan III (in 1759); Shah
fourteen later emperors came and went, was particularly volatile: nobles became king
makers, and king makers and their factions held sway at the imperial court until such time
as a new faction supplanted them. The rise of emperors’ and nobles’ factions were
usually preceded and followed by much intrigue on the part of actors involved, the killing
and blinding of rivals (including those who had been rendered ex-emperors), the seizing
of fallen nobles’ houses and properties, the drawing up of troops, and skirmishes, and
even open warfare between factional partisans. Each time a new political revolution
was in the offing, rumors and fear would reign at the imperial capital Delhi. With life

Alam II (1759-1806); Akbar Shah II (1806-1837); Zafar (1837-1857). The four rulers
between Farrukhsiyar and Muhammad Shah Rangila came and went in such quick
succession in the years 1719-1720 that official histories of the Mughal period do not recognize their terms. And while Muhammad Shah came to the throne only in 1720, histories record his reign as beginning immediately after Farrukh Siyar’s in 1719.

22 The trend of ruthless annihilation of all those who had been in opposition to them, and of
blinding and killing all potential rivals in the royal family begins with Jahandar Shah and his
wazir Zulfiqar Khan. Prior to them Mughal emperors were not known to show such
indiscriminate viciousness in settling old scores. For Jahandar Shah’s vengeful acts after
coronation see William Irvine Later Mughals, vol. i, pp. 188-190. For a repeat of the same
under Jahandar Shah see ibid., pp.248-255.

23 Though there are many instances, possibly the most infamous instance of factional
fighting comes from the year 1752 when Imad-ul-Mulk’s and Safdarjang’s troops, the
former’s from inside the walled city and the latter’s from the old city suburbs in the south,
pummeled each other for several months. This civil war—as it is remembered in histories—
caused great misery at Delhi. Several rounds of forced contributions were levied on the
Delhi citizenry, flow of grains from the suburbs was disturbed causing prices to rise sharply
inside the city, and worst of all, the Old Delhi suburb, which had supported sizable
populations for hundreds of years, was reduced to complete waste and rubble. See Siyar-ul-
Mulk (1837-1857), Zafar (1837-1857). The four rulers

24 It seems some of the most hectic rumor-mongering happened during the reign of
Farrukhsiyar. While he owed his ascent to the top to the Sayyids from Barha—Hussain Ali
Khan and Abdullah Khan (also called Qutub-ul-Mulk)-- he soon tired of the two brothers
whom he had rewarded with the top ranks in his bureaucracy, that of wazir and mir bakshi.
While the emperor was scared to come out in the open against his powerful ministers, he
intrigued with other nobles ceaselessly and aggressively to put them out of his way. Matters
came to such a pass that every time Farrukhsiyar left on a hunting expedition to the
outskirts of Delhi with his close ministers, the city would become abuzz with rumors that
the Emperor would take this opportunity to finish off his wazir (Abdullah Khan). See Later
and property both under threat, merchants would shut the markets, and people with anything to lose would barricade themselves in their houses. The capital’s streets, especially the two famed ones, Chandni Chowk and Faiz Bazar, also saw some very gory and gruesome processions, either by successful armies (such as the one that came back with the Sikh leader Banda Bahadur and his followers as captives), or more frequently by royal candidates who succeeded to the throne. Farrukhsiyar’s first entry into the imperial capital from the Delhi Gate of the city, after gaining the crown, was spectacular in its gruesomeness. Mirza Muhammad and Khushal Chand were eyewitnesses who recounted with horror how along with the artillery and kettle drums and the tossing of gold and silver coins amongst the throngs gathered to watch, the new emperor made his entry seated on an elephant followed by the head of the previous emperor--Janahndar Shah--mounted on a bamboo pole, and the headless body of Zulfiqar Khan (the wazir of Jahandar Shah), tied to the tail of an elephant and dragged through the streets. The ill effects of infighting and financial disarray were exacerbated by invasions from outside forces. The Persian Nadir Shah’s invasion of 1739, and the Afghan Ahmad Shah Abdali’s of 1757, when the city was sacked and looted, caused great misery to town folk at Delhi.

On the whole, chroniclers of early eighteenth century Mughal history present the picture of an imperial city often held hostage by fear and uncertainty, wild rumors, the staging of violent spectacles, factional fights amongst nobles, and above all, frequent mutinies of angry unpaid soldiers in the armies maintained by different nobles, and by the Mughal

26 For a brief account of these invasions see Three Mughal Poets, pp. 15-23.
Emperor himself. Delhi in the eighteenth century was not a stable, tranquil place. As the capital of a foundering Empire, the strains that were pulling the Empire asunder, notably the problem of finding liquid capital for the payment of troops, were very visible at Delhi.

Yet, unlike the Empire whose capital it was, Delhi was not a declining city in all of the eighteenth century. When poets such as Mir and Sauda lamented the decline of Delhi in the late eighteenth century and remembered its past glories—the city’s beautiful buildings and gardens, its famed mehfiils, the excellence of its language, the perfection of the arts there, and the profusion of the discerning and generous who patronized artists—they were not merely going back to Shahjahan’s time. They were alluding to the Delhi they had seen with their own eyes, the Delhi that had developed under the reign of

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27 The problem of unpaid soldiery is visible from the time of Muhammad Shah Rangila itself. After Nadir Shah’s 1739 invasion, the Emperor’s elite shamshir dagh troops were disbanded without clearing a year’s pay, causing a soldiers’ riot. Likewise, Amir Khan, a favorite courtier of Muhammad Shah died, leaving his soldiers’ fourteen months’ pay in arrears. The soldiers refused to allow his burial until their claims were satisfied. When Amir Khan’s affects were auctioned, the jewels alone were able to fetch 50 lakhs. But the worst episodes of rioting soldiery came from the period of Alamgir II (r. 1754-1759) who succeeded Ahmad Shah to the throne after the latter was blinded and murdered by the machinations of Imad-ul-Mulk the man who became king maker and wazir to Alamgir II. Imad-ul-Mulk had fought a bitter civil war on the streets and outskirts of Delhi against Safdarjang, nawab of Awadh and wazir of Ahmad Shah in 1752. Imad was able to prevail in the civil war but only by using up almost all the sizable inheritance he had received from his father, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and by buying Maratha help at a ruinously costly price. Imad’s real problems started after the battle was won. Erratic imperial revenues that still flowed in, had to be diverted towards paying the harassing Marathas their dues, and no money was left to pay anyone else, including the imperial troops and servants. When payments became overdue for over two years, soldier mutinies became a regular feature at Delhi. See Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire* v. I, p. 13; G.S. Cheema, *The Forgotten Mughals* pp. 215-6; and Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire* v. II, pp. 16-33.
eighteenth century Mughal badshahs, starting from the time of Jahandar Shah, and lasting almost to the period of the badshah Ahmad Shah (r. 1748-1754).²⁸

Through much of the eighteenth century, almost up to c.1760, Delhi was a populous and bustling metropolis. And possibly the biggest factor contributing to Delhi’s dynamism in the period was the sedenterization of the Mughal at Delhi. The sedenterization of the Mughal at one place was a departure from the norm. Earlier Mughal Emperors had frequently changed their capitals, besides being highly peripatetic rulers as well. For politico-administrative reasons they would inveterately roam their realm in tent cities fighting wars and quelling rebellions. By one estimation, between 1556 to the early eighteenth century, Mughal emperors spent nearly forty percent of their time in camps, on tours lasting a year or longer. With imperial camps being up to 300,000 souls large,

²⁸ One example each from Sauda and Mir will give the reader some sense of how Delhi’s misfortunes had come to be lamented by the late eighteenth century. Sauda, in an oft quoted passage written around 1761 A.D. said: “How can I describe the desolation of Delhi?...The Mosques at evening are unlit and deserted...vermin crawl in the places where in former days men used to welcome the coming of spring with music and rejoicing. The lovely buildings which once made the famished man forget his hunger are in ruins now. The once beautiful gardens where the nightingale sang his love songs to the rose, the grass grows waist high...Jahanabad [Delhi], you never deserved this terrible fate, you who were once vibrant with life and love and hope,... you for whom men afloat upon the ocean of the world once set their course as to the promised shore, you from whose dust men came to gather pearls. Not even a lamp of clay burns where once the chandelier blazed with light.” See Ralph Russel and Khurshidul Islam ed., Three Mughal Poets (London, 1968), pp. 67-68. A famous verse from Mir, written in 1782, touches upon some of the same themes:

There was a city, famed throughout the world/
Where dwelt the chosen spirits of the age /
Delhi its name, fairest among the fair/
Fate looted it and laid it desolate/
And to that ravaged city I belong/ (Ibid., p. 260).

For a more detailed idea of the views of these poets see Three Mughal Poets and C.M. Naim ed., Zikr-i-Mir
the movement of Emperors caused great urban instability.\textsuperscript{29} But all this changed in the eighteenth century.

Starting with Jahandar Shah in 1712, until the Mughal line ceased to exist in 1857, the Mughals never had another capital. Barring a brief period (1761-1772) when Shah Alam lived in exile outside Delhi, successive Emperors, for a span of nearly a century and a half, continued to reside in Delhi. By the time Muhammad Shah \textit{Rangila} came to the throne in 1718, the Emperor hardly ever left the city, even to make short trips to other places. The city and the Emperor became conjoined in ways they had never been before.

This was a move with momentous significance for Delhi. “Metropolitan instability”, or the waxing and waning of the city in the presence or absence of the Emperor’s establishment—the feature that had impacted the destinies of previous Delhis, and also of Shahjahanabad, became a thing of the past.\textsuperscript{30} If Delhi shrank in Aurangzeb’s absence, it swelled in the eighteenth century when the royal establishment made the city its permanent home. War weary nobles and their retinues, who had been campaigning for long years in the Deccan under Aurangzeb, flocked to Delhi as successive emperors made it their home.\textsuperscript{31} Even as the Empire began to come apart from very early in the eighteenth century, the Mughal emperor remained the magnet who continued to attract the

\textsuperscript{29} Stephen Blake, \textit{Shahjahanabad...}, p. 97
\textsuperscript{30} Percival Spear, ‘Delhi—The “Stop-Go” Capital: A Summation’ in Robert Frykenberg ed, \textit{Delhi Through the Ages: Selected Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society} (Delhi, 2002)
\textsuperscript{31} Satish Chandra, ‘Cultural and Political Role of Delhi, 1675-1725’ in Frykenberg ed., \textit{Delhi Through the Ages}, p. 107
politically significant and ambitious from all over Hindustan. In fact, as Jadunath Sarkar explains, having a foothold in the capital may have become even more important in the dynamic circumstances of the eighteenth century. Every soldier of fortune, ambitious noble, and upstart, who managed to corner a principality or carve a little kingdom, still needed the imperial *farmans* (orders) to legitimize his spoils in the public eye. Mughal emperors, no matter how ineffectual they became, continued to be seen as the only valid fount of authority in India throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus, though Emperors were deposed and even murdered by powerful, overbearing nobles, the latter were not able to set aside the claims of the Mughal family to the throne at Delhi. In fact public sentiment at the capital Delhi was usually very hostile towards the *Badshshah Gards* or the fellers of the kings. The murdered emperor Farrukhsiyar passed into the city’s oral memory as “*shahid*” (the martyred one), and the nobles who were responsible for his murder were heckled and harassed on Delhi’s streets by the city’s common folk, especially by beggars and mendicants, for a long time afterwards. Nobles well understood that however puppet like, a Mughal alone would make an acceptable emperor. Therefore, while they could not be set aside, the Mughals had to be controlled and manipulated. For this presence in Delhi, and proximity to the court, became vital for all who aspired to power in Hindustan in the eighteenth century.

Thus, Mughal nobles, and agents of quasi-independent powers such as the British, the Maratha and the Bangash Pathans, etc. all congregated at Delhi. The numbers of large

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32 The Jats in the Delhi-Agra region were rebelling even under Aurangzeb while he was away in the Deccan. The Sikhs had become a serious problem in the Punjab, the Marathas were restive in the Deccan, and several Rajput states were exerting against the Mughal center. Amongst the provinces Hyderabad under the Nizam by 1724, Awadh by 1732, and Bengal by 1743 had become independent.
haveli establishments that housed prominent notables along with their families, and vast numbers of servicemen and soldiers, running into several thousands, rose sharply in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{33} The men and materials needed to supply the needs of these notable establishments would have been immense. By some accounts a population that may have fallen to less than 200,000 in Aurangzeb’s absence had burgeoned to 500,000 by 1740.\textsuperscript{34} This figure represents a substantial increase on the highest numbers to which Delhi’s population had supposedly risen even in the hey-day of the empire in the seventeenth century!\textsuperscript{35}

The notables did not confine themselves to building just their own dwellings. They also built public edifices such as mosques and rest houses, established institutions of learning and embellished the tomb complexes of the sufi saints for which Delhi was famous all over Hindustan—with many even among the non-Dilliwallahs often choosing to be

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\textsuperscript{33} Shama Mitra Chenoy gives details of sixteen large mansions from Shahjahan's time at Delhi. For the eighteenth century she mentions no less than than fifty such establishments. See Shama Mitra Chenoy, \textit{Shahjahanabad: A City of Delhi, 1638-1857} (Delhi, 1998), pp. 71-84. Some sense of the size of a "large mansion" may be had from Stephen Blake’s account of Shahjahan's Delhi. Blake states that great nobles’ mansions were so large as to be neighborhoods unto themselves, housing nearly 4000 men each! See Blake, \textit{Sovereign City}…pp. 87-8.

\textsuperscript{34} See P. Spear ‘Delhi—The “Stop-Go” Capital’ in \textit{Delhi Through the Ages}, p. 322. There were no official censuses of the Delhi population until the British takeover of the city in 1803. All estimates of population from previous periods are made on the basis of travelers’ accounts. Percival Spear’s calculations of the Delhi population under Aurangzeb are based on Thevenot’s account from \textit{Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri}. The figure of half a million for the eighteenth century is derived from L. von Orlich, \textit{Travels in India}, vol. II (London, 1845), p.4.

\textsuperscript{35} Using figures from various travel accounts Stephen Blake has estimated that Shahjahanbad had a population of nearly 375,000-400,000 until the time Aurangzeb left for the Deccan in 1679. According to Blake, the imperial camp (comprising the noble, princely and imperial households) contributed about 80 % of those numbers, and when the imperial camp moved to the Deccan the city was left with only twenty percent, or one fifth of its population. Blake’s calculations are not too much at variance from de Thevenot’s, who felt that Delhi collapsed to one sixth of its numbers when the Emperor left for the Deccan. See Blake \textit{Sovereign City}…p. 67.
Association with Delhi redounded to the credit of the noble men and women involved. And through their continued engagement with Delhi, they city’s built environment expanded and grew.

Thus, even though the fixing of the imperial camp at Delhi may have been a sign of imperial weakness, the very fact that the Mughal emperor became sedenterized in the city meant that the city could develop as a stable urban center over a long span of time. Delhi’s physical form and social routines stabilized in the eighteenth century into patterns that came to be recognized and celebrated as distinctively Dehlvi later.

One important social routine that appears to have developed in Delhi in the eighteenth century was that of the mela or fair on the steps of the Jama Masjid. Jama Masjid, the chief congregational mosque of Delhi, was built in 1639. Seventeenth century accounts of Delhi, including those by travellers, make rich descriptions of the Jama Masjid. But it appears that as a social institution the masjid had grown in stature by the eighteenth century. The “steps” of the Jama Masjid—the huge stairways to be found on three sides of the mosque (which was raised on a plinth)—became a distinctive institution of Delhi

36 Just a few examples of famous Delhi structures and institutions that were built in the early eighteenth century by nobles from outside of Delhi would be Ghaziuddin Madarsa, Bangash ka Kamra, Safdarjung’s tomb and Jantar Mantar. Nawab Safdarjung, when he died in 1757, was practically an independent governor of Oudh, apart from being the wazir of the Mughal emperor. Safdurjung died at his provincial capital Faizabad. His body was specially brought to Delhi to be buried in a grand tomb complex famous as Safdarjung’s tomb (See Monuments of Delhi vol. ii, pp. 190-94; for Bangash ka Kamra see Maulavi Zafar Hasan’s, Monuments of Delhi: Lasting Splendour of the Great Mughals and Others, vol. 1, p. 49; for Ghaziuddin’s Madarsa see Monuments of Delhi, vol. ii, p. 3; for Jantar Mantar, which was built by the Ambar Rajput chieftain Sawai Mansingh over two years’ continous stay in Delhi, see ibid., vol. ii, pp. 13-14. For the many people who chose to be buried in the tomb complexes of Delhi’s famous sufī saints see Chapter One, p. 14, f.n. 16.
life in the eighteenth century. Every evening there would be a near fair like (mela like) atmosphere on the steps of the great mosque with the congregation there of storytellers, animal fanciers, kebab sellers, male lovers, dandies etc. The early nineteenth century work Sair-ul-manazil speaks of them as such, and the mid nineteenth century Asaar us Sanaadid makes the most vivid description of the vibrant scenes that unfolded on the Masjid’s steps every evening.

Another urban routine that appears to have developed more fully in the eighteenth century, and with more direct imperial impetus, was Delhi’s link to Mehrauli. Mehrauli seems to have become the Delhiaallahs’ favorite suburb in the eighteenth century, where, on occasions throughout the year, the city’s people thronged for reasons of piety and revelry. Not only was the area’s water system revived, the later Mughal emperors also built gardens, and mosques in the area, and a surprisingly large number of them were buried in the vicinity of the tomb of the fourteenth century sufi saint Qutub-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki at Mehrauli. The last two Mughal Emperors, in particular, have a special relationship to the area. It is quite likely that this kind of interest taken in

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37 Seventeenth century accounts of Delhi, such as those of Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire, 1656-1668* (London, 1891) and Mannucí’s *Storia do Mogor: Or Mughal India 1653-1708* make no mention of activity on the steps of the Jama Masjid. Both these accounts do speak of the Jama Masjid itself—the chief mosque in the city, as also of the hustle and bustle of the *Khaas Bazaar* (the road linking the Jama Masjid and the Lal Qila), and of the Sadullah Chowk. But there is no description of the Masjid’s steps, of the type that one finds in later early nineteenth century accounts such as the *Sair* or the *Asar*.

38 See Sangeen Beg’s *Sair-ul-Manazil* (exact date unknown, but written before 1827), p. ; Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s *Asar*... pp. 272-278

39 For a large water works project inaugurated at Mehrauli in the 18th century see *Asar*, pp. 293-294. For building activities in Mehrauli by eighteenth and nineteenth century Mughals see Savita Kumari, “Imperial Architecture in the Late Mughal Period: Consideration of Site” in *Journal of History and Social Sciences*, vol. ii, issue ii, July-December 2011.
Mehrauli by the Emperors helped to popularize the suburb amongst the city folk at large. Mehrauli became the Dilliwallahs’ favorite destination for “taking in the air”, and remained so at least until the early decades of the twentieth century. 40 People who could walk the distance started their journey early morning, or late at night from Shahjahanabad (Delhi) so as to get to Mehrauli by the break of dawn. Bakhtiyar Kaki’s tomb was usually the first stop for the Dilliwallahs. But after paying their respects to the saint, people would spend the day visiting the gardens, the Hauz-i-shamsi (water reservoir) and a magnificent structure called the birka, which was set in a garden complex. Under the last two emperors many royals built residences there, as did the wealthy lalas of Delhi. Every year, for two months during the rainy season, the imperial establishment would move to the sylvan surroundings of Mehrauli and set up their camp there. When the emperors retired to Mehrauli for two months in an year, many of the royals also took built residences there. Also, it seems that powerless as they were, the last Mughals continued to do some administrative work until the very end and built structures such as a kotwali

40 Reverence for Bakhtiyar “Kaki” continued to be observed under the last Mughals: Shah Alam II, Akbar Shah Sani and Bahadur Shah Zafar as well. All three of these rulers made provisions for their tombs around Bakhtiyar Kaki’s mazaar. Also, Akbar Shah Sani started the practice of spending several weeks every year in the rainy season at Mehrauli, with his large family and servants in tow. When Akbar Shah inaugurated the pankha festival at Mehrauli in 1837, the suburb became the site for the biggest public celebration for the Dilliwallahs. The last Mughal, Bahadur Shah Zafar, built a new palace for himself at Mehrauli, and many members of his family, and of the wealthy classes at Delhi also built houses there. The pankha festival became bigger than ever under Bahadur Shah, with hundreds of thousands of people attending it during the three days it lasted. For Mehrauli and the pankha festival under the last two Mughals see Faizuddin’s Bazm-e Aakhir pp. 94-99 and Farhatullah Beg’s Bahadur Shah Zafar Aur Phool Walon ki Sair (Hyderabad, 1927).
(police station) and a kuchheri (court) at Mehrauli. The annual three-day festival, *Ploolwalon ki Sair*, was also held there from 1837 onwards.41

Thus, with the Emperor permanently in residence, the built environment of the city expanded, and the social routines and social geography of the city stabilized. Further more, the emperor’s presence meant that the city once again became the hub of a thriving, courtly, urban culture. Mughal royals, and the nobles who patterned themselves after the former, had always engaged in the patronage and upkeep of high art and culture. This trend had reached its apogee under Shahjahan when the expenses for maintaining the court had gone up fourfold, and the salaries of the nobles had to be doubled because of the “expensive display” that came to be expected from them.42 But Aurangzeb, whose reign had followed Shahjahan’s, was a champion of *suni* puritanism. He attempted to curb the lavish, expansive lifestyles of notables that had become *de rigeur* under Shahjahan.43 But after Aurangzeb’s death, later Mughals and their nobles, who had

41 For a flavor of what Mehrauli was like when the Badshsh was in residence, see Margrit Pernau and Yunus Jaffery (ed.), *Information and the Public Sphere: Persian Newsletters from Mughal Delhi* (Delhi, 2009), pp. 394-411. The Margrit Pernau book is a translation from Persian to Urdu of Persian newsletters from the Mughal Court. The Newsletters translated are from June 1810, 1825 and 1830. For Mehrauli during the *Phool walon ki Sair* see Farhatullah Beg op. cit.
43 When Aurangzeb was at Delhi he had turned his back on Shahjahan’s vast artistic patronage, and on his brother Dara Shikoh’s eclectic intellectual and spiritual explorations. It is believed that Aurangzeb banished music from the court, frowned upon painting as un-Islamic, saw poets as “purveyors of untruth,” and disliked sufi mysticism influenced by monism *(Wahad-ul-wajud)*. It seems however, that while he was away in the Deccan some of those who had stayed back in Delhi, including princes and princesses of the Royal family and a few nobles continued to offer patronage that kept liberal culture traditions alive at Delhi. In the Deccan however, where Aurangzeb campaigned for nearly the last three decades of his life, his legacy was stronger, and Aurangabad, Deccan, with its emphasis of theology, religious studies etc., emerged as a center of orthodoxy. See Satish Chandra,
chafed under the yoke of the late emperor’s orthodoxy, cast it aside. Delhi, which had never fully come under Aurangzeb’s spell, emerged now, in the eighteenth century, as a still more liberal and pluralistic center, imbibing many shia, Hindu, and local culture elements.  

The change in the nature of imperial preferences and styles became evident right after Aurangzeb’s death. While Bahadur Shah I probably had shia sympathies, under Farrukhsiyar, shia ritual practices, that had developed in the shia sultantes of the Deccan, came to Delhi. The practice of taking out tazias at Muharram began to be observed now, and marsiya khwani (the singing of poems in remembrance of the Prophet’s grandson Hussain) was also popularized. Jahandar Shah and Farrukhsiyar’s reigns also saw greater incorporation and encouragement of the local and Hindu element in Mughal high culture and courtly life. Efforts were made to mend relations with several Hindu Rajput rulers who had been alienated in Aurangzeb and Bahadur Shah I’s time. Not only was the Jizya (the poll tax on Hindu subjects) abolished on the recommendation of Rajput nobles, at the Emperor Farrukhsiyar’s wedding to a Rajput princess, several Hindu customs were openly incorporated, causing a lot of comment amongst the orthodox segments at Delhi. But perhaps the most significant sign of greater incorporation of Hindu customs and practices at the court was the compilation of Tuhfat-al-Hind (Gifts of Hind) for Jahandar

"Cultural and political role of Delhi, 1675-1725" in Frykenberg, Delhi Through the Ages pp. 110-113.
44 Rizvi, Shah Wali-Allah and His Times...pp. 97,
45 Ibid, p. 113
47 Later Mughals, vol. I, p. 305
Shah towards the end of the seventeenth century. The *Tuhfat* was one of the finest treatises on Hindu arts and sciences, containing particularly striking chapters on the Hindavi alphabet and on Indic traditions in music. What makes the *Tuhfat* more striking is that it was a text in the genre of ‘mirror for princes’, i.e., it was written with the explicit purpose of making prescriptions on the education of Mughal princes. ⁴⁸

Thus under Jahandar Shah (r. 1712-1713) and Farrukhsiyar (r. 1713-1719), the Mughal court had moved away from the orthodox style of Aurangzeb towards a more liberal, accommodating cultural style. But it was perhaps the twenty-eight years long and, within Delhi, largely peaceful reign of Muhammad Shah, that cemented Delhi’s standing as a center of a liberal, eclectic, even libertine culture.

In all his twenty-eight years of rule, though still *badshshah* of a substantial empire, Muhammad Shah hardly ever left Delhi, except to visit parks in the neighborhood of the capital, or to see the annual fair at Garh Mukteshwar, about a hundred miles east of the city. He also withdrew from most administrative responsibilities, spending most of his time within the harem and in artistic pursuits. Muhammad Shah, called ‘Rangila’, or ‘the colorful one’, was known for extreme refinement in dress and personal grooming, for his discerning patronage of arts and artists and for his pursuit of pleasure—of song, dance, poetry, female company and uninhibited merry making. He enjoyed his musical and

dance soirees dressed in ladies *peshwaz*.\textsuperscript{49} The emperor’s personality and the kind of culture he fostered are evident in the paintings from his atelier. Portraits show the Rangila emperor in exquisite clothing, bedecked with jewels, his eyes often *khol* lined and his eyebrows arched. Paintings also depict the Emperor hunting, enjoying animal combats, exuberantly celebrating the Hindu festival of Holi with women folk, relaxing in Mughal pleasure gardens, and making love.\textsuperscript{50}

But by the end of his life, particularly after Nadir Shah’s invasion in 1739, a kind of “deep melancholy” was said to have settled upon Muhammad Shah. The emperor began to frequent the company of *faqirs* (mendicants/holy men) holding long conversations on spiritual questions with them. And so strong was the tendency to follow trends set at the imperial court, that in this love of the *faqirs*, as in the love of the arts, the nobles emulated the *badshahs*. A contemporary noble commenting on the craze for *sufi* mystics that Muhammad Shah set off says: “his majesty gave Shah Mubarak the title of *burhan-ul-Tarikat*, Shah Badda that of *burhan-ul-haqiqat*, and Shah Ramz *Fasih-u-Bayan* and used to frequent their company. All the ministers and rich lords followed suit. Other people also imitated, so much so that the bazaar craftsmen in the villages of every province put initiates’ turbans on their heads and *taqdir* tunics on their backs, till at last even women took up the fashion.”\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{49} Rizvi, *Shah Wali-allah*...p. 179
\textsuperscript{50} For some online paintings of Muhammad Shah Rangila see http://www.mfa.org/search/collections?keyword=muhammad+shah
The Deccan nobleman Dargah Quli Khan who left an account of his four years’ (1739-1741) stay in Muhammad Shah’s Delhi attests to these twin facets of Dehlvi life: the passion for visiting sufis, faqirs (mendicants) and the mazaars (tombs) of holy men and women; and the passion for poetic and musical soirees. The two passions could also combine, with soirees of music, dance and poetry often held at sufi mazaars (tombs) and khanqaahs (sufi hospices). At these soirees, poets and/or musicians (instrumentalists, vocalists and dancers) would perform in an intimate setting for a mostly elite audience, most of whose members understood the nuances of classical music very well, and many of whom may have been accomplished musicians and poets themselves.52

It was in such a climate that many ‘villains’ of political histories, many of the worst scamsters of eighteenth century, and particularly Rangila’s Delhi, also emerged as great aesthetes and lovers of the saints and the arts. There were men such as Raushan ud daula (Turra baz Khan) who embezzled a lot of public money but spent a great deal of it building famous mosques, repairing graves of sufis and hosting public celebrations such as the elaborate arrangements he made for the urs of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki.53 There was the noble Amir Khan, derided in conventional histories as an inept administrator, and as a man who died with a massive fortune but left his soldiers’ pays in arrears. But this same Amir Khan, a great favorite of Muhammad Shah Rangila, was a man of great personal charm, ready wit, ability for extempore composition, and polished manners. He also had a reputation for never turning away a mendicant, and for spending lavishly on

52 Dargah Quli Khan’s Muraqqa-e Dilli, trans. and edited by Chander Shekhar and Shama Mitra Chenoy, (Delhi, 1989)
53 S.A.A. Rizvi, Shah Wali-Allah…pp.137-8. Raushan-ud-Daula built two famous mosques in Delhi which were named after him. One of the mosques was near the palace, and the other, including a madarsa, in the city’s main thoroughfare –Chandani Chowk.
the patronage of artists, learned men and poets.\textsuperscript{54} Even Imad ul Mulk, the \textit{wazir} who earned notoriety for murdering two emperors, and for never managing to find enough money to pay his troops, was an accomplished poet himself, a sponsor of great poets such as Sauda, and husband to a fine poetess of a wife—the legendary Gunna Begum.\textsuperscript{55} Nawwab Bahadur Jawid Khan is another example of the type of split personality one finds in the annals of eighteenth century Delhi history. Jawid Khan was a eunuch and a rumored lover of Qudasia Begum—the mother of the Emperor Ahmad Shah. He was also the real wielder of power, along with Begum Qudasia, in Emperor Ahmad Shah’s time. His proximity to the queen mother and the power he wielded made Jawid Khan an eyesore to old nobles who felt upended by him. It also inspired ridicule and the lowest kind of salacious gossip at Delhi with crude songs and stories about the eunuch and the queen mother being repeated and sung in the streets and alleys of the city.\textsuperscript{56} But Jawid Khan was also a builder of note—he constructed mosques and repaired tombs, and had among his protégés poets of the genius of Mir Taqi Mir. All these characters with their individual and collective efforts may have driven the Empire into decline, but they took Delhi’s cultural capital to a height that had perhaps never been attained before.

It is therefore not surprising that in the arts many distinctive styles emerged at Delhi in the eighteenth century. While Catherine Asher has spoken of a Late Mughal architectural style that blossomed in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Delhi\textsuperscript{57}, scholars are also

\textsuperscript{54} J. Sarkar, \textit{Fall of the Mughal Empire...v.I}, p. 10
\textsuperscript{55} Beale, \textit{Oriental Biographical Dictionary}, p. 143
\textsuperscript{56} G.S. Cheema, \textit{The Forgotten Mughals: A History of the Later Emperors of the House of Babar, 1707-1857} (Delhi, 2005), p.239
\textsuperscript{57} Catherine Asher, ‘Later Mughals and their contemporaries’ in Barnett ed. \textit{Rethinking Early Modern India} (Delhi, 2002)
beginning to speak of a distinctive style in painting that emerged in the same period. William Dalrymple and Yuthika Sharma have argued that despite volatility of the political climate, the atelier at Delhi continued to "produce works during and after the reign of Aurangzeb. Moreover, the courts of Bahadur Shah I, Jahandar Shah and Farrukh Siyar all fostered painters who developed their own distinguished palette utilizing a decorative and highly refined approach to figural representation."\(^{58}\) But in this, as in the arts, the apogee of aesthetic refinement and cultural patronage was reached under Muhammad Shah Rangila and celebrated artists such as Nidha Mal, Chitarman, Bhupal Singh and Kalyan Das were associated with his court.

Music too, which was possibly the greatest passion of eighteenth century Dilliwallahs, scaled new heights under the Later Mughals. According to Dargah Quli Khan music was "the most popular and pervasive form of entertainment practiced in all walks of life. It was patronized in the imperial court, in the establishments of the nobility, in the khanqahs of the living sufis, in the houses of the musicians and dancers, and on the streets and common places."\(^{59}\) Jahandar Shah and Muhammad Shah Rangila were particularly keen patrons of musicians. While gharaanas or "musical lineages associated with particular cities" came to be spoken of from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, most musical treatises see the eighteenth and early nineteenth century periods as

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\(^{58}\) From the web page of the exhibition "Princes and Painters in Mughal Delhi, 1707-1857". See [http://sites.asiasociety.org/princesandpainters/seat-of-the-kingdom/](http://sites.asiasociety.org/princesandpainters/seat-of-the-kingdom/). Two features that the authors point as distinctive about the early eighteenth century Mughal miniatures produced at Delhi are the use of the outdoor setting of the garden terrace as a space for meetings between emperors and nobles, and the softened treatment of the features of emperors—often portrayed with arched eyebrow and upturned eye.

\(^{59}\) Chenoy and Chandershekhar trans. and ed., *Muraqqa-e Dilli*, p. xxxii
seminal in the fusing of a unique Dehlvi gharaanaa and in furnishing it with its signature style and compositions.\textsuperscript{60}

But perhaps the greatest anchor to city identity that the eighteenth century created was a high literary kind of Urdu. Under Muhammad Shah Rangila, in 1724, the local language of Delhi—Dehlvi/Hindavi or Rekhta as it was called—came to be recognized as an imperial language—and poetry came to be composed in this language. Urdu's career as a literary language progressed very rapidly from here. In his \textit{tazkirah} (biographical dictionary) composed in 1754, Mir lists 103 poets, while Mushafi who wrote his account a few years later gives the names of 278 poets.\textsuperscript{61} Within a few decades of its recognition as a legitimate literary language at the Court, Urdu had produced great masters at Delhi such as Afsos, Mir, Sauda, Mir Hasan etc. This development was remarkable for the great departure it signaled from Mughal policy and practice in earlier times. The Mughals had traditionally encouraged literature in Persian, sometimes even at the expense of thwarting regional languages. But by the eighteenth century this trend was reversed and the local was now being encouraged.\textsuperscript{62}

This is not to imply that the court was able to establish Urdu's primacy by decree. The rise of Urdu at Delhi was a result of the language's embrace by the city's poets in what,

\textsuperscript{60} Vidya Rao, 'The Dilli Gharana' in Mala Dayal ed., \textit{Celebrating Delhi} (Delhi, 2010), pp. 124-143; Jeffrey Michael Grimes, 'The Geography of Hindustani Music: The Influence of Region and Regionalism on the North Indian Classical Tradition', unpublished PhD dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin, December, 2008, pp. 422-464; Katherine Butler Brown \textit{Dargah Quli Khan’s Strange Vision: Mughals, Music and Muraqqa-e Dehli}

\textsuperscript{61} Mir Taqi Mir, \textit{Nikhat-us Shuara} and Ghulam Hamdani Mushafi, \textit{Tazkirah-i Hindi} cited in Ishrat Haque, \textit{Glimpses of Mughal Society and Culture} (Delhi, 1992), p. 20

\textsuperscript{62}Muzaffar Alam, \textit{The Languages of Political Islam in India}, pp. 134, 148, 150
by some indications, was a nativist revolt against the foreignness of Persian. In all likelihood, the court endorsed a switch that was already beginning to be made by the city’s poets. After Vali Deccani’s Rekhtah poems became a rage in Delhi in 1724, the Badshah gave the language official recognition. Urdu became not just the unrivalled lingua franca of north India, but also a language of great sophistication in which a lot of high poetry was also composed. And while Urdu literary production came from all over North India and from centers in the Deccan, Dilliwallahs claimed Urdu for themselves in ways others did not. To the Dilliwallahs, Urdu was their local khari boli dialect fused with Persian vocabulary and literary forms. Most studies on the history of Urdu would agree that Rektah, as Urdu was mostly called in the eighteenth century, was born in the region around Delhi in the 12th/13th century when it was called “Zabaan-i-Dihlvi” by Amir Khusrau. But between its origins in the Delhi region, and the high literary status it achieved in the eighteenth century, Urdu/Rekhtah underwent its most significant development in the Deccan courts of Bijapur and Golconda. Most Delhi partisans from the eighteenth century however, blithely ignored the contribution of other regions in the development of Urdu. The eighteenth century poet Mir’s boast was that Urdu was the language that was heard spoken on the steps of Delhi’s Jama Masjid—that it was the rozmarrah or the every day spoken language of the people of Delhi. This view

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63 S.A.A. Rizvi, Shah Wali-allah and His Times...p. 189  
64 The most that some of the more chauvinistic Delhi partisans did was to acknowledge the contribution of the Deccani poet Vali in popularizing Rekhtah (as Urdu used to be called in the eighteenth century) poetry in Delhi. That Vali himself was not just an individual who existed in a vacuum but the product of a rich tradition that had a long history in the Deccan is most often ignored. See Carla Petievitch’s ‘Making ‘manly’ poetry: The Construction of Urdu’s Golden Age’ in Richard Barnett ed., Re-thinking Early Modern India (Delhi, 2002).  
continued to be echoed throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, finding possibly its most memorable expression in Daagh Dehlvi’s claim—“it is not Urdu, if it is not our speech” (woh urdu hi nahin jo hamaari zabaan nahin). The elevation to literary status of the local language was probably the single most important factor in the rooting of a local Dehlvi identity. Dehlvi Urdu became and remained the key anchor of the city’s identity till well into the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

But what happened to this cultural efflorescence, and building of the city’s cultural traditions, when political turbulence hit the city? The first big shock for Delhi was Nadir Shah’s invasion in 1739. But rude as this shock was, Delhi, as Dargah Quli’s account shows, seems to have got back to its merry ways soon after. It was not until after the civil war between rival ministers in 1753/54, and the depredations by the Jat and Maratha supporters of these ministers, preserved in public memory as Jat Gardi (Jat affliction) and Maratha Gardi (Maratha affliction), that Delhi embarked upon a really bleak phase. Much of old Delhi was destroyed, some spacial routines, especially those connected to Old Delhi, were also disrupted. In 1757, the Afghan invader Nadir Shah invaded and sacked Delhi. After the Battle of Panipat in 1761, the Empire seemed finally spent.

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66 Sayyid Insha’s views expressed in his 1808 work called Darya-i-Latafat, Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s in his essay on Urdu language in the first edition of the Asar-us-Sanaadeed (in 1847), would be examples of the ways in which Mir’s ideas continued to be held as axiomatic by later Dilliwallahs as well. Muhammad Hussain Azad’s late nineteenth century Ab-i-Hayat, a canon shaping work of Urdu literary criticism, pushed the markazi claims of Dihlvi Urdu much further. But it is important to underline that Azad’s vastly popular and influential work only generalized an idea which already had an established pedigree going back at least one century.

67 Three Mughal Poets...pp. 28-36
Yet, for the city of Delhi, serious disruption of social and cultural routines possibly did not occur until the 1780s. The 1760-1780 period has been called the ‘kingdom of Delhi’ phase. No longer the capital city of an Empire, Delhi became the nucleus of a small kingdom of Delhi. This was a period of relative calm, when first Najib-ud-Daula between 1761-1770, and later Najaf Khan, during 1770-1782, held Delhi together. Under Najaf Khan’s regency, for a while it seemed that Delhi would become a successful eighteenth century regional polity like Lucknow or Hyderabad. But that was not to be. The pressures on Delhi from the other powers were too great, and Najaf Khan himself died in 1782, destabilizing the political scene at Delhi once again.68 But by far the worse blow came in the form of the Chalisa famine of 1783. It was environmental catastrophe that ruined 500 square miles of agricultural land in the Delhi region, sweeping away nearly one third to half of the rural population of the region.69 In 1784, the Mughal emperor Shah Alam became a pensionary of the Marathas, who promised him six hundred thousand rupees a year for his household and personal expenses, but apparently never deposited more than rupees seventeen thousand a month in his treasury. Moreover, in a shockingly violent incident in 1788, the Rohilla chieftain Ghulam Qadir blinded the emperor Shah Alam.

Thus, the Chalisa famine which reduced many a noble family to distress, the control of Delhi by the Marathas, who had a reputation for tight fistedness, and for not being great patrons of the arts held in high esteem at Delhi, the Emperor’s blindness, and his indigence on account of his paltry pension, all contributed to the drying up of cultural

68 For developments in the ‘kingdom of Delhi’ phase see Percival Spear, Twilight of the Mughals: Studies in Late Mughal Delhi, pp. 13-32
69 Ibid, p. 21 and C.A. Bayly, “Delhi and Other Cities of North India During the ‘Twilight’ “ in Delhi Through the Ages...pp. 121-136
patronage at Delhi in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Many artists and poets left Delhi for better opportunities at places such as Lucknow and Hyderabad—centers of polities that had emerged in the eighteenth century.\(^70\)

Regional kingdoms, in order to shore up their legitimacy, and to underline their independence, patronized arts and artists and attempted to articulate their unique cultural identities. Owing to this development, it is possible that elements of the local *Dehlvi* culture, which had evolved in a big way in the early part of the eighteenth century under the Later Mughals, came now to be objectified and to be seen as distinct, and (to Delhiwallahs) superior to, the culture of other places. The term *Dehlviyat* was probably first used in early twentieth century literary criticism. But the spirit of *Dehlviyat*—a sense of the uniqueness and superiority of Delhi, of the modes and manners practiced there, of the city’s socio-cultural institutions, and of its Urdu language etc., ironically enough, comes to animate the works of *Dilliwallahs* from the late eighteenth century onwards (see *Zikr-i-Mir* and *Darya-i-Latafat*), when Delhi was at its lowest ebb in a long time. In a period of competitive cultural posturing, *Dilliwallahs* celebrated *Dehlviyat*, and non-Dilliwallahs compared and defined themselves against it. It appears that in this period, Delhi’s fame continued to be burnished by its artists, even though they did so not in Delhi itself, but in exile. Delhi *émigrés* at new urban centers remained very much that—*Delhi* émigrés. Being from Delhi was an important qualification that held them in good stead as

\(^{70}\) For specific examples of poets who left Delhi at this time for other centers, see Muhammad Hussain Azad’s *Ab-e Hayat: Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry* trans. and ed., Frances Pritchett and S.R. Faruqi, (Delhi, 2001)—descriptions of the third and fourth era. Also see Abdul Halim Sharar’s *The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, trans. and ed., E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain, for several references of not only poets, but also other artists, artisans and learned men who left Delhi for Lucknow in the late eighteenth century.
they sought patrons in courts throughout Hindustan, in all of which Delhi men were accorded a special welcome.

Actuated no doubt by great love for their city, but probably also by the desire to underline their *Dehlvi* “distinctiveness” (which had been such a great calling card for them), Delhi poets in ‘exile’—people such as Mir, Sauda, Mushafi and Insha—wrote poetry, and occasionally prose as well, that did much to extoll Delhi’s uniqueness and its greatness.\(^71\) Delhi’s cultural identity therefore, appears not to have suffered in this period. The sense of Delhi’s unique cultural standing, and of its distinctive identity vis-à-vis other urban centers probably became sharper due to the paeans and elegiac poems *Dilliwallahs* wrote about their city at a time when many new centers were attempting to challenge Delhi’s cultural pre-eminence (*markazi haisiyat*). And it is significant that in these artists’ perceptions, Delhi’s uniqueness and excellence derived from the city’s position as *dar-ul-hukumat*, or imperial city—a place whose culture was a ‘model’ for other places precisely because it was believed to have been nourished and “perfected” by the presence of Mughal royals and their “discerning” nobles.\(^72\) Thus Sayyid Insha, who had moved out of Delhi in 1788, and had found patronage under the Nawab of Lucknow, wrote in 1808 in his *Darya-i-Latafat*:

\(^{71}\) For a few such compositions see *Ab-e Hayat* pp. 149, 187, 196, 197, 253, etc.

\(^{72}\) Thus for instance, while Urdu had become the lingua franca of North India in the eighteenth century, with many poets composing in the language, for the famous *Dehlvi* poet – *Mir* -- the language of Shahjahanbad (Delhi) alone qualified as Urdu. People from other places, whether Sonepat or Lucknow, or any place else, could never really hope to compose well in it, for the simple reason that they were not Dilliwallahs. *Ibid*, p. 196
“In every country, traditionally people of talent and virtue collect in the one city which is the political nerve center, and where people from all over congregate to earn their livelihood. As such, the styles of conversation and writing of the residents of this city are better than that of people from other places. As is Isfahan in Iran…or is Istanbul…the capital of the king of Rome, Shahjahanabad has been the capital and place of residence of the Mughal Kings…and so] masters of the beautiful arts and elite sciences made this city their residence, and this city attained excellence (imtiaaz haasil hai). Although Lahore, Multan, Akbarabad [Agra], and Allahabad too have been centers of rulers, they cannot be compared to Delhi. Emperors have graced Delhi longer than they have any other place…In the times past (saabiq men) people from different cities would come to Delhi and learn about culture and sophistication. People from here [Delhi] would not go to other places and, if out of some necessity they did have to venture outside, then the notables of that place would come for their ziyaarat (lit. coming to take someone’s blessing), and from their company learn the correct rules and protocols for introductions, leave takings, carrying of conversations, and the etiquette to be observed in gatherings (adaab majlis). Now that for some years there has been unrest in Shahjahanabad, and residents of Delhi have left for different places, and taken shelter where they could, people from the country (dehaat), i.e. rustics, have gained from their company, and have learnt the arts of fine dining and drinking, of dressing in style, the beauties of polished conversation, and the skills of wit and quick repartee. Sometimes this can create the illusion that they too are Dilliwallahs, but a big difference remains till today between the original and the copy.”

73 Pandit Braj Mohan Dattatreya Kaifi trans., Sayyid Insha Allah Khan Insha’s Darya-i-Lataafat (Karachi, 1988; first published 1849), pp. 1-3. The book was originally written in 1808, in Persian. Braj Mohan Dattatreya’s translation is in Urdu. It is significant that in the above passage Sayyid Insha does not mention Lucknow as one of the cities that might be considered a rival to Delhi. The Delhi Lucknow rivalry was already well established by the time Sayyid Insha was writing, and many Delhi poets, including Sayyid Insha himself, had found patronage at the Lucknow court when patronage at Delhi had dried up. A constant refrain in writings about Delhi-Lucknow is that the ruin of the former proved to be the making of the latter, and that it was the Dilliwallahs who helped establish Lucknow as a
This then was Delhi’s state at the turn of the nineteenth century: Substantive production and promotion of culture at the *dar-ul-hukumat* stood diminished. But given that Delhi now had many ‘rivals’-- the ‘others’-- that it was compelled to define and defend itself against--- the sense of *Dehlviyat*, or *Dehlvi* distinctiveness was probably sharper than ever. But what became of *Dehlviyat*, and of the Badshah-city connection in the nineteenth century?

From all standard acocunts we know that as far as the *Badshahs* went, with British takeover of Delhi in 1803, there was further diminution in status and actual power. While they had been pensioners even earlier, the ruthless efficiency the British brought to the task of enforcing agreements favorable to themselves, and their practice of circumventing, disregarding and eventually setting aside those that were not, meant that the powers and privileges of Mughal rulers became increasingly restricted. So much so, that by the 1830s, though in popular parlance, the Mughal was still referred to as a cultural centre of note after it was inaugurated by Asafuddaula in 1775. That Dilliwallahs should claim so—as do nearly all of them including Insha—is understandable. What is striking is that Lucknow wallahs too acknowledge the fact, only they would argue that they beat Delhi at its own game—a claim that Dilliwallahs never fully ratified—insisting on the *naql aur asl ka farq* (the difference between the copy and the original). At another place in *Darya* Sayyid Insha does acknowledge Lucknow’s rise to prominence as a cultural center. But he does so in a back handed kind of way saying Lucknow was indeed great, and so much so, that it was now more *Dehlvi* than Delhi-- given how many true Dilliwallahs had migrated to Lucknow, and how few of them now remained in Delhi! See also the Lucknowwallah Abdul Halim Sharar’s celebrated book on his city-*Last phase of an Oriental Culture* for how many artistic and cultural practices at Lucknow owed their inception to migrant Dilliwallahs.
‘Badshah’ (Emperor), in actual fact, his politico-legal powers did not extend beyond the confines of the Red Fort. 74

Mughal financial woes also continued. They struggled to balance a fixed modest pension with an ever expanding and squabbling royal family. 75 Visitors to the Red Fort often found large parts of it shabby and unkempt. 76 Several, particularly British visitors, commented on how when they presented the “Mogul” with gold coins as nazars (gift offerings), the Emperor in turn presented them with “cheap khlluts” or gaudy pieces of cloth. 77 Newspapers at Delhi regularly carried news of loans, the Badhshah or some other royal took from some city banker and then failed to pay back. It has also bee documented that the Emperors had lengthy, and ultimately fruitless tussles with East India Company officials to have their pensions increased. 78

Aside from such comment on their pathetic powerlessness, and the occasional highlighting of individual Emperors’/Royals’ personal qualities, the Badshah and the royal family remain largely absent from mainstream English language histories of nineteenth century Delhi that do not deal with the Revolt. 79 We get little sense of how the

75 Percival Spear, Twilight of the Mughals, p. 62.
76 R. Bishop Heber, Narrative of a journey through the Upper Provinces of India (ed. 1844,) Vol. I, pp. 306-7. This account is widely quoted, including in Spear, Twilight.
77 Spear, Twilight, p. 63.
78 Percival Spear, Twilight of the Mughals in Delhi Omnibus, pp. 36-40 and 46-49.
79 Percival Spear's and Narayani Gupta's books on Delhi are authoritative histories of the city. The depiction in these accounts of individual Badshahs and of the Mughal courtly life is not unsympathetic. But given their subjective choice of emphasis the books offer little sense of the texture of socio-cultural life in Delhi, and of the actual ways in which the Royal establishment was enmeshed with it. The Mughal returns to center stage with the Revolt,
Badshah and the royal establishment related to the city, or what the city wallahs thought of them. There is even the suggestion by C.M. Naim that the “presence of the Emperor was felt in the city only on those occasions that involved some public pomp and display.” The Royal establishment was too insignificant, he says, to leave much of an impress on cultural life in Delhi. Moreover, as Naim points out, and as can be figured from the work of other historians, the only subjects pertaining to Delhi’s socio-cultural life in the nineteenth century that have been discussed in detail are those that had British associations. Thus Delhi College, the printing press and the Vernacular Translation Society have received a lot of scholarly attention. That new elements of Dehlvi life should occasion comment is not surprising. But since these elements of ‘change’ are practically the only elements prominently discussed, and since the general impression of the period is of increasing British dominance and rapid Mughal enfeeblement, elements of continuity, particularly in the socio-cultural sphere get glossed over. However, literature in Urdu, specially the Dilliwallahs’ own accounts—the memoirs, and memorializing literature produced between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when he is, somewhat against his will, propelled to leadership position. The Mughals’ ‘leadership’ of the Revolt has of course generated comment in historiography, and a few years ago a full length book as well. See William Dalrymple, The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty: Delhi, 1857 (Delhi, 2006.)

80 C.M Naim, ‘Ghalib’s Delhi: A Shamelessly Revisionist Look at Two Popular Metaphors’ in Annual of Urdu Studies, Vol. 18, 2003. Naim’s article is in fact written with the express purpose of dismissing the perspectives of memorializing literature. He says that “with the rise of nationalism in India there developed in the public mind not only a tragic and valiant image of the last occupant of the Red Fort but also a belief that his court actually mattered in the greatly alive social and intellectual life in Delhi preceding the Revolt of 1857, and that only the Revolt’s failure brought an end to that way of life and thought and its regal source. (emphasis mine)” Ibid., p. 7. Because Naim sahib is reluctant to take memorializing literature seriously, seeing it as a progeny of the rising nationalism, I deliberately chose to begin with Ghalib’s quotes, who was neither a sentimental Mughal loyalist, nor lived long enough to be ‘tainted’ by nationalism.

81 See for instance Narayani Gupta, Delhi Between Two Empires... and Margrit Pernau, The Delhi College: Traditional elites, the Colonial State, and Education Before 1857 (Delhi, 2006)
century, that have been largely ignored by mainstream historiography, tell a different story.

Contrary to the impression one can get from mainstream histories about great changes that were sweeping over Delhi in the nineteenth century, and about the marginality of the Mughals in the new order that was emerging, *Dilliwallah* accounts reveal how “traditional” Dehlvi culture still remained, and point to a substantial Mughal presence at Delhi, in terms of both impact and institutions. Poetry, music, religious scholarship, spiritual attainments, traditional sports were still supported and encouraged by the Qila Mubarak, as the Red Fort was called. The Red Fort had been designed to be the social and cultural hub of the city.\(^{82}\) This was a role that had probably suffered towards the end of the eighteenth century, but was revived in the nineteenth.

In Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s *Sirat-i-Faridiya,\(^{83}\) one learns that in pre-Revolt nineteenth century Delhi, while administratively the Mughals had been rendered impotent, many traditional departments of Empire aimed at promoting art and learning had been retained; various posts in these departments were filled, and even actively sought by potential candidates. There was, for instance, a department, headed by an officer called *Naqib-ul-Auliya*, through which saints and *sufis* within the city approached the *Badshah* for monetary support. The yearly expenditures of all *dargahs* (tombs of saints) in the city,

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82 Anisha Shekhar Mukherjee, *The Red Fort of Shahjahanabad* (New Delhi, 2003).

83 Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Sirat-i-Faridiya: Yaani Halaat-i-Zindagi Nawab Dabir-ud-Daula Amin-ul-Mulk Khwajah Fariduddin Ahmad Khan Bahadur Maslah Jang—Wazir Muinuddin Akbar Shah Sani* (Karachi, 1964[originally published in 1896]). The book is a biography of Fariduddin Ahmad Khan who was Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s maternal grandfather, and one time *wazir* to the Mughal emperor Akbar Shah Sani (r. 1806-1837).
and of the urs and fatihas held there, were paid out of this department. Likewise there were three other departments of similar nature, headed by influential and respected individuals through whom the ulema (Islamic religious scholars), tabibs (doctors of Yunani medicine) and shuaras (poets) were introduced at the court and received rewards, titles or awards of land.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad’s autobiography, Khwud Navisht, corroborates the Sirat. Azad’s great grandfather, Maulana Munavvaruddin, himself held one of the four posts that Sayyid Ahmad talks about. Maulana Munavvaruddin was appointed Rukn-ul-Madarseen or ‘Chief Teacher’ of the Mughal Empire, towards the end of Shah Alam’s reign, when the British were already in control of Delhi. Throughout the Empire, madarsaas and private schools, and schools run by the ulema in their masjids or homes were supposed to be supervised, administered, provided with funds or endowed with waqfs through the office of the rukn-ul-madarseen. Azad adds that though with British takeover of Delhi the Mughals ruled only in name (baraai naam), yet many departments (kaarkhaane) of the Empire, including these posts, continued to exist. And individuals...

84 Sayyid Ahmad’s grandfather’s (i.e. Fariduddin Ahmad Khan’s) father-in-law was the Naqib-ul-Auliya in Shah Alam’s and possibly Akbar Shah’s time too. Ibid., p. 8
85 Sirat...p. 8
86 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Khvud Navisht (Delhi, 2002 [first published c.1921]). Abul Kalam’s forefathers were renowned scholars of religion with “reach” at the Mughal court stretching back to the time of Akbar. Their ‘reach’ at the Court had not signified a cozy relationship with the successive emperors. Being guardians of Islamic orthodoxy (as alims are supposed to be), they often stood in opposition to Royal policies that deviated from orthodoxy. Individual Emperors do not cut a positive figure in the family anecdotes recounted in Maulana Azad’s autobiography. The worst criticisms are reserved for the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar who gets called “nihaayat toham parast aur kamzor aadmi” (an extremely weak and superstitious man). Yet even this unsympathetic (vis-à-vis the Mughals) memoir conveys the distinct impression of the continued tamadduni (cultural) relevance of the Mughal Badshah and the imperial establishment in Delhi while they lasted. See ibid., pp. 35-37, 39-40, 48 and 50.
who got appointed to these posts, in a way, ‘their official impact (sarkari asar) came to be felt throughout the realm (mulk)’. Even in far flung parts of the Empire, such as Bihar, if somebody opened a large madrasa, they would get in touch with the rukn-ul-madarseen, seeking recommendations for able teachers to staff their institutions with. Within Delhi and its suburbs, the rukn-al-madarseen was still more palpably influential. Under Maulana Munavvaruddin, more than fifty madarsaas in the Delhi region received support money (wazifa) through the office of the rukn-ul-madarseen at the Fort. There were times, Azad says, when money from the Royal treasury was not forthcoming. In such cases, owing to the exalted dignity of these official Mughal ranks in society, and for the individuals who were appointed to these, notable natives would come forward with monetary contributions.

Thus several imperial institutions remained while the Emperor remained at Delhi. And even when the Emperor could not always contribute to them materially, the fact that these were imperial institutions, with established “brand equity,” so to speak, voluntary contributions could still be found to keep them afloat. And it was possibly through institutions such as these that the Mughals continued to wield influence in Dehlvi society, and to contribute to the reproduction of values and skills which were at the heart of the city’s Indo-Muslim culture.

87 The free flowing translation and paraphrasing from Azad’s text in the Khvud Navisht is mine. See Khvud Navisht, pp. 45-6.
88 It must also be mentioned, that although other centers of Indo-Muslim culture such as Lucknow, Hyderabad, Bhopal etc. had come up since the eighteenth century, Delhi was still very much the city, or the shehr, as it was called, in its part of Hindustan/India. Scions of several independent princely estates around Delhi such as Dujana, Ballabhgarh, Jhajhar maintained residence at Delhi, and were active in the city’s socio-cultural life. Nobles from
But quite apart from institutionalized support, memoirs and memorializing texts also offer plenty of anecdotal, family lore kind of evidence of more informal nourishment of cultural life in Delhi by the Mughals. Obligatory gifts and sums of money were offered to a whole host of people, from religious performers such as Qaris (Quran reciters) and marsiya khwans\textsuperscript{89} to more “profane” ones such as bhands (folk singers), nats (trapeze artists), and singing and dancing girls, on many ritual and festal occasions at the Lal Haveli (as the Red Fort was called by the city folk). Also, in apparent defiance of struggling finances, Emperors even made the occasional grand gesture of munificence to some fortunate few. Bahadur Shah gifted a grand haveli (and a few villages) to Delhi’s famous nineteenth century sufi sheikh Kaale Shah and another to the master musician Tanras Khan, the doyen of the “Dilli gharana” or the Delhi school of music that had emerged in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{90} The Badshah, it may be mentioned, was not acting merely as patron in these two cases. He was a pupil (shagird) to both masters: to one in mysticism, and to the other in Music. Other badshahi gifts, though not quite as grand, could still be substantial. Thus Mullah Vahidi recalled that for his debut with other young qaris (Quran reciters) at the Lal Haveli, his father Abdul Wajid received rolls of seven different types of expensive cloths. One of these, a zarbaf roll or thaan, was kept aside for use in Abdul Wajid’s wedding—which took place years later!\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{89} Those who recited the marsiyas, or poems of lament, on the martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandson—Hussain.

\textsuperscript{90} Members of the gharana (musical lineage) live in the Haveli to this day. See Vidya Rao, ‘The Dilli Gharana’ in Celebrating Delhi (Delhi, 2010)

Thus the Mughals are remembered in Dihlvi accounts for their patronage of high culture. But they are remembered even more, particularly in the memorializing texts, for their popularity among the common folk, and for the many ways in which they were integrated with the rhythms of city life in Delhi. Farhatullah Beg avers that though “the Badshah at Delhi had lost his powers, the *riyaya’s* (common public’s) love for him had not lessened, nor had the Badhshah’s concern for their welfare…there was neither a joy nor sorrow that the *riyaya* and the Badshah didn’t share.” How did this happen? Munshi Faizuddin’s *Bazm-i Aakhir* offers some answers.

Faizuddin, a long time servant of one of the Mughal princes, and resident of the Lal Qila until 1857, wrote an anthropological account of the lives and every day routines of the last two Mughal Badshahs—Akbar Shah Sani and Bahadur Shah Zafar. Faizuddin’s account, contrary to general accounts of Mughal poverty, shows the Qila as a privileged world of dignified living. He highlights how the badshahs and other royals lived, serviced by many different kinds of servants and attendants at the Fort, the distinctive ‘royal’ Urdu they spoke, the exaggerated courtesies and protocols that were observed in interactions between, and with, the Royals, the elaborate meals that were served there, the festivals celebrated there etc. So the accent very much is on showing the distinctiveness of the Royal lifestyle. But in *Bazm-i Aakhir* one also finds that “distinctiveness” and “privilege” do not translate into aloofness of the “Ahl-I Qila” (people of the Fort) from

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93 Munshi Faizuddin, *Bazm-i-Aakhir* ed., Kamil Quraishi (Delhi, 1992 [first published 1887]).
the city. Faizuddin in fact shows that the Qila was an integral part of the city, and in many ways, big and small, life in Delhi was tied intrinsically to the routines of the Qila and the Badshah.

The *naubats* (drums) sounded from the Lal Qila marked the daily passage of hours for people in the Qila, as well as the wider city; every day scores of people were fed outside the Lal Qila. Apparently five hundred kilograms of stuffed *nans* (flat breads), and five large pots of curry were distributed to the poor, apart from the foods that were doled out separately to orphans and widows.\(^{94}\) On special days such as *Id*, the numbers fed were very much higher. Every *Jumma*/Friday, the day enjoined for communal prayers among Muslims, the emperor processed to the Jama Masjid and joined in the prayers in this chief congregational mosque of the city.\(^{95}\) On all major annual festivals, both Hindu and Muslim, celebrations were held at the Qila, and to varying degrees city folks participated either as spectators, entertainers or recipients of royal charity. Festivals such as the two *Ids* were, in fact, officially announced to the city by the Lal Qila, with the firing of

\(^{94}\) Faizuddin gives no figures for how much food was distributed, but Rashid-al-Khiri does. In *Naubat-i-Panj Rozah* he says that "...today these poor and destitute people whom Delhi has thrown out, allowing them to die of hunger by the banks of the Yamuna, these used to then [i.e. before 1857 when the Badshahs were still around] be present at the Qila. Seven *maunds of khamiri rotis* [about 7*70 kgs of stuffed bread] and five *deghs* [really large pots] of *saalan* [curry] used to be prepared for them everyday...". See p. 50. Khiri’s text is strictly speaking not a work of history. So it is hard to vouch for the veracity of his facts. But Faizuddin in *Bazm-i-Aakhir* has spoken of the daily distribution of food, and from what Sayyid Ahmad writes in the *Sirat*, it seems that the amount of food distributed was indeed large. Sayyid Ahmad says that one of the “austerity” measures his grandfather Fariduddin Khan recommended as a way of balancing royal accounts, was to do away with the quantities of foods distributed at the Qila everyday. The idea was to cut down on “needless” expenditures so the Badshahi accounts could be brought in order. But the suggestion was shot down. *Sirat*, p. 10

\(^{95}\) *Bazm-e Aakhir* pp. 46-50
The Badshahs also ritually participated in, or flagged off important annual sufi festivities such as the installation of Shah Madar’s staff (shah madar ki chariyan) or ‘shahji ki satravininh’ which was the urs (death anniversary) of Nizamuddin Auliya. The emperors also held competitions for popular sports such as kite flying and swimming, and sponsored and/or participated in various fairs in the city. In fact, the most popular public celebration of any kind in nineteenth century Delhi, the Pankha Mela or the flower men’s festival, owed its inception and popularity to the last two Mughal Badshahs, Akbar Shah Sani, and Bahadur Shah Zafar.

Thus Faizuddin’s account, and others that elaborated upon the themes of his account, reveal a kind of frequent, routinized interaction between the Qila (Fort) and the city, in which the Qila seems to furnish almost a common backdrop for life within Delhi. The accounts reveal small, but tangible ways in which the Qila would have been part of every Dilliwallah’s experience of lived life in the city, and show why Ghalib, never the most sentimental of royalists, should lament the loss of the Qila in post Revolt Delhi.

The Dehlvi texts, including the memorializing ones, show the Last Mughals outside of a history of Empire. These texts that view the Mughal badshahs from the vantage point of local history, show what the latter meant to Delhi as a locality, and how their presence impacted everyday life in the city.

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96 Ibid, pp. 62-67, 74-84
97 Ibid, pp. 68-72
98 Ibid, pp. 94-99
A subtext in many Dilliwallah accounts, particularly the memorializing texts, seems to be a negation of British stereotypes about the Mughals and Indo-Muslim culture that had gained great currency by the late nineteenth century. The Mughals and the culture they fostered were critiqued by the British as decadent and wasteful. But we find that the very elements that would have invited British derision and negative comment have been highlighted and lauded by authors of memorializing literature. These texts speak of a large Mughal presence in Delhi, give detailed descriptions of the Royals’ numerous servants and hangers on, talk of the paraphernalia of Empire that was still retained, the artists and arts the Mughals continued to patronize, the poor they kept feeding despite their penury, the public festivities they sponsored and participated in at Delhi—all in an entirely positive light. Unlike the Victorian era British gentleman to whom it seemed that with natives “everything is for display”, to the Indian memorializer, the later Mughals were not frivolous rulers, indulging in conspicuous consumption, refusing to come to terms with the reality of reduced circumstances. To natives, the Mughal style was the style appropriate to kingly dignity. A patronage of knowledge and the arts, gift giving, charity, distress alleviation and conspicuous consumption (which generated employment

100 Take for example how Rashid al Khiri talks about trying only in vain, through his writings, to get the last Mughals their due. Everywhere, he says, “there is progress (taraqqi kaa bazaar garam hai), and where ever I look, I find only crowds of the educated (taleem yafta hi taaleem yafta hain), who find such talk [abou the Mughals and their old ways] backward and embarrassing...” See Naubat, p. 64. For a discussion of British stereotypes about native culture and their efforts at cultural “reform” of the natives in the late nineteenth century see the two Introductions by S.R. Faruqi and Frances Pritchett in Frances W. Pritchett & S. R. Faruqi, trans. and ed. Ab-e Hayat: Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry (New Delhi, 2001). Also see Frances Pritchett, Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and its Critics (Berkely, 1994)

101 Henry Lawrence, in a journal written for his sister, October 1830, quoted in Francis G. Hutchins, The Illusion of Permanence (Princeton, 1967), p. 56
for many), were all central to the Indo-Muslim conception of ideal rulership. The Mughals were lauded in memoirs/ memorializing texts because despite their poverty, they kept up these traditions of kingly conduct.

There is, therefore, a definite effort to rescue the last Mughals from the condescension of the British. But perhaps there is something else as well, behind the praise offered to the Mughals in these texts. There were important ideals of kingly behavior such as ensuring justice, peace etc., which the last Mughals could not uphold. But, for the most part, this is not held against them. This is significant, because no similar latitude was shown to the likes of Farrukhsiyar (r. 1713-1719) or Muhammad Shah Rangila (r. 1719-1748) by eighteenth century native chroniclers. These eighteenth century Mughal rulers were far greater patrons of art and culture than the last Mughals, and were probably not deficient in upholding several of the other values, such as charity and benevolence, for which the last Mughals were praised. Yet the eighteenth century rulers were always made to suffer by comparison with the Great Mughals, the Akbars, Shahjahans and Aurangzebs of the dynasty. Native accounts of the last three Mughal rulers are, by contrast, highly indulgent towards them, forgiving of their failings, and highly appreciative of what they did get right. This makes sense when we realize that the last Mughals’ comparison was not with the Great Mughals, but with the British at Delhi. Praise for the Mughals often comes side by side with implied/veiled criticism of the other rulers of Delhi—the

102 See N. Dirks, ‘Structure and meaning of political relations in a south Indian little kingdom’ in Contributions to Indian Sociology, New Series, xiii (1979). For a detailed discussion of Indo-Muslim ideas of political morality see C.A. Bayly, Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India (Delhi, 1998)
103 A comprehensive sense of the views of the native chroniclers of the eighteenth century may be had from William Irvine Later Mughals in 2 vols., and Jadunath Sarkar, The Fall of the Mughal Empire 4 volumes.
British. The texts are almost as much a critique of the British as they are a celebration of the Mughals.

To understand why this was so, and why Dehlvi texts portray the Mughal rulers of Delhi in the nineteenth century as so central to the city’s life, one has to understand British policies in Delhi and North India in the nineteenth century.

Starting from 1803, starting from when the British took over Delhi, the Company Government’s revenue demand had increased steadily. The revenue settlements made to facilitate collection were inflexibly made, and mortgage and transfer of property was widespread. According to British officers themselves, making a settlement report in 1878, “pre-Mutiny Delhi” (i.e. Delhi before the Revolt of 1857) was a “very mismanaged district”. “The great idea…of successfully managing revenue appears to have been to put strong pressure on subordinates, beginning at the tehsildar…this pressure was passed on to the zamindars in the shape of quartering sawars [armed horsemen] on the villages till the revenue was paid.” They added that given this state of affairs it was ‘hardly surprising that complainants should come up from time to time that cultivators in whole sets of villages are absconding en masse” either during or at the end of the short leases given them.105

Much property passed out of the hands of traditional land holding elites into the hands of those with ready money—especially the trader-bankers (usually banias). With the

104 For one example of this see foot note 75 above.
establishment of Pax Brittanica in 1818, the pre-colonial military labor market was also
disrupted. These policies resulted in a “reduction of elite dignities”, both landed and
military.\footnote{For insight into the ways in which the East India Company’s
revenue policies had pressed hard on land owners economically, besides also increasing
dispossession, and putting land ownership in the hands of classes (trader-mercantile
groups) never traditionally associated with it, see Gautam Bhadra, “Four Rebels of
1857” in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak ed., \textit{Selected Subaltern Studies} (India,
1988), pp. 129-179. For a discussion of the pre-colonial military-labor market and its
disruption under Pax-Britannica see Dirk H. A. Kolff, \textit{Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy:
The Ethno-history of the Military Labor Market of Hindustan, 1450-1850} (London,
2002)} With the squeezing of the elites, a whole host of artisan groups, who
depended for their livelihood on conspicuous consumption by such elites, were also hit
hard. The change was made worse by the sharp turn towards \textit{laissez faire} and Utilitarian
policies under evangelical and free trader influences from the 1830s.\footnote{Eric
Stokes, \textit{The English Utilitarians and India} (Oxford, 1959), pp. 35-42} The Company
now cut down on the meager expenditure it had earlier made on works of public utility in
Delhi. Patronage of places of worship, artists, or men of religion had never been
Company policy even in better days. Thus, by the fourth decade of the nineteenth
century, while the Company asserted its right to ever greater revenue, it made no
“expenditures” that could have made its rigorously extractive rule more bearable.
Moreover, the Company Government earned great unpopularity because of its
disinclination to enforce “redistributive justice” in times of scarcity. During famines or
shortages, people expected rulers to fix a fair price of grain, prevent hoarding, waive
taxes and make direct distributions of grain. But as was evident during the drought of
1833-4, and the grain shortages of 1837, the British were notoriously reluctant to either
give substantial tax breaks or interfere in the market to enforce a just price. On top of
this, from around the third decade of the nineteenth century, the British had started not
only to distance themselves from the intellectual and socio-cultural lives of the natives, they often showed outright scorn for it as well.\textsuperscript{108}

Thus, as Kaye observed, in the two decades prior to the Revolt, the British through their “dry” censuses of houses, numbers, and “outward appearances of natives”, had developed vast knowledge about India, but it pertained only to the’ externals of Indian life’.\textsuperscript{109} They knew little, and came to care less and less about Indian sentiments and beliefs, and about matters pertaining to native culture such as music, dance, food, language etc. At Delhi, such unconcern with a culture so beloved of the citywallahs, seems to have created a perception of the British as more than a little uncivilized, and ignorant of proper \textit{adab} (literally -- comportment). For a society that valued \textit{adab} very highly, this was unpardonable.\textsuperscript{110} Native Delhi newspapers such as \textit{Sadiq-ul-akhbaar}, \textit{Dilli Urdu Akhbaar} and \textit{Qiran-al Sadin} often carried attacks on prominent British personalities and their native sympathizers, maliciously mocking their foreignness.

\textquotedblleft The gentlemen of exalted dignity,” one city paper reported, “had a great feast last night, to which all military chiefs and lieutenants were invited. There was a little, \textit{hog on the table}, before Mr----, who cut it into small pieces, and sent some to each of the party, \textit{even the women ate it}... Having \textit{stuffed themselves with unclean food}, and many sorts of flesh, taking plenty of wine, they made for sometime a great noise, which doubtless arose from drunkenness. They all stood up two or four times, crying “hip! hip” and roared before they drank more wine. After dinner, they

\textsuperscript{108} See C. Bayly, \textit{Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars} pp. 69-70 and 333-334.
\textsuperscript{110} For the various dimensions of the complex notion of \textit{adab} in Indo-Muslim society see Barbara Daly Metcalf ed., \textit{Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam} (London, 1984)
danced in their licentious manner, pulling about each other’s wives…Captain-----who is staying with Mr. ------went away with the latter’s lady (arm in arm), the palanquins followed behind, and they proceeded by themselves into the bungalow: the wittol remained at the table guzzling red wine.”

The want of courtesy with which many Englishmen treated the natives was also greatly resented and reported:

“The government has manifested singular want of sense in appointing Mr. -----to be ------at -----. The man is a capacious blockhead, and very hot tempered; he can do no business himself and yet has the extreme folly to be angry when abler persons wish to do it for him. When the most respected Hindustani gentleman waited upon him yesterday, he just stood up half dressed, and when they salaamed, he asked “well what do you want?” When they said “we are here only to pay our respects”, he growled “jao!” (go!).

Against this background, where British policies were laying bare the alien nature of British rule, and anger against them was widespread, it is possible to appreciate why the last Mughals and their courts, despite their weaknesses, would have seemed important to the Dilliwallahs. The Mughals continued to patronize the city’s traditional Indo-Muslim culture, and were themselves seen as fine exemplars of much that was believed to be best in the city’s culture. While this was true for Shah Alam, who had the reputation for being a cultured man, and wrote Urdu verse under the pen name of “Aftab,” this was most true of the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. Bahadur Shah’s contemporaries, and his

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memorializers spoke glowingly of his poetic abilities, the *sufistic* bent of his temperament, his compassion for the poor, and his myriad other gifts such as: excellent marksmanship, horse-riding skills, a fine aptitude for calligraphy etc. Even the harshest of the native critics of the last Mughals, acknowledged Bahdur Shah Zafar’s many redeeming qualities, and the excellence of the culture fostered under his auspices at Delhi. Thus Muhammad Zakaullah says-

“The craze for his ghazals (poems) had spread to far off places, to speak nothing of their popularity in the city itself…Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, who was another Amir Khusrau in Persian poetry, was connected to his court…Ibrahim Zauq who was another Mir in Urdu versification, was Zafar’s *istaad* (teacher). The Badhshah was an accomplished figure in the *sufi* world…His concern for the poor is something worth remembering. The lame, the deaf, the hearing impaired amongst his servants would get their salaries right at home. In all his life he probably never removed anyone from service…Custom is that when the lamp is about to burn out, its flame flickers and rises; those about to die, recover briefly, before they pass away. Likewise, when the lamp of the ‘House of Timur,’ [Mughals] was about to extinguish, and its last moments were near, then it shone so bright, and showed such a recovery, that another example of its kind would be hard to cite.”

It appears that the last Mughals’ personal qualities, their sensitivity to native expectations of good rulership, and the contrast that they presented to the Birtish rulers of the city, had

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112 See for example, Muhammad Zakaullah's *Tareekh-e Hindustan* vol. 8-9-10, pp. 344-45, and Zaheer Dehlvi’s *Dastan-i Ghadar* pp. 18-23, for contemporaries’ accounts of Bahadur Shah Zafar. The more memorializing accounts would be Rashid-al Khiri’s *Naubat-e Panj Roza*, Nasir Nazir Firaq’s *Dilli ka Aakhiri Deedar* etc.

113 Muhammad Zakaullah, *Tareekh-e Hindustan* vol. 8-9-10, pp. 344-5. Zakaullah’s appraisal is important because one, he was a contemporary of Bahadur Shah Zafar. And two, he was, in general, a great critic of the Later Mughals and a sincere admirer of British rule. The critical tone he usually adopts towards the later Mughal rulers is in evidence even in his *Tareekh-e Hindustan* (egs. on pp. 345, 346).
all combined to deepen the Emperor-city connection in nineteenth century Delhi. A
passage from Farhatullah Beg’s Bahadur Shah aur Phool walon ki Sair lays bare both the
closeness of ties between the Mughal emperor and the Dilliwallahs, and the distance
there was between the British and the natives.

In 1264 H (c.1848 A.D.) when the rainy season came, it rained so hard that water filled up the city.
Hardly a house was left which was not destroyed…it rained incessantly for fifteen days…people
didn’t know where to go and who to turn to. In Delhi, Bahadur Shah was Badshah only in name. The
entire administration was in the hands of Company Bahadur. But what did the Company care what had
befallen the poor city folks? They could fend for themselves….The Badshah was told of the
Dilliwallahs’ plight. Poor fellow! He set out to do all there was in his hands. He ordered all Badshahi
residences in the city-open; the maalguzaari (revenue in grain) from Kot Qasim had come in only a
few days ago…he had it all spent on the city folks…the Musalmaans were distributed cooked food,
twice a day, and the Hindus were supplied with grain…Gradually the situation eased…the rains
stopped, the water in the Jamuna receded and the sun came out. A few days were spent getting things
back on track…and then the Dilliwallhs wanted a melat(fair)! With the Jamuna running so full, could
the Dilliwallahs have sat at home!? The Badshah had it announced—‘tomorrow is the swimming
festival’. From the morning, crowds started to collect outside the Qila [which fronted the Jamuna]. By
eight or nine the city was all empty and the sands by the Jamuna choc-a-block full. With the Emperor
and other Royals watching from the Qila above, the competition unfolded below…No one could have
told just two days ago hell was visiting the city!\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{114} Phool walon ki sair, pp. 7-9. Translation and paraphrasing from the original Urdu text are
mine.
Thus the Lal Qila continued to be the pivot of Delhi’s socio cultural life right up to the
Revolt of 1857 -- when the last emperor was exiled to Burma, and Mughal rule came to an end. If in politics and administration the British were completely dominant, their presence, it could be said, was hardly felt on the socio-cultural, or the more intimate domains, of the Dilliwallahs’ lives.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the world of the Dilliwallahs had indeed changed a great deal. Administrative powers had already moved from Mughal into British hands. The old Mughal style scholar-gentry elite had been in decline for some time. A new, British backed, trader banker Hindu elite was gaining in strength. New technologies such as that of the printing press, a new kind of west inspired education, and Christian missionaries had made their presence felt at Delhi. Yet, most of these changes were not very far reaching in Delhi up to 1857.

Take Delhi College, for instance. Established in 1824 by European educators, with the blessings and active encouragement of Delhi’s British administrators, the college represented a bold experiment in Delhi: alongside Arabic and Persian, English language classes were taught at the college, as were classes in modern western science in the Urdu medium. In Delhi historiography, the Delhi College is possibly the most visible educational institution of pre-Revolt Delhi. It has been seen as a center of a ‘Delhi Renaissance’ brought forth by the meeting of the new (western knowledge) and the old

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115 For decline of the older elite see P. Hardy’s ‘Ghalib and the British’ in Ralph Russel ed., *Ghalib: The Poet and his Age* (London, 1972), pp. 60-62. For the rise of the trader banker elite at Delhi see C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, pp. 212-3, 240-41
(indigenous/ Islamic learning).\textsuperscript{117} But the significance afforded in historiography to Delhi College can be misleading for an understanding of the intellectual and academic climate of Delhi before the Revolt. Some Indo-Muslim elites in the city had indeed accepted the college, but among most aristocratic families, and families of ulama (scholars of Islam), the sons were either taught by private tutors, or were drawn to the many renowned traditional madrasas of Delhi. The testimony of Altaf Hussain Hali indicates how little the Delhi College, that supposedly heralded a “Delhi Renaissance”, mattered to pre-Revolt contemporaries in Delhi. Hali had come from Panipat to Delhi to further his education, and to polish his Persian and Urdu poetry at the feet of great masters in Delhi. He says that he never personally came across a student of Delhi College in his days, and in fact insists that “in Delhi, in the school in which I was enrolled, its teachers and students considered the graduates of Delhi College merely ignoramuses.”\textsuperscript{118} Hali’s testimony, when it is juxtaposed with the enrollment figures at the Delhi College on the one hand,\textsuperscript{119} and with (the somewhat scattered) information we have about the widespread fame of pre-1857 traditional madrassas and Islamic scholars at Delhi, on the other, underlines how the dominant strain in the Delhi educational scene, prior to the Revolt, was the traditional Islamic one.

\textsuperscript{117} For the view that the Delhi College represented a ‘Delhi Renaissance’ see C.F. Andrews, 
Zakaullah of Delhi; Spear, Twilight of the Mughals, pp. 199-200; Narayani Gupta, Delhi Between Two Empires, pp. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{118} Abdul Haq, Marhum Dihli College, second edition, (Delhi, 1945, first pub. 1933), p. 8
\textsuperscript{119} At the Delhi College, the founders’ original intention had been to attract the sons of elite Muslim familites of Delhi, for that, the founders believed would be the real yardstick of acceptance and success of the college at Delhi. By this yardstick, the college seems to have fallen well short. Between 1854-56 only 34 percent of the college’s students were Muslims, and of these, not many were from an ashraf (well born Muslim) background, nor did many (though there were a handful of famous Delhi College alumni) make ‘much of an impact in their subsequent careers’. For an account that qualifies the success of the Delhi College, see Avril Ann Powell, Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India, (London, 1993), pp. 195-201
Likewise, though missionary influences caused much upheaval and social churning in many areas where they were introduced (including in Agra, which like Delhi, was part of the North Western Provinces), in Delhi, they were far more muted. The missionary, Pfander attempted to stir the religious atmosphere of Delhi in the 1820s without success. He then re-visited Delhi in 1844, with his aggressive proselytizing literature that had already caused a huge uproar in Agra, but was surprised to find how relatively moderately the Dilliwallahs received him and his work. Pfander says “though the Musalmans were sometimes surprised or displeased by what was said against the Kuran and Muhammad, they behaved with utmost propriety…and never showed such anger as they often [do] at Agra.” It was not until 1852, when a couple of dramatic conversions took place in Delhi (and this, among caste Hindus, and not Muslims), that Christian missionary presence caused a stir in the city. When a full time mission (the SPG) opened at Delhi in 1854, there was a build up in resentment against aggressive missionary activity, but this too was of a relatively retrained variety. Among other responses, Mirza Fakhra al-Din, the heir apparent of Bahadur Shah Zafar (the last Mughal badshah), offered patronage to those ulema who took up the gauntlet thrown by the missionaries, and published refutations of tracts disseminated by the latter.

Thus the winds of change were beginning to blow in mid-nineteenth century Delhi. But in socio-cultural terms the city changed so gradually that to the natives of Delhi, the city still seemed recognizably traditional. In their reminiscences from the turn of the twentieth century, old Dilliwallahs, who had seen pre-1857 Delhi with their own eyes, remembered
it nostalgically as an urban oasis sheltered within walls that held back a rural desert. Delhi in these remembrances appears a city moving at its own pace, oblivious to the world around it. Every other day it saw celebrations, fairs and festivals, handicrafts were inexpensive and excellent, food was plentiful and cheap, and a very large number of old time Dilliwallahs also brought up the Badshah and the royal family as a fond memory. Old men remembered the stately processions of the Badshah along the Chandani Chowk quite vividly. These processions had made a great impression on them while they were young kids.

Turn of the century recollections of pre-Revolt Delhi have a distinct quality. Written with the knowledge of all that followed after the Revolt, and the many ways in which the city changed after wards, the Delhi they portray appears an improbable bubble, so close to destruction, but blissfully oblivious to it. In some ways the most ironical remembrance is of the British and of the Mughals. The latter appear to be the hub of the socio-cultural life of Delhi, while the former appear incidental to it.

“In those days before the Mutiny…the sovereignty of the king was merely nominal…But the mere fact that the king lived was enough, and the etiquette of the day of Akbar the Great was still in vogue. Bahadur Shah was in receipt of a lakh of rupees as pension from the Company, and the princes and other royal personages were also in receipt of salaries according to their rank…Out of this lakh of rupees, which the Company paid monthly, the city people also came in for pension and salaries. There was one thing to be said in respect of this money, and that was that, although it was not such a big amount, it meant that Delhi people had no occasion to go outside their city in search of livelihood…In brief, in those days, men of every profession, art and industry, famous in the various callings and
evocations, could be found here…the whole city wore an air of oblivion and neglect, so much so, that in it, hardly anyone knew what was taking place beyond the city walls. Occasionally, there was a Durbar, at which the Resident dressed in flowing robes, wearing a helmet with a white band of cloth, known as the “pugree”, and with a “jareeb” [ceremonial staff] in his hand, used to be present. The Princes and the nobles also used to be present, and the king sat on the throne and those present stood with hands folded. If the Resident had something to say, he used to say it, otherwise, after a few words about the climate and other ordinary matters… the Durbar came to an end. … People thought that Mughal rule in India still existed, although the British commander of the Fort was present at the gate…Such was the way in which Delhi people passed their days…”

Perhaps it was this perception of the centrality of the Mughal Badshah that made people turn to him for leadership once the Revolt broke out. To the British, who had for some time regarded the Mughal Badshah as an obsolete encumbrance, this may have come as a shock. British officials remarked how they were taken aback by people’s familiarity with the court decorum etc. But since the Badshash had continued to uphold aspects of rulership which the British had little understanding of, his elevation to full rulership, when opportunity presented itself, must not occasion surprise.

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\[My Life: Being the Autobiography of Nawab Server-ul-Mulk Bahadur\] translated by his son Nawab Jiwan Yar Jung Bahadur (London, ), pp. 40-44. Server-ul-Mulk, as the Preface to the book tells us, was born in Delhi in 1848. Some of his family members worked for the Mughal badshah, and some for the British. Server-ul-Mulk's own father was educated at Roorkee—at the first engineering college established by the British in India. When Server-ul-Mulk was still an infant, his father died. Server-ul-Mulk was therefore brought up by his uncle Mirza Abbas Beg Khan, who was well known to the English, and was a close friend of the British hero of the Revolt/Mutiny of 1857—Sir Henry Lawrence. The uncle's useful services to the British during the Revolt were recognized, and rewarded after the Revolt was put down. In his own career at Hyderabad, where he rose to serve at very high positions in the Nizam's government, Server-ul-Mulk was greatly helped by some British officials posted at the Nizam of Hyderabad's court. So there is no reason to assume that either by background or family affiliation, or because of “decline” he suffered under the British, Server-ul-Mulk would have felt obliged to flatter the memory of the Mughals in his autobiography.
Chapter Three: Delhi: The Shehr or “City” Par Excellence

“Imagine a city situated on the banks of the beautiful river Jumna bounded by it on one side, and surrounded by a somewhat modernized, crenellated wall and ditch on the other three (the entire circle of which is about 7 or 8 miles)... It was a city that to the eyes of the natives of India, especially of Mussulmen, was equivalent to what London is to an Englishman, Paris to a Frenchman, or Moscow to a Russian. The palace at Delhi, and the Jumma Masjid there, are as well or better known to the Easterns, as St. James, the Tuileries, or the Kremlin to Europeans. The language of Delhi is considered quite as refined, with comparison with the patios of the rest of India, as the Court language of London or Paris as regards the dialects of Yorkshire or Cornwall. Delhi conveys to the native mind the concentration of all that is elegant, recherché, and beautiful, in language, manners, luxuries or dress. It is supposed by them to contain everything (to use their own phrase)... whether the imagination revel on valuable gems, beautiful shawls, elaborately worked guns, finely bound and illuminated books, superb horses, splendid vehicles, grand houses, handsome men or beautiful women. Say you want anything, and ask where it is to be procured; the answer is sure to be (whether probable, and though you may be a thousand miles off), ‘Oh! It can be had at Delhi!’ Delhi is a complete cynosure in the eyes of the Hindostanee: many of their most learned men of the Mahommedan religion, as well as numbers of the wealthiest of the Hindoo persuasion, live there; it is filled with the ancient Mughal nobility of India...No
wonder, then, that the natives looked up to Delhi as something very extraordinary…(emphases mine)"

The foregoing observations are not from a partisan Dilliwallah. They were made, instead by a British civilian officer serving in Bengal. They convey some sense of the hold Delhi had over popular imagination, all over South Asia, as a city par excellence. Delhi’s urbanity, its sophisticated shehryiat, constitutes yet another defining element of Dehlviyat. So far we have looked at history and memorialization, as well as Mughal emperors, as axes around which Dehlviyat was articulated and imagined. But, as the quote above shows, a notion of Delhi’s shehryiat—its urbanity, inhering in its splendid monuments, refined language, many markets and excellent wares, and widely famous people of wealth and learning, too was integral to what lent the city a sense of distinctiveness in public consciousness. What is interesting about this notion of the “imagined city” of polished urbanity is the period in which it is being voiced. The given quote comes from a book that came out in 1858, right after the Revolt of 1857. But English language histories of Delhi, that deal with the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century period, hardly ever convey this sense of Delhi—of the city as a vibrant center of urbanity.

The historical lens for the late eighteenth to the nineteenth century period focuses elsewhere. The standard accounts of the eighteenth century, when Delhi, as the capital of the disintegrating Mughal Empire, experienced great political upheavals and

1 A Retired Bengali Civilian, pseud. India and its Future (London, 1858), pp. 8-10
disturbances, are one of a city in decline. In the nineteenth century on the other hand, when Delhi passed under British rule, the focus shifts to the “renaissance” under British rule. English language histories chart the slew of changes brought about by transition to East India Company rule. They speak of the administrative systems the British elaborated in the city; the new technologies such as print they introduced; new kinds of educational institutions (Delhi College) they founded for the dissemination of western science and knowledge; and the myriad ways in which Dilliwallahs responded and adapted to these changes. The impression one gets from such histories is of gradual British takeover of Delhi. But who would be able to tell all of this from the quote above? In learned histories, the politico-administrative account has become the definitive account of Delhi. However, in popular perception particularly in the accounts of contemporaries and those produced by Dilliwallahs in the mid nineteenth to the early twentieth century, a very different portrait of the city emerges - the Mughal Delhi as a center of vibrant citi-ness and culture; and of a citi-ness and culture very much tied, in broader imagination, to Delhi’s perceived Muslimness.

In this chapter I will try to un-package the amorphous idea of Delhi’s shehriyat or urbanity. What is the urbanity that Delhi represents? What is the relationship between

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3 The most representative nineteenth century histories of Delhi would be Percival Spear's Twilight of the Mughals: Studies in Late Mughal Delhi (Cambridge, 1951); Spear's Delhi: A Historical Sketch (Bombay, 1945); Narayani Gupta’s Delhi Between Two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth (Delhi, 1981); selected essays in Robert Frykenberg, Delhi Through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society (Delhi, 1986); studies that chart the changes in the intellectual culture of Delhi’s traditional elites under colonial influence would be Margrit Pernau ed., The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education Before 1857; Mushirul Hasan, A Moral Reckoning: Muslim Intellectuals in Nineteenth Century Delhi (New Delhi, 2005)
Muslim-ness and Delhi’s urbanity? What can a consideration of Delhi’s shehriyat tell us about the city’s perceived personality?

Among the many criteria for judging the citi-ness of a place, “culture,” as the Benaras historian Neeta Kumar asserts, is an important marker.\(^4\) In South Asia there were very well developed, pre-colonial, ideas about the cultural attributes of citi-ness.\(^5\) However, these indigenous understandings of citi-ness were critiqued and stood stigmatized when modern urban culture began to develop under British colonial influence in places such as Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. In colonial discourse, as also gradually in the perception of elite natives, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, cities that had come up under British colonial influence, places such as Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, or the colonial quarters (such as the Civil Lines) that came up within older cities such as Delhi, came to be looked upon as embodiments of modernity, progress and urbanity. Modern denoted something positive and desirable and in colonized south Asia “modern was necessarily western”. And even though the colonized were in a relationship of dominance and dependence vis-a-vis the colonizers in these cities, such was the “culturally constituted behavioral environment of the colonial city” that a move into it was a mark of “social respectability” for the colonized.\(^6\) In this situation a dichotomy developed: while Modern was western and progressive, the non-western became pre-modern and

\(^{4}\) Neeta Kumar makes a persuasive argument for this in her article in Indu Banga (ed.), *The City in Indian History: Urban Demography, Society, and Politics*, (Delhi, 1991).

\(^{5}\) See below for a discussion of pre-British/pre-modern Indo-Persian notions of the “beautiful metropolis”.

backward. It was thus that older Indian cities such as Lucknow and Delhi, and their culture, came to be denigrated as “backward” and “degenerate.”

There was thus a displacement of the pre-modern by the modern. And this is a displacement that seems to have affected South Asian historiography as well. There is very little work on pre-colonial urban cultures in South Asia. Aspects of these cultures have been discussed in the context of colonial criticism and the colonial discourse that formed around them on the one hand, and in the context of reform efforts directed at them on the other. But pre-colonial ideas of citiness have rarely been investigated for their own sake, for how they were understood by Indians themselves before the late nineteenth century moment of rupture. And this despite the fact that even until the mid-nineteenth century, though colonial Bombay, Calcutta and Madras had been around for a while, when Indians thought of sophisticated urbanity, they thought of older cities such as Lucknow, Hyderabad, and above all, Delhi.

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8 There has, for instance, been excellent work on colonial criticism of Urdu poetry. Taking their cues from the British government in the late nineteenth century, Indian elites also turned deeply critical of Urdu poetry. People such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Hussain Azad and Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali became “reformers” of the language and advocated the adoption of western themes and styles over the “decadent” content of classical Urdu poetry. Western educated middle class Hindus on the other hand, in the same period began to take up the cause of the Hindi language, starting the Hindi-Urdu controversy in which Hindi was projected as a sober, more “natural” language that promoted “good morals,” while Urdu was castigated as a “licentious” language, associated with the brothel culture. For the Hindi-Urdu controversy and the role of the colonial state and of indigenous elites in this controversy see Frances Pritchett & S.R. Faruqui trans. and ed., *Ab-I Hayat: Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry*; Christopher Shackle’s *Hali’s Mussaddas: the Ebb and Flow of Islam*; Christopher R King *One Language Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Delhi, 1994) and Vasudha Dalmiya, *The Nationalization of Hindu Tradition: Bhartendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth Century Benaras* (Delhi, 1997)
This chapter will offer a window into pre-colonial notions of big city culture or *shehriyat* in South Asia. Taking up the case of Delhi, I will focus on broadly two features of *shehri* (city) life in Delhi: love for the city’s language Urdu, and for versification; and the passion for pigeon-keeping and bird-fights- as entry points into a discussion on Delhi’s popular culture. These elements- a love of *sher-o-shairi* (i.e. poetry) and of the birds-were among some of the features of the popular culture of older cities such as Delhi that were later critiqued as “degenerate” and wasteful. Native elites, as already mentioned, also internalized a lot of this criticism. I, however, will show that until the mid-nineteenth century period, such cultural practices were seen as an integral part of city life and charm, and were patronized both by elites and non-elites. Moreover, while in the later criticisms of the Mughal urban cultures, their supposed degeneracy and decadence was tied to their Muslimness, I will show that until the mid century, these cultures were seen as vibrantly *shehri*, even sophisticated, *precisely because* they were seen as Muslim. Their Muslimness carried neither a negative valence, nor did it preclude participation by non-

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9 For summaries of culturally grounded western critique of Indian “moral decline” see Francis Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence* (Princeton, 1967), pp. 3-19; and Gauri Vishwanathan, *Masks of Conquest* (New York, 1989), pp. 118-141. A classic example of a text that offers a modern critique of the “indolence” and “dissipation” of courtly, urban culture in India would be Munshi Premchand’s short story *Shatranj Ke Khilaadi* (The Chess Players) which was first published in 1924. Set in 1856, Lucknow, the story is about two nawaabs (nobles) completely engrossed in outdoing each other over a game of chess, stretching over several days, totally heedless of the news that keeps coming to them about the near approach of the British--arriving to take over their city. The story was later made into a memorable film of the same name by Satyajit Ray in 1977. For a more Delhi specific example see Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi*, (London, 1940) which looks at the decay of Delhi’s once proud Mughal culture. Even though Ahmed Ali looks at defeat and decline quite honestly, it is also evident that his is a sympathetic account. Ali loved Delhi’s dying culture and was sorry for its decay. The chief character in his novel, the character who embodies Delhi’s culture, or stands for Delhi itself in the *Twilight* is Mir Nihal, a middle class Muslim man of *sharif* (noble) birth and training, who has two great passions—his pigeons and his mistress Babban Jan.
Muslims. The pre-colonial urban culture of places such as Delhi was seen as Muslim and cosmopolitan—the two not being deemed mutually exclusive. The “Muslimness” of cosmopolitanism in pre-modern Delhi, and of South Asia in general, is a fact not often acknowledged in studies of Hindu-Muslim or Indo-Muslim culture in post-independence India.

*Do cities have personalities?*

Can a city be Hindu or Muslim? Do places have personalities? Bholanauth Chunder’s 1868-69 two volume—*The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India* is fascinating for the insight it offers into nineteenth century ways of thinking about cities in general, and about Delhi in particular. Bholanauth Chunder, as the title of his book well indicates, was a Hindu gentleman. He was from Bengal, and had had “modern” British education at Calcutta, and at the time of writing the *Travels*, worked for the British government in Bengal. His general outlook was one of seeing British rule as a force for good in India, which would, under its “tutelage”, weld Indians from different regions and “nationalities” into a single nation state.\(^{10}\) Also, in keeping with his “modern” pro-British proclivities, at many places Bholanauth Chunder voices belief in “science” and “progress”, and tends to see pre-British rulers, and traditional, pre-British nobility, as lacking in a progressive outlook.\(^{11}\) Yet, despite this fidelity to modernity and

\(^{10}\) Bholanath Chunder, *Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India* (London, 1868), Vol. I, p. 388

\(^{11}\) It is quite evident that in his negative judgments of the traditional Mughal elites (and especially if these were Muslims), Bholanath Chunder uses a vocabulary that generously borrows from the British. But it is interesting that his disdain for Muslims, and things Mughal etc., is practically absent until he gets to the vicinity of Delhi. This is evident in the freedom with which he talks about Agra in Vol. I, and the convoluted knots into which he ties himself when talking of Delhi in Vol. II. He was visiting Delhi just ten years after the big
the British, and almost in spite of himself, Bholanauth Chunder is impressed by the Muslim imperial cities of Agra and Delhi.

At Agra he notes the “polished Urdu” spoken without “any taint of rural corruption”, the “unmistakable shops that can belong only to an imperial city”, the excellence of the non-vegetarian food he was served at the house of his Hindu Kayastha host (which he ascribed to the “Muhammedanisms” that had crept into the food styles even of Hindus in a “Muhammedan town”) etc. On the whole, he felt most impressed with Agra. He observed, “not alone in point of eating, but also in dressing, and in politeness do North-westerns beat us. As far as the outward air of good breeding goes, almost every Agrawallah is well bred. The decorum of his appearance, and the propriety of his speech

upheaval of 1857, which the British had put down only with the greatest difficulty. British revenue policies had proved ruinous to Mughal gentry elites everywhere right from the early years of the nineteenth century. But with 1857, which was seen as the handiwork of ‘seditious' Muslims, the British went after traditional Muslim elites with a vengeance. Delhi had been the epicenter of the uprising of 1857, and the city and its traditional Mughal elites (many of whom were Muslims) suffered greatly from the wrecking of British “vengeance” once the ‘Rebellion’ (as the British insisted on calling the upheaval of 1857) was put down. A whole way of describing Muslim elites as “fallen”, indolent, debauchees became common in official British discourse, a good example of which would be W.W. Hunter’s Indian Muslims. Chunder echoes very similar beliefs when he remarks at Aligarh (very close to Delhi) –“The profligate Muhammedans are sunk in an effeminate indolence, which is the cause of their raggedness and decay throughout the country...his [the Muhammedan's] religion makes him three parts a ruffian and the fourth part a voluptuary.” Travels of a Hindoo, Vol. II, p. 124

12 Travels of a Hindoo Vol. I, pp. 370
13 Ibid., p. 380
14 Ibid., p. 390. Non-vegetarian food was consumed in all parts of India, and certainly in Bholanath’s Bengal. When he is referring to the excellence of Agra’s non-vegetarian food it is not because non-vegetarian foods were not to be had elsewhere. He is, in all likelihood, referring to certain dishes such as kebabs, variety of rice dishes (such as biryani), and oven baked flat breads of different kinds (such as naan that were sometimes stuffed with meat), that were special to the cuisines of cities with courtly Muslim cultures. The cooking of things like kebabs and biryanis to perfection was considered quite an art. And it was widely regarded that cities such as Lucknow, Delhi, Rampur etc. had special bragging rights when it came to getting these dishes right. Also, for Hindus influenced by Muhammedanisms, see footnote 27 below.
indicate the civilized life that is spent in a metropolis”.¹⁵ (Emphases mine) Thus, “eating”, “dressing”, “politeness”, “outward signs of good breeding” are identified as signifiers of civilized, metropolitan life. And in all these matters, the Bengali Bholanath Chunder, who was also intimately familiar with colonial Calcutta, readily concedes that north-westerners from an imperial, “Muhammedan town”, “beat us”.

At Delhi, which he was visiting a mere ten years after the uprising of 1857, Bholanath Chunder felt the need to be more circumspect about showing enthusiasm. The “wounds” of 1857 were still too fresh for the British, and possibly for this reason, Bholanath appears to wear his British loyalty more on the sleeve when he arrives in Delhi. Time and again he compares Calcutta and Delhi, and insists that Calcutta is the better city.¹⁶ He also makes “appropriately” censorious remarks about the “fallen” state of this “Muslim city” and its Muslims.¹⁷ Yet, there are moments when Bholanath Chunder appears “star struck” with Delhi. As the train rides into Delhi from Ghaziabad, he can barely contain his excitement as it crosses “the Kootub”, then Humayun’s tomb, and then the Jamuna before bursting into a full view of “the city’s mosques, minarets, towers and palaces.

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¹⁵ Ibid., p. 391
¹⁶ See for instance Travels of a Hindoo, Vol. II, pp. 375-6. I am not trying to imply that some kind of ‘pressure’ alone could have made late nineteenth century people compare Calcutta favorably with Delhi. It was of course possible to genuinely see ‘modern’, colonial Calcutta as superior to other cities in South Asia. But just the self conscious, almost crude, manner in which Bholanath Chunder does so when he gets to Delhi, and the fact that he never does that until he gets into the vicinity of Delhi, makes one think that he was treating Delhi as a ‘special’ case because the British saw it as ‘special’ in a negative way.
¹⁷ When Bholanath Chunder says Delhi or Agra are ‘Muslim’ cities he is not going by the numbers of Muslims in the two cities. In both places when discussing a rough population distribution he clearly states that Hindus were more numerous than Muslims. He calls them Muslim cities because the dominant culture of these places was perceived to be Muslim. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 373
extending to a great distance along the bank.”

Delhi, he exults, “conjures up a thousand associations. It is perhaps the most renowned city on the globe.” He waxes eloquent about the “showy and splendid street” of Chandnee Chowk where the “stream of life flows through ceaselessly and the great city roar is continuously in your ears; he speaks of the excellence of artisanal manufactures of Delhi; and is struck by the affordability of food in the city where the “freshest flesh, without the tare of bones,” “sweetmeats- excellent and unadulterated” and an astonishing variety of fresh fruit is available to the “meanest pauper.”

Vibrant markets and excellent manufactures were important criteria in the judging of shehriyat, and Delhi seems to have had an excellent reputation on both counts throughout the nineteenth century. In fact, such were the riches, charms and seductive appeal of Delhi’s markets that the editor of Dilli Urdu Akhbar, who had exulted and welcomed the anti-British rebels pouring into Delhi at the outbreak of the revolt of 1857, was turning despondent a few days later for the “easterners” (The rebelling Company soldiers who had come in from eastern regions), he thought, were losing their fighting vigor: they had become too busy enjoying the sweetmeats and the women [these women would be the bazaar women or the courtesans

18 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 129
19 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 129
20 Chandnee Chowk was the main street of Delhi, which had shops on either side of it. Ever since Chandnee Chowk was built in 1639, it acquired an almost legendary reputation as the street in the city of South Asia. No visitor to Delhi, and no Delhiwallah who ever wrote about his city, could do so without going into raptures about Chandnee Chowk. Likewise, other landmarks of Delhi such as the Jama Masjid, the Kootub Minar, Humayun’s tomb etc. were widely recognized monuments, which were seen as symbols of Muslim grandeur and glory everywhere---even outside of Delhi.
21 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 378
22 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 377
24 See below the discussion on the “ideal city” in Indo-Persian literature.
25 For travellers’ observations over the ages about the markets of Delhi see H.K. Kaul, Historic Delhi: An Anthology (Delhi, 1985)
and prostitutes] of Delhi!”. Bholanauth Chunder then was clearly not the first “easterner” bedazzled by Delhi’s markets! But for Bholanauth, just as at Agra, but even more so at Delhi, what was truly remarkable about the city was its “polished urbanity”.

“Decent dress, polished manners and external urbanities”, says Bholanauth Chunder, set off the “Mahomedan”, who has a “praiseworthy regard of outward appearance” and is “seldom uncivil in speaking to an inferior. The vocabulary of no language [the reference here is to the spoken Urdu of Delhi] abounds with so many words of polite address.” And then, in a truly fascinating revelation Bholanauth Chunder even underlines just how hegemonic this “Muslim” culture of Delhi was. He says, “these externalities are in fact adopted by all grades of Hindoos in Delhi,” and such adoption is surprising and offers a contrast, for example, to the Hindoos of Bengal. “Our rich mahajuns [Hindu and Jain trader-bankers who lent out money on interest] of Calcutta”, compares Bholanauth, “do not in the least, fear sinking in the estimation of the public from the shabbiness of their

26 Dilli Urdu Akhbar, 3rd August, 1857
27 In most established Muslim centers there were groups among Hindus—especially Kayasthas, Khatris and Kashmiri Brahmins-- who, owing to their close integration in the Mughal administrative apparatus, had adopted life styles very similar to that of the Muslim elites under the Mughals. In the way they dressed, the foods they ate, and the education and literary tastes they cultivated, men from these caste groups were often closer to Muslim Mughal elites than they were to Hindus of various persuasions. At the same time, in almost all places, there were groups from among the Hindus, especially the Hindu and Jain trader-bankers, who maintained their distance from 'Muslim’ practices, keeping in tact their dress (usually very modest), food habits (strictly vegetarian), educational practices (they usually sent their kids to Mahajuni or “commerce schools” which emphasized teaching of accountancy) etc. In vol. I of the Travels of a Hindoo Bholanauth shows how in Agra the Kayashths had adopted 'Muslim’ ways in dress, comportment, and in their preference for non-vegetarian food, while the Hindu and Jain trader banker class of the city was more Hindu orthodox in its habits. It is against this context that the significance of the adoption of Muslim practices by 'all grades of Hindoos' in Delhi must be understood. For Kayasthas see Karen Leonard, Social History of an Indian Caste: The Kayasthas of Hyderabad (Berkeley, 1978); for Kashmiri Brahmins see Henny Sender, The Kashmiri Pandits: A Study of Cultural Choice in North India (Delhi, 1988).
clothing, the meanness of their lodgings, or the fashion of their equipages. But in Delhi, a Hindoo...[uses] the same colloquy, the same costume, and the same civilities, [and all this] seems to have apparently effaced all external distinction between Hindoos and Mohamedans of Delhi.”  

It has often been argued that the slotting of peoples and cultures in India in terms of “Hindu” and “Muslim” is a product of British orientalist discourse, and of the internalization of the same by Indians. On account of their orientalist biases and their mis-readings of Indian society, the British overemphasized the role of religion in Indian life. Moreover, such knowledge production about India was not merely the result of an innocuous quest to know India better. It was also complicit with the colonialist power project in the country. Reading Indians, among other things, as a people in thrall of religion, and divided by it, helped to justify the colonialist subjugation of the country. Colonialism, in a “backward” and “far from perfectly realized nation” such as India, came to be justified as a “tutoring” phase from which a more mature and unified country

28 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 374
29 I have shown here how Bholanauth sees Agra and Delhi as Muslim cities. In vol. I of his travels, his description of Benaras (Varanasi—a Hindu pilgrimage center) makes clear his perception of that city as a Hindu one.
would emerge—always at some unspecified, distant point in the future. But how does Bholanauth Chunder’s work sit with such ideas about colonial discourse and its efficacy?

At first glance, it may seem that Bholanauth Chunder’s observations about the “muhammedanisms” and the Muslim-ness of places such as Delhi and Agra, and his comments on “Muslim dissolution” are signs that he is using lenses and categories put at his disposal by his British colonial masters. But, it is at least equally evident that even if Bholanauth Chunder is influenced by British ideas about classifying and categorizing Indians, he hardly appears to have bought into these ideas *in toto*. In general, British opinion of older Mughal imperial cities and their culture, starting from about the third decade of the nineteenth century, had turned quite negative. The critique of the “traditional” cultures of older cities was enmeshed with wider British criticism of Islam, and Muslim indolence, and debauchery. This was a change from the stated admiration that an earlier generation of Orientalist scholar-administrators had professed for India. Thomas Babington Macaulay, Governor-General of India, a liberal imperialist, and arch Anglicist, clearly articulated the shift in British thinking vi-a-vis Hindustan’s ruling elites and their culture. Expounding on the cause of Mughal decline he says, “…such was the change which passed on the Mogul empire during the forty years which followed the death of Aurungzebe. A succession of nominal sovereigns, sunk in indolence and debauchery, sauntered away life in secluded palaces, chewing *bang* [opium], fondling

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31 For a good discussion of the move away from Orientalism to liberal imperialism in British administrative attitudes see Eric Stokes, *English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 34-42. For a sense of the material context in which this ideological shift was occurring see Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen...*pp. 263-303
concubines, and listening to buffoons. A succession of ferocious invaders descended through the western passes, to prey on the defenceless wealth of Hindostan.”

Thus moral weakness was identified as a cause of Mughal/Muslim decline. There are places, as we have seen, where Bholanauth voices very similar ideas, holding forth that a Muhammedan is “three parts a ruffian and fourth part a voluptuary.” But such misgivings about Muslims does not come in the way of the frank admiration he expresses for the Muslim cities he visits. Rather, quite often, the very facets he singles out for praise are those that he associates with the various cities’ Muslimness--such as polite speech, fine food, elegant clothing, comportment, etc. Thus Bholanauth’s ideas may have been shaped by the colonial context, but they also showcase positive perceptions that were widely held about Muslim urban culture, and about Dehlvi culture, in particular.

**Relationship Between Islam and Urbanity in India**

Islam, it is often asserted, has a special relationship to urbanity: its religious practices, beliefs and values, especially those relating to organization and authority, encourage the urban settlement for they emphasize social gathering and discourage nomadism. Early Islamic cities such as Al-Fustat, Tunis, Rabat etc. were meant to serve as “citadels of the Faith” and to provide sanctuary to new converts in much the same way as Medina did to

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32 “Lord Clive: An Essay by Thomas Babington Macaulay (January, 1840) in *Thomas Babington Macaulay: Critical and Historical Essays, Vol. I* (ed.), A.J. Grieve (London,1907). E-text of the volume from Project Gutenberg: [http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2332](http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2332). Macaulay’s, and other liberal imperialists’ disdain was in fact not limited to India’s Muslim rulers and their culture, but was part of a broader critique of pre-colonial traditional culture, learning and way of life in India. Another famous statement from Macaulay is worth quoting: “I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. .... I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.” Text from H. Sharp (ed.), *Selections from Educational Records, Part I (1781–1839)*, (Calcutta, 1920).
those coming in from Mecca. According to Marshall Hodgson, early cities were *Dar-ul-Hijr* (places for migrants) where Muslims could collect to practice the Islamic way of life. Such views that foregrounded Islamic belief as a factor in promoting urbanism, have often been critiqued. But even the critics admitted that wherever Muslim emperors went, they set up urban settlements, and fostered urban cultures.

Commenting on the Indian case, Muhammad Mujeeb, in his classic text *Islamic Influence on Indian Society* reasoned: “religion required the congregation of the faithful in the mosque preferably five times a day but at least once a week. Muslims have to live together; a mosque has to be the central feature of every Muslim settlement. In India, especially during the first two or three centuries, the Muslims could maintain themselves as a community only in cities.”

Mujeeb’s formulation about the close inter-relationship between Islam and urbanization in South Asia is widely accepted, though other scholars have emphasized factors other than religion in explaining urban growth under Muslim sovereigns in South Asia.

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33 Muhammad Mujeeb, *Islamic Influence on Indian Society* (Meerut, 1972), pp. X, 10-11. Mujeeb acknowledges that large cities were a feature of South Asian life even before the advent of Islam in the sub-continent, particularly so in the Mauryan and Gupta periods. But, he says—“the tradition that religious instruction should not be imparted in the noise and dust of cities was fairly well established, and it was considered meritorious for a person to retire into the ‘forest’ in old age. The religious minded among the Hindus have tended to move away from cities...We could say, therefore, that the religious tendency among Hindus has been against urbanization, and among Muslims strongly in favor of it.” Ibid, p. x.

34 See J.S. Grewals’ “Urbanization in medieval India”, and Satish Chandra’s “Some Aspects of Urbanization in Medieval India,” both in Indu Banga ed., *City in Indian History: Urban Demography, Society and Politics* (Delhi, 1994). Satish Chandra, in particular, makes a compelling argument about the role of trade, especially between South Asia and Central Asia, as a factor in creating the “urban revolution” with the inauguration of Muslim rule in South Asia. For a more recent take on Islam and urbanism in South Asia see Christophe Jaffrelot “The Sense of a Community” in *Outlook*, July 23rd, 2012, and Jaffrelot and Laurent gayer (ed.), *Muslims in Indian Cities: Trajectories of Marginalization* (New York, 2011), p. 13-17.
So there is co-relation between Islam and urbanism in India, but what was the nature of this urbanism that Islam fostered? According to Mujeeb, although orthodox Islam enjoined piety and aversion to luxury, the “cultural expression of Islam has been the exact opposite, and Islam has almost everywhere promoted urban life and luxury. Their ruling class had to strike the imagination of the people. And so [there was] a multiplication of and a rapid development of cities, and of the glamorous products of craft and industry…the demand for many and excellent products of all kinds…the cultivation of elaborate manners, and so on.”35 Mujeeb thus points to a gap between normative “pure” Islam and the reality of Muslim life, particularly as it was experienced in large cities. This is a gap that is very much in evidence in practically all the historically great centers of Muslim urban culture in the world. One of the greatest popular culture classics of the Muslim world—The Thousand and One Nights s bears this out very well. The Thousand and One Nights, a collection of stories produced by several authors, in different places, over several centuries, were performed orally to vast audiences all over the Arab, Persian and the Hindustani world. These stories, many of which were set against the backdrop of glittering metropolises such as Baghdad, are a testament to the pressures and pulls an individual in a Muslim metropolis would have to negotiate. Urban life in Islamic lands, as it is evoked in the Thousand and One Tales (Hazaar Daastan), consists of exposure to virtually endless entertainments and temptations, both material and corporeal, that conflict with the obligations of faith. Of course, characters who, to begin with, get ensnared in temptation, eventually redeem themselves, and Islamic morality does triumph. But before this denouement the listener has already been taken on

35 Mujeeb, *Islamic Influence*, p. 11.
a dazzling, thrilling, even titillating journey through the pleasures, enticements and excitements of city life.\textsuperscript{36}

A similarly “glamorous” and “imagination striking” sense of urban life may be gleaned from Indo-Persian writings on cities from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Whether it is Amin Ahmad Razi’s 1594 \textit{Haft Iqlim} (Seven Climes), written for the Mughal Emperor Akbar; Nuruddin Muhammad Zuhuri’s (d. 1616) \textit{Saqinama}—a long poem on the new city of Ahmednagar built by Sultan Burhan II (r. 1591-5); or Abu Talib Kalim Kashani’s (d. 1650) \textit{masnavi} (long poem) on Akbarabad (Agra), written for the Mughal emperor Shahjahan—several common tropes are employed in praising the cities.

The public spaces of the cities are highlighted—especially their forts, baths, gardens and their bazaaars. The Bazaars, in fact, “bejeweled with groups of skilled ones”-- the diverse professional types who inhabit them, and the merchandise from all corners of the Hind and the world that they carry, receive particularly indulgent treatment in this literature.

Also mentioned in writings on cities are the “higher echelons of its inhabitants”, the \textit{ahl-i-ilm} (men of learning), \textit{hakimaan} (physicians of Greaco-Arabic medicine), \textit{ahl-i-nujuum} (astrologers), poets etc.\textsuperscript{37} In all, the established mode of glorifying a city was “a

\textsuperscript{36}For a detailed exploration of this theme see Muhsin J. al-Musawi, \textit{The Islamic Context of the Thousand and One Nights}, (New York, 2009). The \textit{Daastan} genre was popular all over the Muslim world. Within Hindustan many Dastaans have been popular over the ages including the Thousand and One Nights, but the most popular was the Daastan Amir Hamza. In the various versions of the Dastaan Amir Hamza that were published in nineteenth century Hindustan (though they had been orally rendered since the 11th century and produced in manuscript form from the sixteenth) the culture evoked is the contemporary urban one. Rich details are given of garments, ornaments, the embellishments of buildings, the interior decorations, the variegated cuisines, the trappings of the palace and court, the components of royal processions etc. Music, dance, arts, superstitions and religious beliefs are also described in great detail. See Abida Samiuuddin (ed.), \textit{Encyclopedic Dictionary of Urdu Literature} (Delhi, 2007), p. 162.

celebration of public life, including the presence of lovers and beauties, the means of making merry, and an overall air of reckless abandon.”  

Sixteenth and seventeenth century works, in the “city of beauties” genre were a mix of “metaphor and reality”, combining elements of an established genre with some place specific details. But from the eighteenth century one begins to find books that celebrate not some generic city of beauty, but specific cities brought alive with named and fleshed out details. Sayyid Ahmed Khan’s Asaar-us-Sanaadeed is a detailed work that celebrates Delhi. It talks about the built environment of the city—the forts, mosques, gardens, temples, and water reservoirs of the city. It makes quick descriptions of Delhi’s bazaars, and then in the last section moves to talk about the notables of the city. Sayyid Ahmed furnishes short biographies of 18 orthodox (bashaara) Muslim mystics, 12 unorthodox (be-shaara ) Muslim saints, 12 Muslim physicians of Yunani (Greco-Arabic) medicine, 29 scholars of Islamic religion (Ulema), 5 reciters and memorizers of the Quran, 17 poets, 11 calligraphists (including one Hindu), 4 artists, and 9 singers and dancers (including 2 Hindus). The Asar is a nineteenth century work but Delhi is discussed and praised in very similar terms in the eighteenth century text Muraqqa-i-Delhi. These texts reveal how well Delhi embodied the criteria of the “beautiful city” of the Indo-Persian imagination—it was Muslim, but also cosmopolitan. It had its Muslim saints and scholars of religion, but it also possessed the other attributes of shehriyat—monumental public buildings, bazaars and its people of talents—the singers, dancers, calligraphists etc.

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38 Ibid., p. 76
39 Sayyid Ahmed Khan’s Asar-us-Sanaadeed was first published in 1847 and then again, with some modifications in 1854. The edition I have used here is the Delhi Urdu Academy’s 2000 one. See Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Asaar-us-Sanaadeed ed., Dr. Tanveer Ahmed Alavi (Delhi, 2000).
To think of Delhi as a Muslim and a shehri markaz (urban center) was common place until the nineteenth century. In fact, Delhi’s shehriyat was seen to derive from its Muslimness. *Haft Tamasha*, a Persian work from the eighteenth century, illustrates this quite well.\(^{40}\) *Haft Tamasha* was written by Muhammad Hasan Qatil—a Khatri Hindu, who had converted to Islam. Qatil, was a Persian poet of great renown, and in the *Haft*, which is a treatise on the socio-cultural life of India, he, very matter of factly (as though holding forth on a self evident truth) speaks of “high culture” as Muslim, and uses Dehlvi examples throughout to illustrate his ideas about “cultured living”.

Delhi, therefore, was amongst the oldest and greatest of the centers of Muslim urban culture in South Asia. Much like New York gets referred to as “the city”, when people referred to Delhi, they would quite often not use the city’s name—they would simply call it shehr or the city.\(^{41}\) Shehriyat or citi-ness were synonymous with Delhi, and even in the nineteenth century, despite all its political tribulations, this shehriyat (urbanity) was very much intact.

As some of the examples given above clearly reveal, and as is evident from many other works on Delhi from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Delhi’s reputation as a cosmopolitan Muslim cultural center rested on its association with Muslim emperors of its past and present, and its polished elites, its scholars of Islam and sufī saints; its poets

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\(^{40}\) Muhammad Hasan Qatil's *Haft Tamasha*, trans. and ed., from Persian to Urdu by Muhammad Umar (Delhi, 1968). The work was originally written in the eighteenth century, and first published in 1875.

\(^{41}\) Satish Chandra, ‘Eighteenth Century Delhi’ in Frykenberg ed., *Delhi Through the Ages*
and its hakims; its grand monuments and public spaces; the liveliness of its markets; the refinement of its speech (of Delhi’s Urdu), and the craze for versification that touched very Dilliwallah; the virtuosity of its musicians and dancers—particularly its famous and beautiful tawaifs or dancing girls; the passion for pastimes such as pigeon keeping, kite flying, swimming, body-building etc.; and its numerous public “mele thele”, or the festivals and fairs.

To speak of all these different aspects of the socio-cultural life of Delhi is outside the scope this chapter. However, I will take up two things—the place of language and poetry in Dehlvi culture, and the craze for pigeon keeping in Delhi—to gain a sense of the popular culture elements within the city’s urban culture. Delhi’s culture has traditionally been spoken of in texts produced by elites. It were mostly the Persian/Urdu knowing scholar-gentry, high born men from Delhi, who wrote about Delhi’s distinctive (makhsuus) culture, and from the late nineteenth century onwards, of the loss of this distinctive culture. But should this be taken to mean that a sense of Delhi-ness animates the worldview only of the elites? I would argue that this was not the case. Delhi had a shared city culture, which people across classes could identify with. Within texts

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42 See H.K. Kaul, *Delhi* for how visitors to the city, over the ages never failed to comment on its tawaifs or dancing girls. Also see Mir Sher Ali "Afsos”, *Araish-i-Mehfil* trans. from Urdu by Major Henry Court, (Calcutta, 1882, 1871), pp. 48 for how highly regarded the arts of the courtesans were in the Indo-Muslim world and how Delhi’s courtesans were considered in a class of their own. Mir Sher Ali had written his book in “praise of India”, in 1805, at the behest of a Company official. In praise of the “beautiful ones of the country” he says—“ the lovely ones of this country are unequalled in grace...winning and charming manner...and it is well known that in the immediate neighbourhood of Dilli, as far as beauty goes, an unadorned one has the elegance of adornment, and should one with a body fair as silver, but unpolished come here, in a short time having obtained neatness of form, she will rank among the beauties of the world...everyone here knows how to steal and rob people’s hearts.”
produced by elites there are scattered references to activities of non-elite Dehlvis as well. And authors such as Ashraf Suboohi Dehlvi and Sayed Yusuf Bukhari, in particular, have gone beyond the elites to the streets of Delhi. They have captured the voices of people in the bazaars, and focussed on non-elite groups such as kaarkhaandars (petty workshop owners and workers), mendicants, bakers, sweepers etc. in offering their take on Dehlvi culture.

The Place of Urdu Language and Poetry in Delhi

Urdu was a language that came up through an admixture of Persian and Turkic words with the dialect spoken in the Delhi region. It is believed that this language began to develop when the earliest Muslim sultans of South Asia made Delhi the capital of their Empires from the thirteenth century C.E. onwards. But Urdu remained the spoken language of Delhi between the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. But in the eighteenth century it also emerged as a literary language. Many excellent poets, who had earlier used only Persian, now began to compose poems in Urdu. Persian, and later Urdu, were cultivated in nearly all the courts of India, especially the courts of the Muslim sovereigns. There were therefore, many centers of Urdu all over India (though they were all cities). Yet, Dilliwallahs claimed a special affinity to the language. Urdu, they insisted, was their vernacular rendered into literary language. Delhi’s Urdu, it was claimed, was in a class of its own, and visitors to the city (as some of the examples above show) also commented on it. In biographies of the city\textsuperscript{43}, in texts specifically composed on language and

\textsuperscript{43} Syyid Ahmad Khan’s \textit{Asar-us sanaadeed} has a complete chapter on ‘The Rise and progress of Urdu over the Ages’ that clearly foregrounds \textit{Dehlvi} Urdu as the correct literary Urdu, and
poetry, people spoke of and celebrated Dehlvi Urdu. Works were written on the different kinds of Urdu spoken inside Delhi—the Urdu spoken at the Red Fort and by the city’s elite; the \textit{beghamati zabaan} or the language of women in Delhi, and the \textit{Kaarkhaandari zabaan} or the Urdu spoken by the \textit{kaarkhaandars} of Delhi. Big lexical projects on the Urdu language were undertaken, and efforts were made through them to prioritize the Dehlvi pronunciation, and the Dehlvi usage of words and phrases over their usage in other Urdu centers such as Lucknow and Hyderabad. Rivalries with other centers of Muslim urban culture, particularly with Lucknow, were fought largely on the turf of language. What was correct \textit{talaffus} or pronunciation, which endings—masculine or feminine to use for particular verbs, how much of Persian to mix with Urdu, how much \textit{rozmarrah} (everyday speech) to use in literary writings, especially poetry, were contentious matters bitterly fought between partisans of different cities. Dilliwallahs, who thought themselves natives of the language, felt they had to have the arbitration rights in matters pertaining to the ‘correct’ use of Urdu. But almost all these people talking about Urdu—the writers of city biographies, and dictionaries and published poets—were elites.

nonchalantly sweeps aside the claims of those whom he calls ‘non-natives’ to the tongue. See pp. 360-365.

\textsuperscript{44} Insha Allah Khan Insha’s \textit{Darya-i-Latafat} is a book on Urdu grammar and etymology, but here as well one gets the distinct sense that it is not so much about Urdu—the lingua franca of North India, but more about \textit{Dehlvi} Urdu, though of course \textit{Dehlvi} Urdu was made to speak for all Urdu.

\textsuperscript{45} Faizuddin’s 1780s’ \textit{Bazm-I Aakhir} has entire sections devoted to \textit{Zaban-I Urdu-i- Mualla}—the language of the exalted fort and on the \textit{Beghamati Zabaan} –the language of elite women of Delhi full of proverbs, metaphors and similes. Ashraf Subuhi Dehlvi’s \textit{Lal Qile ki ek Jhalak} is also on the \textit{beghamati zabaan} (its an essay that was first published in the 1940s and later re-published in Shamim Ahmad ed., \textit{Marhum Dilli ki Ek Jhalak} (Delhi, 1965)

\textsuperscript{46} Abdul Ghani Dehlvi, \textit{Dilli ki kaarkhandari zabaan} and Gopichand Narang, \textit{Kaarkhandari Urdu} (Delhi, 1961)

\textsuperscript{47} See Sayyid Ahmad Dehlvi’s monumental dictionary \textit{Farhang-i-Aasafiyya
How then might one reasonably speak of Urdu and a love of versification as pan-Dehlvi features that defined the city’s culture?

Sensitivity to language usage, and an immense pride bordering on chauvinism, in Dehlvi Urdu was something that appears to cut across classes. The idiomatic, expressionful native tongue (taksaali zabaan) was zealously guarded against “polluting” influences from without. Stories of the famous eighteenth century poet Mir, made famous by Azad, about the poet’s utter contempt for all those who did not speak Urdu in the “proper Dilli fashion” are a legion. But there are other stories as well that suggest that even ordinary Delhiwallahs, who could not remotely claim the great Mir’s poetic sensibilities, were readily offended and got confrontational when they perceived “threat” to the “purity” of their Dehlvi Urdu. The author of Marhum Dilli Ki Ek Jhalak narrates the following anecdote from before the ghadar (revolt of 1857)—

One day it was brought to the Badshshah’s notice that people in the city had given a sound thrashing to some khat bunnos. It was common practice for khaat bunnos to go from street to street with the cry “khaat banaa lo” (‘get your khaat made’). Some city folks (shehrwallahs) in the bazaar were offended and said—“nikle tumhaari khaat’ (let

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48 See Muhammad Hussain Azad Ab-I Hayat ‘Poets of the Third Age’ for anecdotes about Mir.
49 The khaat is a kind of easily moved bed with a basic wood frame and legs, in which the sleeping surface is formed by weaving together broad strips of a coarse, sturdy type of cloth. Constant use can cause a khaat’s woven surface to sag or tear. Khaat bunnos (weavers of khaats) are people who repair khaats. The cry they use is ‘khaat bana lo’ (‘get the khaat made’), and this is done either by re-weaving the old khaat to tighten the sleeping surface, or by weaving a fresh sleeping surface with new cloth strips to replace torn/worn ones. While still common in households across India, for the period that this study covers, when furniture even in well off homes was sparse to non-existent, the khaat would probably have been one item of furniture that was still available and used in most households.
your *khaat* be made*)

“what kind of indecent language is this?!”

and proceeded to thrash the stuffing out of the poor *khaat bunno*.

The citywallahs made their victims swear off this [*khaat*] non-native term [*taksaal baahar lafz se taubaa karaayi*] and explained that instead of saying “*khaat banaa lo*” (get your *khaat* made) they should say “*chaarpaayi banaa lo*” (‘get your *chaarpaayi* made’).

And if people cared deeply for the *taksaali zabaan* (native tongue), they were nothing short of crazy for poetry in this language. In Muslim urban culture in South Asia, and it may well be true for Muslim urban cultures everywhere in the pre-modern period, poetry and poets were held in high esteem. Gentlemen elites always claimed, even if they did not always possess, a talent for versification, and the ability to appreciate poetry. Poetry was certainly amongst the center-pieces of the largely oral culture that dominated Mughal Delhi. People could recall from memory copious amounts of poetry. Biographies of people from within this culture make a point of highlighting their subjects’ prodigious *hafiza*/memory. (For instance: Sayyid Ahmad Khan does that for his grandfather

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50 There is a pun here. Get your *khaat* made—means get your *khaat* repaired, but it can also mean ‘get ready for your funeral’, because people were carried for their last rites on a *khaat* like contraption.

51 The other name for *khaat* is *chaarpai*, and the two, to the best of my knowledge, are used interchangeably. But this anecdote reveals otherwise: it seems that *chaarpai* is what people in Delhi used to call this contraption. And denoting the said item by the name of *khaat* was found offensive. Here of course the question is not one of correct or incorrect usage of a word, but the intolerance of a city people for a term they considered non-native (*ghair taksaali*) to their speech. For the anecdote see Shamim Ahmad (ed.), *Marhum Dilli*...p. 19.

52 For a brief but good introduction to the culture of Urdu poetry in South Asia see Khurshidul Islam and Ralph Russel ed., *Three Mughal Poets: Mir, Sauda, Mir Hasan*, Introduction.

53 The other great ‘oral’ passion of the Dilliwallahs was a love for *Daastaan goi* or the oral telling of Arab and Persian popular tales from the Arabian Nights, Daastaan Amir Hamza etc. *Daastaans* were told publicly in the bazaars, on the steps of the Jama Masjid and ‘daastaan gos’ (story-tellers) were invited into elite homes for virtuoso story telling sessions—where one Daastaan/story was told over several days. See ‘Mir Baqir Ali Daastan-go’ in *Dilliwale*, Vol. III (Delhi, 1992)
Fariduddin Khan, and Muhammad Hussain Azad does that for his ustad Zauq). For poets—established ustads and aspiring shagirds—hafiza was even more important. The great ustaads (teachers) of poetry, when judging the suitability of a candidate for their shaagirdee (mentoring) used to see, among other things, how much of the poetic production of old masters the hopeful could recite from memory. It was not unusual even for non-poets to quote in their prose writings, and in everyday speech, lines of poetry from Persian and Urdu.\(^\text{54}\)

Not surprisingly therefore, the mushaira, or the poetical assembly, was a most important institution of cultural life in Delhi, and other centers of Muslim culture from the eighteenth century. Works such as Ab-i Hayat, Diwan-i-Zauq and Tabaqat e Shuara-i Hind carry a lot of information about some of the more famous mushairas of Delhi, as well as a general sense of how a budding poet found entry into mushairah circles, the entry barriers he/she encountered, the ways in which entry was finally gained, the elaborate etiquette observed in such settings, how a young poet made his mark/earned his spurs, how, and on what kinds of points poets were ragged by opponents, the fractious,

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\(^{54}\) The practice of quoting lines of poetry in works of prose was very much the norm. To cite just a few examples see Sayyid Ahmad’s Asar, Abul Kalam Azad’s Khvud Navisht, Mullah Wahidi Mere Zamaane Ki Dilli (Karachi, 1961). It appears to me that while speaking/writing from memory was the norm, there was probably not too great a pressure to remember with exactitude. It was acceptable to claim one was “quoting” something, when properly speaking, one might more likely be recalling a version very near to the original, but not the original itself. This kind of inexact “quoting from memory” habit often surfaces even in written work, making it extremely exasperating for later scholars to figure out what the exact version of a particular piece of poetry/prose may have been. It was not unusual for an author to quote several slightly different versions of the same piece of poetry or prose even within one work. See Muhammad Hussain Azad Aab-e Hayaat: Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry, translated and edited by Frances Pritchett and Shamsur Rehman Faruqi (Delhi, 2001), p. IX
though always outwardly polite, disputations that happened between them etc. These works that provide details about the poetry circles and poets of Delhi also reveal how *mushairas* were not just gatherings for reciting poetry, they were important social institutions as well. Young men wanted to attend *mushiras* because *mushaira* settings allowed one to socialize with a city’s Persianate-Urdu literary elites (Stephen Blake’s notion fo ahl-i-kalam) and thereby make claims for one’s own inclusion in this elite. *Mushairas* were also settings where personal bonds (between friends, between teacher-student etc.) were forged and maintained, and rivalries played out and underlined. It was owing to their significance as social institutions that men with little poetic talent also wanted to be part of *mushairas*. Non-poets often approached others with more talent to pen some couplets on their behalf so they might attend a *mushairah mehil*. *Mushairas*, thus, were significant institutions of the socio-cultural life of Indo-Muslim urban centers.  

The organization of the best *mushairahs* took careful planning, and investment in both time and money. Who should be invited, who should be left out, how the guests should be seated, who should lay down the metre and the rhyme for a particular gathering, what was the order in which guests were to be encouraged to read their poems—these were all carefully considered matters. And all of this was aside from the “physical arrangements” that were made for the *mushairas*—the tents that were set up, the lighting that was arranged, the betel leaves and *itr* that were got ready for offering to guests etc. Poetry, therefore, was pursued earnestly and passionately in eighteenth and

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55 A quite vivid sense of the *mushairaa* culture may be had from Muhammad Hussain Azad’s two texts *Ab-i-Hayat* and *Diwan-i-Zauq*. 
nineteenth century Delhi. People spent effort, money and time in honing and showcasing poetic talent—be it their own, or others.⁵⁶

So poetry was central to the culture I am seeking to foreground: quoting it from memory, weaving it with effortless ease into one’s conversation, using it to pithily and subtly to make one’s point, particularly as a tool of repartee, were considered hallmarks of good articulation—itself a most important attribute of any “cultured” person within the milieu under consideration.

But poetry, whether in its composition or its appreciation, was not the preserve of the elites alone. Mendicants, beggars, street vendors all plied their trade through catchy, mischievous, occasionally philosophical poetry that was often self-composed. It is the boast of many a Delhi’s “nostalgia writer” that even the beggars and vendors of their city had poetry coursing through their veins.⁵⁷ They sang their own limericks, and also the poetry of established masters. Ghalib⁵⁸, in letters he wrote to friends after the Revolt had ravaged Delhi, often rued the fact that along with so much else that had been carried away, his poetry too had been lost in the tumult. Ghalib was known never to maintain any

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⁵⁶ To understand the elaborate preparation for Mushairaaas see Farhatullah Beg’s 1917 fictional account of a mushairah in mid-nineteenth century Delhi called Dilli Ki Aakhiri Shama. Though the account is fictional there is wide agreement that it is a faithful recreation of what mushairaaas would have been like in early to mid-nineteenth century Delhi. Also see ‘Dilli ke Mushairah’ in Dilli College Magazine: Dilli Number

⁵⁷ See for example Khwajah Muhammad Shafi’s Dilli Ki Aawaazen (Delhi, exact date unknown but written before the 1940s). Here Shafi speaks of the many limericks and ditties used by common Dilliwallahs to ply their trade. He talks of people such as coach drivers, newspaper sellers, and sellers of caps, shoes, clothes, flowers etc. Maheshwar Dayal in Aalam men Intikhaab Dilli and Ashruf Subuhi in Yeh Dilli Hai (published 1944) also writes about the poetic talents of the men and women on Delhi’s streets.

⁵⁸ Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, who lived in Delhi from the early c. 1810 to 1868, is regarded as one of the foremost poets of the Urdu language.
kind of record of his own compositions. But two of Ghalib’s gentleman friends at Delhi used to keep written records of all the poetry he recited at *mushairas* (poetic assemblies). However, in the vandalism, that was such a key facet of the Revolt in Delhi, many of city’s best libraries were destroyed. Among these were those of Ghalib’s friends, and with their libraries also went much of his preserved *kalaam* (poetic output). It was for this reason that Ghalib felt moved to tears one day when he heard a mendicant singing lines from a poem he recognized as his own. Apparently, the beggar had found torn pieces of paper with poetry on it, he had it read out to him, and then took to singing it on the streets!^{59}

Thus, it was not unusual in eighteenth and nineteenth century Delhi, for first-rate poetry to be sung on streets. Such was the passion for poetry in this society as a whole, that at least some of the “high literary production” of the poetic type must have been both comprehensible and popular with the masses as well. In sources from the period, one gets a sense that while many (though by no means all) poets may have been social elites of one type or another, as “poets” they had become accessible to a much larger public. In fact, one often gets the impression that poets in eighteenth and nineteenth century Delhi were almost popular culture icons of their society. Their rivalries, fanned by connoisseur partisans, including the Emperor himself, were played out in poetic assemblies (*mushairas*) at the imperial court, and at the houses of substantial gentlemen in the city. The goings on of the *mushairas*, who read what, how established rivals faced off with each other, the praises that some won, and the criticisms and barbs others gathered, were reported in newspapers, and became grist for the city’s gossip mills through word of

mouth transmission in a highly literacy aware society.\textsuperscript{60} Newspapers- and not just those called \textit{guldastaas} that were exclusively devoted to poetry- but also “sober” ones such as Master Ramchander’s newspaper \textit{Fawaid-i-Nazrin} (which was devoted to scientific matters and history), felt compelled to carry the fresh \textit{kalaam} (poetic production) of Urdu masters in order to boost their sales.\textsuperscript{61}

But all of this is not to suggest that in the Delhi of our period it was simply a case of one-way transmission of “elite” poetry amongst the “masses”. Rather, where poetry and its ancillary arts (music) were concerned, there could be real circularity in elite and popular cultures in the city.\textsuperscript{62} The following anecdote by the poet laureate Zauq, reproduced in Muhammad Hussain Azad’s \textit{Divan-i-Zauq} bears the point out—

An old man used to go about selling pouches of spicy digestive powders (chooran aur mirch ki puriyaan) using a catchy ditty\textsuperscript{63}

\begin{center} 
\textit{Tere man chale ka suada hai khatta aur meetha} 
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{60} There is a lot of indication about the circulation of this kind of poet/poetry related gossip in \textit{tazkiras} (anthologies of poet biographies with a few examples of their poetry) written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of these would be Mir Taqi Mir’s \textit{Nikhat us Shuaara}, Muhammad Husain Azad’s \textit{Ab-I Hayat}, \textit{Tabqaat-i-Shuaara-i-Hind}, Muhammad Hussain Azad’s \textit{Diwan-I Zauq} etc.

\textsuperscript{61} For the importance of urdu poetry in the boosting of newspaper sales in Delhi in the early nineteenth century see Swapna Liddle, ‘Azurda: Scholar, Poet and Judge’ and Gail Minault’s ‘Perils of Cultural Mediation: Master Ramchandra and Academic Journalism at Delhi College’ in Margrit Pernau ed., \textit{Traditional Elites, Colonial State and Education before 1857} (Delhi, 2006)

\textsuperscript{62} For a theoretical understanding of ‘popular culture’ see Peter Burke, \textit{Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe} (London, 1978); for the idea of ‘circularity’ in the culture of elites and non-elites see Mikhail Bakhtin’s \textit{Rabelais and his World} (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), and Carlo Ginzburg’s \textit{Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller} (Baltimore, 1980), Preface

\textsuperscript{63} The exact line is “\textit{tere man chale ka saudaa hai, khatta aur meetha}” (it is your man chala’s bargain—sweet and sour). \textit{Divan-I Zauq} p. 317
(It is your sweetheart’s bargain—sweet and sour)

The emperor heard this, and taking a shine to it, added a few more lines to it on his own. He then sent over the unfinished song to his ustaad—Zauq, who added ten further couplets to it. When this “finished” (pun intended) composition was presented to the emperor, he was being attended upon by some dancing girls. They heard the complete song, memorized its couplets, and by the next day the song was so popular that men and women, and even kids in the lanes and bazaars of the city were singing it (bachche bachche ki zabaan par thaa).  

Likewise, Azad remembers his uestaad Zauq telling him of another incident: a mendicant’s cry—“kuch raah i khudaa de jaa” (Give in the name of God) fell on the emperor’s ears who liked it very much and repeated it to Zauq. Using this same “refrain” kuch raah I khuda de jaa (give in the name of God), and meter, and rhyme, Zauq then composed a complete twelve couplet song. For years afterwards the song could be heard from “every house in the city. People would go about singing it street to street”.

This trajectory of poetic production and dissemination, as it appears in the examples above, reveals real circularity between elite and popular culture in the Delhi of our period. Inspiration could come from any body—even mendicants and small time vendors; it could be worked over by the Emperor or the poet laureate; be taken up by the professional singers and dancing girls of the city; and through them get to elite patrons, as

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64 Divan-i-Zauq, p. 317
65 Divan-I Zauq p. 209
well as to the people of the bazaars. Only in a completely poetry crazed society this kind of rapid transmission, across classes and age groups, of a poetic composition becomes possible.66

Pigeon Keeping

As with versification, so with respect to pastimes such as pigeon keeping, it is possible to speak of a shared Dehlvi culture. As an elite pastime, references to pigeon breeding and flying come at least as early as the time of Akbar. In the Ain-i-Akbari (Akbar’s regulations), the chapter on amusements includes a section on pigeon flying, breeding and different colors of royal pigeons. There were estimated to be upwards of twenty thousand pigeons at Akbar’s court, which moved along with the Emperor when the latter moved camp. These pigeons were trained to execute complicated maneuvers that thrilled spectators.67 The keeping of pigeons and other birds continued to be regarded as pastimes befitting elites even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.68 In the nineteenth

66 It would not be wrong to say that Indo-Muslim urban society was a quite poetry crazed society. Today nobody would associate Delhi as a city of poets or as a city that cares deeply about language. In part this is because Delhi today is not the pre-modern city it was until the mid-late nineteenth century. But poetry is no longer central to Dehlvi culture also because Delhi is no longer an Indo-Muslim city. Starting from the late nineteenth century (discussed in Chapter Four below) Delhi’s personality as an Indo-Muslim or Muslim urban center had begun to come apart. With the Partition of India in 1947 (and the exodus of nearly 80 percent of Delhi’s Muslims to Pakistan and the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Punjabi speaking Hindu refugees from Pakistan), Delhi’s character as a Muslim city was almost completely wiped out. But in other Indo-Muslim cities, places such as Lahore (which was also a Mughal imperial city) the passion for poetry still persists, and extempore verification, even by less than “literary people”, is attempted all the time.

67 Abul-Fazl Allami, Ain-i-Akbari; translated by H.Blochmann and H.S. Jarret (Calcutta, 1873-1894), Book II, p. 29.

68 William Hoey trans., Memoirs of Delhi and Faizabad Being a Translation of the Tarikh-i-Farah Baksh” of Muhammad Faiz Baksha From the Original Persian, Vol. II (Allahabad, 1888),
century, the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, had very talented pigeon fliers. Old Dilliwallahs, even in the early twentieth century, remembered with awe, the stories of the royal pigeon fliers who had trained their birds to form a canopy over the Badshah’s head everytime he travelled on his elephant from the Qila to the Jama Masjid on Fridays. But at least from the late nineteenth–early twentieth century there is evidence that pigeon keeping and flying were popular with all classes of people in Delhi. Shahid Ahmad Dehlvi writes, “In the hovels of Delhi’s poor, space was too short even for human habitation…yet there was scarcely a house where a few animals were not reared. Every household had at least five to ten pairs of pigeons…pigeons are seen as innocent birds, some even consider them sayyids [descended from the family of the Prophet]. It is also said that illness doesn’t visit the house that keeps pigeons…with the constant flapping of their wings they keep the circulation of air flowing in congested quarters.”

Depending on therefore, on the time and resources one was willing to spend on this hobby, the range of things one could possibly do in pursuance of each of these could be quite vast. With respect to kabootarbazi or pigeon keeping- at one end of the spectrum would be the average person who would follow the pigeon contests in the city keenly, perhaps even keep a bird or two. At other end of the spectrum, would be the diehard enthusiasts—people who spent almost all of their time, and a lot of their resources (often with unhappy consequences for their larger families) on this hobby. People kept large flocks of birds, trained them carefully, and took their kabootarbazi rivalries very

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p. 57. The original work “Tarikh-i-Farah Baksha” was an eye witness account of the years of the Lucknow Nawab, Asaf-ud-daula’s reign 1775-1797.
70 Mir Nihal, in Ahmad Ali’s Twilight in Delhi would be an example of a character willing to go to extreme lengths to indulge his hobby of pigeon rearing.
seriously. They took care to buy the very best that their money could get, and being in Delhi, which was famous for its birds and animals bazaar near the Jama Masjid, there were plenty of options for the aficionados to splurge on this hobby. Birds from far off places could be bought here, and enthusiasts willingly paid astronomical sums for some of them. Some species of pigeons such as the “lotan kabootars” were valued highly, and anyone who had these could be assured of having his flock taken “seriously”. Some pigeons were prized for their looks, some for their flying, and others because they could be trained to be good at competitive flying and at making opponents “lose their way”: they would so encircle their rival pigeons, cutting off their possibility of free flight, that the latter would be compelled to land on the former’s (rather their masters’) terraces.71

In literature that seeks to memorialize the “traditional” culture of Delhi, one finds very detailed descriptions of these leisure activities. Hobbies such as kabootarbazi (pigeon keeping), patangbazi (kite flying), shatranj (chess), ganjifa, cock fighting etc., are inextricably linked with the culture of “traditional” Delhi. People write in great details about what they were, where they were staged, the different grades of experts in the field, its chief ustads, its biggest rivalries, the elaborate hierarchy and adab (comportment) observed in their gatherings and competitions etc. The important thing to note here is that elites and commoners alike patronized these pastimes.

71 Some of the best descriptions of pigeon fliers, their rivalries and the pains they took to maintain their flocks are to be found in Ahmad Ali’s Twilight in Delhi, especially pp. 20-22, 99-103.
Thus, writings such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s *Sirat-i-Fareediyaa* and Abul Kalaam Azad’s *Khwud Navisht* describe various kinds of convivial gatherings where gentlemen elites pursued all manners of pastimes (poetry, astronomy, kite-flying, chess, Hindustani music etc.) with great passion. But other kinds of writings reveal the passion with which many of these same pastimes/hobbies were pursued by the city’s non-elites as well—particularly by the class of people called *kaarkhaandaars*.

Several accounts, from the early twentieth century, that self consciously try to convey a sense of the everyday life and culture of Old Delhi (by which is meant Shahjahanabad in the period before 1947) highlight the *kaarkhaandar* of Delhi as a sociological type who is the city’s “subaltern king of good times.”\(^7\) The *kaarkhaandar* is a person who owns, or is employed in, the smaller workshops of the city. He is mostly an illiterate. His Urdu, as one author puts it, is not “the real Delhavi Urdu.” It is rather a cockney dialect, with a lot of swearing and abusing—both of the serious and good-natured variety. In short, a *kaarkhandar*, as a “type”, offers quite a contrast to the average *sharif* (noble/elite) gentleman. He was believed, in both his speech and personality, to be loud and crude, but not altogether bereft of charm. The *kaarkhaandar*’s philosophy in life is to ‘live it up’. With no family wealth to fall back upon, he needs to works hard for his money, and soon as he has some in hand, he sets about splurging it, enjoying the good life, outside of home, in the company of male friends, at the various revelry destinations inside the walled city and its suburbs. And only after his last penny is spent, the *karkhaandar* thinks

\(^7\) Some of these accounts are Sayed Yusuf Bukhari Dehlavi, ‘Dilli ke Karkhaandaar (Delhi’s Karkhaandars)’ in *Yeh Dilli Hai (This is Delhi)* (Delhi, 1944), pp. 77-99; Shamim Ahmad (ed.,) *Marhum Dilli Ki Ek Jhalak (A glimpse of the late or deceased Delhi)*, pp.
of heading back to his *karkhaanaa* (workshop).  

Ashraf Subuhi, in an interesting piece ‘The *kaarkhaandar’s* house on the morning of Eid”, hilariously charts out how a *kaarkhaandar*, over the protestations of his wife, says the Eid *namaaz*, and then proceeds to spend the rest of the day roaming the big city streets with his friends. The *kaarkhaandar* takes a coach ride into Nizamuddin (a suburb in the South of Delhi), pays respects at the grave of Nizamuddin Auliya (a much revered fourteenth century *sufi* saint), and then sets about enjoying the fair like atmosphere that obtains near the *sufi*’s tomb. He watches the performance of singing girls and trapeze artists, bets on a bout of bird fighting, eats a large plate of *kebabs* and a big glass of thickened and sweetened milk, and lounges about with his friends, to come home only late at night to a volley of abuse from his wife!  

Delhi’s large city attractions, therefore—the bird fighting, performing artists, bazaar food etc.—were enjoyed by Dilliwallahs in common. This is not to say that there was no distinction between classes in pre-modern Delhi. This was, in fact, a deeply hierarchical society. The distinction between *shareef* (elite) and *raazil* (commoner), though not a strictly class based one, was zealously observed, and firmly insisted upon when questioned. There were very strict rules of comportment for different classes—what they could and could not do, who they could or could not speak to, where they ought or ought not to be seen etc. Thus, for example, many a Delhi elite has written about the famous road-side eateries of the city, the makers of different kinds of *kebabs* and *naharis* and *naans*, etc. While the elites write of these “subaltern” food sellers with great affection,

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73 Shamim Ahmad, *Marhum Dilli*...p. 16  
74 Ashraf Subuhi ‘Kaarkhaandar ka ghar eid ki subah’ in *Marhum Dilli*...pp. 82-98
celebrating them virtually as famous Delhi institutions, it is inconceivable that these same
gentlemen elites would have stood about on the streets, rubbing shoulders with
kaarkhaandars, enjoying a plate of kebabs. To stand eating in the open, with people of
the “lower orders,” would have been a serious dereliction of expected gentlemanly adab.
Gentlemen, and their women, would almost never have visited street food stalls. But what
they did do instead, was to send their servants to these stalls, and have them fetch
“popular” foods for themselves. Thus elites and non-elites shared Delhi’s urban culture.
The elites may have done so in the privacy of their homes, and the commoners in the
city’s public spaces. But they participated in the same culture.

However, this shared urban culture came in for increasing criticism from the late
nineteenth century. When the colonial state ramped up its criticism of the indigenous
cultures in that period, and many of the newer kinds of elites who had come up under
colonial rule also took up the same “cause,” many people from traditional privileged
backgrounds, who had been participants in Delhi’s urban culture, began to distance
themselves from it. Many, including people like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who wrote several
texts celebrating Delhi’s “traditional” culture, became self conscious and defensive about
it by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century period, and began efforts to “reform”
the city’s traditional society and culture. Even after the late nineteenth century
Dilliwallahs flew kites, watched bird fights, fancied pigeons and wrote Urdu poetry.
However, many of these activities, which were once the markers of a vibrant, and much

75 Maheshwar Dayal’s Re-discovering Shahjahanabad makes many descriptions of elite
gatherings where many of the fore-mentioned pastimes were indulged in.
celebrated city culture, now came to be associated with the “lower classes.” The “shared” pre-modern Muslim urban culture of Delhi was lost forever.
Chapter Four: The Unraveling of a ‘Cultural Tradition’

“Delhi has never been the name of a brick and mortar city. If this was the case then the Haveli [as the Lal Qila or Red Fort was called by the Delhiwallahs], the Jama Masjid, and so many other buildings still exist—at least in name. Even today Delhi should have been as lively as before. But no! In former times there was something else that kept cities alive. It was that ‘something’ that made Delhi—Delhi. That spirit fled on wings, and Delhi became lifeless.”

The spirit that had made Delhi—Delhi had fled. The cultural tradition or “tehzeebi riwaayat” that Delhi represented was dying or dead: these refrains were common to many books produced in Delhi from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century period.

So far this study has tried to understand and unpackage the ‘cultural tradition’ that Delhi was believed to represent. A city, as Philip Paneth says, “is as much a personality as a human being...you begin to see in the mind’s eye a picture of the inner life of the city long before you visit it”. Eighteenth and nineteenth century Delhi cannot be visited, but its socio-cultural world, its personality, comes alive through a whole range of texts.

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2 There is a whole list of books that echo the same sentiment— Munshi Faizuddin’s *Bazm-i-Aakhir*; Rashid-al-Khiri’s *Naubat-i-Panj Roza, Dilli ki Aakhirii Bahaar; Ghadar ki Maari Shehzaadian*; Nasir Nazir Firaq’s *Lal Qile ki ek Jhalak, Dilli ka Ujra Hua Lal-Qila*; Baqir Ali Dastango’s *Maula Baksha Haathi*; Khwajah Hasan Nizami’s twelve books on the Revolt in Delhi; Mirza Farhatullah Beg Dehlvi’s *Dilli ki Aakhirii Shama and Phoolwalon ki Sair*; Khwajah Muhammad Shafi Dehlvi’s, *Dilli ka Aakhirii Sambhala*; Sayyid Yusuf Bukhari’s, *Yeh Dilli Hai*; Ashraf Subuhi Dehlvi’s *Dilli ki Chand Ajeeb Hastiyan*.
3 Philip Paneth c.f Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires*, p. 226
produced by Dilliwallahs and non-Dilliwallahs from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From a reading of these texts I have surmised in the previous chapters that the Dehlvi cultural tradition or Dehlviyat—the tradition that was dominant, even hegemonic in the city—represents a cosmopolitan, Muslim, urban culture. Dehlviyat was one variant of the Indo-Muslim urban culture that had been in the making ever since the thirteenth century when Muslim sovereigns began to set up empires in Hindustan. But a more Delhi-specific Muslim urban culture, I have argued, began to develop only in the eighteenth century—in the period of the Mughal Empire’s decline. Dehlviyat, as it began to emerge in the eighteenth century, drew upon Delhi’s rich pre-eighteenth century imperial and sufı history; and developed around the Mughal emperor and the royal establishment; and popular culture practices such as a passion for Urdu language and poetry, and for pastimes such as pigeon keeping, kite flying etc.

The question that I wish to consider now is: why is it that from the late nineteenth century, Dilliwallahs were seized with the anxiety that their culture was disappearing or dying? Why the urgency to record for posterity certain elements of Dehlviyat before they ‘disappear all together’? Why was the cosmopolitan, Muslim, urban culture of Delhi perceived to be under threat?

4 These include memorializing texts about Delhi written in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, but also anthropological accounts relating to aspects of Delhi’s socio-cultural life, memoirs, letters, biographies, and autobiographies by or about Dilliwallahs, and texts on Delhi written in the ‘biographies of city’ genre.
5 See Chapter One, above.
6 See Chapter Two, above.
7 See Chapter Three, above.
8 This, for instance, was the reason why the publisher of Bazm-i-Aakhir got Faizuddin to write it, and why Farhatullah Beg wrote Dilli ki Aakhir Shama. See Preface to Delhi Urdu Academy’s editions of both books for the reasons why they were written.
There are two interrelated sets of reasons for why longtime Dilliwallahs were worrying about Delhi from the late nineteenth century onwards. The first set pertains to the change in the political climate, and the expansion and opening up of Delhi after the Revolt. The second has to do with fault lines or boundaries that were internal to Dehlviyat. These faultlines widened into cracks in the very different political climate that developed in Delhi from the late nineteenth century onwards. In this chapter, while I will briefly go over the first set of reasons for the unraveling of Dehlviyat, my focus will mostly be on other set of reasons--the limits within Dehlviyat that have received little attention from scholars of south Asia’s Indo-Muslim urban culture. Only when one understands the boundaries within this culture may one better understand the anxieties about the death of this culture, and also gain insight into how such anxieties may have had a role in impacting the politics of nationalism on the Indian subcontinent.

Late nineteenth century Delhi

In the late nineteenth century conjuncture, Delhi had changed greatly from its pre-1857 phase. The Revolt of 1857 was a watershed mark in Delhi’s history. The Revolt started with a mutiny of soldiers in Meerut, on 10th May 1857, but soon spread to soldiers and other social classes over much of north India. Soldiers and rebels from different parts of the country marched onto Delhi, and rallied around the (by most accounts somewhat reluctant) Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, as their leader. The Revolt of 1857 was by
far the stiffest challenge British rule had faced in India, and Delhi was the Revolt’s most important center.  

To begin with, considerable sections of Dilliwallahs welcomed the rebels and the rebellion as deliverance from British misrule. The Mughal court, which, in politico-administrative terms, had been rendered ineffective by the British government, once again began to buzz with activity. The darbar (formal court) was held everyday, important matters pertaining to the provisional government that had been formed were discussed, nazars (gifts offered as acknowledgement of overlordship) were received from other centers of the Revolt such as Bareilly and Lucknow, and coins were struck in the Mughal Emperor’s name. The Emperor held out promises to win the support of all classes of people: to the ruling Hindu chiefs he offered the right to adoption; to the old

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9 The revolt of 1857 was not an organized, collective upheaval. It comprised many uprisings, by many groups and social classes that were animated by different arguments and emotions. As a result, in contemporary historical literature as well the nature of the Revolt has been judged differently. First, for Eric Stokes and his followers the revolt is primarily a combination of rural revolts at the heart of which lay old rivalries that had been deepened by economic stresses caused by British policies [See E.T. Stokes, The Peasant and the Raj (Cambridge, 1978) and Peasant Armed (Cambridge, 1986); E.I. Brodkin, “The Struggle for Succession: rebels and Loyalists in the Indian Rebellion of 1857”. MAS, 6, 3, 1972, pp. 277-290]. Along similar lines, but with much greater emphasis on the disruptive effects of colonial policies on indigenous society is Gautam Bhadra’s "Four Rebels of Eighteen-Fifty-Seven" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies IV: Writing on South Asian History and Society (New Delhi, 1985). Bhadra speaks of 1857 as a "subaltern revolt". Other historians favor the view that the Revolt was a legitimist movement responding to the violation of Indian kingship, particularly that of the Mughals by the British [See F.W. Buckler, “ The Poltical Theory of the Indian Mutiny of 1857” in Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4 series, 5, 1992, pp. 71-100]. Lastly, there are historians who have seen the Revolt as an anti-colonial uprising. These historians stress the rebels’ determination to remove all signs of colonial authority [See R. Mukherjee, Awadh in Revolt, 1857-1858: A Study of Popular Resistance (Delhi, 1984)]


11 Kanhaiyya Lal, Taareekh-i-Baghaawat-i-Hind (Lucknow, 1916), pp. 386-7. The right of Indian rulers to adopt a heir had been revoked by the British under the Governor generalship of Lord Dalhousie leading to the ‘lapse’ of many Indian kingdoms such as Jhansi
landholding classes (ruined by the East India Company’s revenue policies), a very substantial reduction of rent; to Indian tradesmen the abolition of all trade monopolies and burdensome taxes; to the employees of the Emperor a substantial increase of pay was offered, including a doubling of pay for soldiers; and artisans were promised security of employment. All these were manifestly tall promises. But they are striking nonetheless for they reveal the Mughal court’s very clear grasp of popular mood that had turned sour against a Company government that had failed to develop an understanding of Indian ideals of rulership.

Despite these promising beginnings, the Revolt very quickly descended into chaos. Though the Emperor was proclaimed the “leader”, in reality, the rebels were not acting under a unified command. Bakht Khan, the general from Bareilly, was the leader of sepoys, and several Mughal princes too had jumped into the leadership fray. So little was the Emperor heeded that, in sheer frustration, he often threatened to go off to Mecca for haj. Money and resources needed to fight the British, and to feed the rebels, were also in very short supply. With the British siege of Delhi that followed the breakout of the Revolt, the supply lines for rations and reinforcements from outside were disrupted. The rebels were soon reduced, first, to forcing loans out of traders and bankers, and then to outright looting and plunder within Delhi. Little wonder then, that public enthusiasm for the rebels began to dip. The *Delhi Urdu Akhbar*, which had at first exulted at the pouring

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13 For the gap that had opened up between the British East India Company's government and Indian expectations of good governance see Chapter Two above.
in of mutineering sepoys into Delhi, now turned despondent. The telangas, the Akhbar’s editor bemoaned, were undisciplined, uncouth and had all too easily succumbed to the big-city temptations of Delhi: “The moment they drink the water of the city and do a round of Chandani Chowk…go around Jama Masjid and enjoy the sweetmeats of Ghantawala [a famous sweet shop of Delhi]…they become shorn of all strength and resolution…” The disorder and chaos at Delhi was particularly galling for the city’s elite. They were both disapproving and scared of the “lumpen rabble” that seemed to have emerged during the Revolt. The poet laureate, Ghalib, felt nothing but contempt for the “un-sophisticated”, “crude rebels” who had converged on Delhi and were “running amok”. Ghalib observed bitterly in his diary- “He whose father tramped the streets and by-lanes as though blown by the idle wind, has made the wind its slave; and he whose mother begged fire from her neighbor, has fire at his command. Shallow men aspire to make fire and wind their servants, and we are those ruined ones…”

Thus the Dilliwallahs suffered a great deal during the revolt, but much worse was to follow when the Revolt was put down, and Delhi re-taken by the British. The British set about making an example of Delhi, and the spirit of vengeance and racist bigotry that was unleashed, combined to create a veritable blood bath in the city. The horrified Ghalib once again noted in his diary, “when the raging lions set foot in the city, they held it

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14 Sepoys (plural of ‘sepoy’, the Anglicized term for the Hindustani word sipahi meaning soldier) in the East India Company’s army were often called telangas. In its early years the Company’s army consisted of many soldiers recruited from the Telangana region in the south of India. By the time of the Revolt much of the Company army was drawn from Awadh—but the term telanaga, it seems, continued to be used for Company sepoys.
15 Dilli Urdu Akhbar, 3rd August, 1857
16 Asadullah Khan Ghalib’s Dastanbuy p. 132
17 For a blow by blow account of the progress of the Revolt in Delhi see William Dalrymple’s Last Mughal
lawful to slaughter the helpless and burn the houses...At the naked spectacle of this vengeful wrath and malevolent hatred...a vast concourse of men and women took to precipitate flight...”¹⁸ People fled from Delhi, and those who didn’t- were turned out of the city walls by orders of the British government. Prize agents, appointed by the government, then set about systematically looting the city. They went from street to street, neighborhood-to-neighborhood, vandalizing homes, digging them up and turning them upside down to look for any hidden treasures. Dilliwallahs, particularly if they were Muslims, were summarily shot or hanged for mere suspicion. The Muslims, the British felt, had on the whole been more eager to have Mughal rule restored—so they were singled out for punishment. The royal family was turned out of the Lal Qila, and many of its princes hanged in full public view on the city’s main thoroughfare, the Chandni Chowk. Women and children from the royal family were left to fend for themselves on the streets. The Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, was exiled from Delhi to distant Burma after a sham trial, and the Mughal line came to an end. Large sections of the city were blown up by gunpowder for ‘security reasons’, and many prominent buildings and city landmarks, including mosques, were defaced and defiled.¹⁹ Indeed, as British administrators later observed, “the Delhi district received a lesson which will never be forgotten.”²⁰

For several years after the Revolt, Delhi was a traumatized town. All of India passed from rule by East India Company to Crown Rule in 1858. And as part of Delhi’s

¹⁸ Dastanbuy, op. cit., p. 140
¹⁹ Narayani Gupta, Delhi Between Two Empires, pp. 20-27.
‘political punishment’, the imperial city Delhi was provincialized and annexed to the frontier province of Punjab.\textsuperscript{21} The Hindus were allowed to return to the city by January 1858, but the Muslims only a year later in January 1959. The city’s population fell by one fourth,\textsuperscript{22} and the ratio of Hindus to Muslims, which in Delhi had been roughly equal prior to 1857, became very skewed, with many Muslims dying or moving out of Delhi to other places. The only group that gained from the Revolt was that of Hindu and Jain bankers and traders of Delhi. Some trader-bankers had supported the Mughal Badshah during the Revolt,\textsuperscript{23} but most had been loyal to the British, and had even acted as spies for them. Such loyalists were rewarded for their services when the Revolt was put down. A lot of the land previously owned by Muslim elites in and around Delhi was forcibly auctioned by the Government, and bought at throwaway rates by the moneyed trader bankers.\textsuperscript{24} Once municipal government was introduced in Delhi in 1864, the \textit{lalas}, as the trader-bankers were called, were nominated to the Municipal Board in the city by the British government.

So 1857 had triggered momentous changes in Delhi. But from the 1860s, a measure of stability, even positive dynamism had begun to return to Delhi. A Municipal Committee was established at Delhi in 1864 leading to a spurt in public construction activities. Between 1860s and 1870s Delhi’s roads were widened, new broad vistas were built, and

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 158.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Final report in the Settlement…}, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{23} Ramjidas, Saligram, Qutbuddin and Hussain Baksha were the trader-bankers who had suied with Bahadur Shah. Narayani Gupta, \textit{Delhi Between Two empires…}, p., 20
\textsuperscript{24} Narayani, op. cit., p. 29-30
the city got a clock tower, a college, a museum, bridges etc. But by far the most radical change for Delhi was the coming into it of the rail line. The first train rode into Delhi in 1867, setting in motion a series of changes: part of the city wall was torn down to enable the railway embankment to come up, and when it did come up, it divided the city into two vertical slices; new suburbs mushroomed around the railway station; the city’s population that had begun to rise from the early 1860s, now exploded. By 1865 the population of Delhi reached 160,553, approximately the same size it had been before the Revolt. The city was now poised to progress beyond the levels of growth reached in the 1850s, and Delhi had become a thriving trading center. Between 1868 and 1869, the number of bankers, piece goods merchants, grain merchants and traders in food in the Delhi district doubled in numbers. Also, given the incentive provided by the railways, twice as many people became engaged in manufacture and production, as in trade. Handicrafts revived too. Merchants or middlemen who made fortunes in a particular trade or craft came to known by those trades and it was thus that Delhi got its “Chawalwallahs” (Ricewallah), Gurwallahs (Jaggerywallah), and Gotewallahs (tinsel-lacewallah) in this period.

Suddenly there were many more people in Delhi, especially from the Punjab. Delhi had been attached to Punjab after the Revolt, and it drew closer still to the frontier state with the railways. Delhi, as a new railway junction, had become a distributing center for goods

26 Sangat Singh, Freedom Movement in Delhi, 1858-1919 (New Delhi, 1972), p. 3 and p. 15
27 Narayani, Delhi Between Two Empires..., pp. 39-42
28 Narayani Gupta, Delhi Between Two Empires...pp. 42-44
all over the Punjab. Punjabi merchants—people who spoke a different language (Punjabi) from the Hindustani spoken in the Delhi area, and whose religiosity was of a more fervent variety compared to that of the Delhi Hindus and Muslims, grew in numbers within the Delhi population.

Thus by the late nineteenth century, ‘modernity’, with the massive changes of scales that it entailed, had descended upon Delhi. The walls of the city had been breached, both literally and figuratively. Up until now, Delhi as a city, had largely been contained within the 6 miles wall that had surrounded it. The many gates in the city wall were opened every day in the morning and closed in the evening. All around it were fields and gardens and the ruins (to the South) of older Delhis—that still supported some small populations. Delhiwallahs frequently ventured outside of their city wall to visit the large garden complexes and the tombs of sufis to the north and south. But the city itself was contained within the walls. The wall, in many ways, locked Delhi’s shehriyat in, keeping it ‘safe’ from the surrounding rurality. Delhi, it was said, was an ‘urban oasis in a rural desert’, and the typical Dilliwallah was notoriously insular, caring little for what went on outside the city wall. But with the railways, Delhi opened up as never before. Outsiders now streamed into the city, and it was rushed into larger geographies of trade and politics.

A still greater swamping of Delhi by extra-local forces happened with the transference of the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911. The British decided not just to move their capital but also to build a new imperial city at Delhi. The new city was to be built South of the existing Delhi (Shahjahanabad), which, from here on, would be called

29 Server-ul-Mulk, My Life (London 1932) p. 42
Old Delhi. Through the building of a new capital city and its inauguration in 1919, there was once again a population surge in Delhi, coupled with intense building activity. For some, such as Khushwant Singh, whose father, Sobha Singh, became the biggest construction contractor in New Delhi, this was a period of great dynamism. Khushwant Singh’s recollection of Delhi in the early decades of the twentieth century are of a grand new city rising before the eyes, where just a few years earlier all had been barren waste land. Singh, among other things, talks of the fortunes that were made by contractors (five of these were Hindus and Sikhs from the Punjab and were called “Panj Pyares”, and two were Muslims, one from the Punjab, and one from Sindh), and the new grammar of socialization that was cultivated by people like his father—who frequently entertained English men and women at home, had bands play western music, and provided for ballroom dancing and billiards tables for guests to amuse themselves with.

To old time Dilliwallahs, all these changes, the sudden widening of scales, the modernization of Delhi, and the “onslaught” of new people such as Bengalis and Punjabis

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30 For the Coronation Durbar (in which the transfer of capital was announced in 1911) and the creation of a new capital see Robert Grant Irving, Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker and Imperial Delhi (Delhi, 1981); Thomas R. Metcalf, “Architecture and Empire: Sir Herbert Baker and the Building of New Delhi” in R.E. Frykenberg (ed.), Delhi Through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society (Delhi, 1986), pp. 390-400; Malvika Singh and Rudranshu Mukherjee, New Delhi: Making of a Capital (Delhi, 2009); Andreas Volwahsen, Imperial Delhi (Prestel, 2002).

31 There are many landmark buildings of New Delhi that Sobha Singh constructed. Some of them are the India Gate, Regal Cinema, Rivoli Cinema, Wenger’s Block (C.P.), Broadcasting House (AIR Building), The National Museum, Red Cross Building, Baroda House. Khushwant Singh, “My Father: The Builder” in Mala Dayal (ed.), Celebrating Delhi (Delhi, 2010), pp. 8, 12, 13.

32 Khushwant Singh father, Sobha Singh, through the many smart investments he made in land, soon became the largest owner of private property in Delhi. He was called “Aadhi Nai Dilli kaa maalik” (owner of half of New Delhi), Ibid. p. 13

33 Ibid., pp. 7,10,11
(who were perceived to be making the most of the new opportunities available) with their
different customs and languages, was too much to bear.\textsuperscript{34} Thus in the early twentieth
century, an old time Dilliwallah-- Mir Baqir Ali, who had grown up in Bahadur Shah
Zafar’s Delhi, and was proud of Dehlvi Urdu, felt compelled to go around correcting
what he thought were people’s incorrect language usage and faulty pronunciation. Baqir
Ali lamented to another Dilliwallah—“Delhi’s doors and windows have become open to
every ‘Tom, Dick and Harry’ (\textit{aiare-ghaire})! What do you expect? If this will not disturb
language, what will?”\textsuperscript{35} Almost every Delhi author writing on the socio-cultural life of
the city agrees (and these would include people such as Sayyid Ahmad Dehlvi and
Munshi Faizuddin who wrote at the turn of the century, and those who wrote later in the
1930s and 1940s such as Zamir Hasan, Muhammad Shafi and Yusuf Bukhari) that the
‘traditional culture’ of Delhi was alive until the turn of the century, but thereafter, it
began to disappear.

Reflections of people like Mir Baqir Ali “\textit{Daastaango}” (1850-1928), who had seen
something of Bahadur Shah’s Delhi, and also the Delhi that was coming into being by the

\textsuperscript{34} The influx of Punjabis owed itself to the railways, the administrative yoking of Delhi to the
state of Punjab after 1857, and the new business opportunities that the transfer of capital to
Delhi in 1911 had created. The Bengalis came for somewhat different reasons. The Bengalis
were from the eastern province of Bengal, which was the East India Company’s
headquarters in India since about the middle of the eighteenth century. It was from Bengal
that British power had spread westwards into the plains of India in the late eighteenth and
the early nineteenth centuries. Since Bengal had had the longest exposure to the British,
and to English education, they were the group that held the most posts among Indians in the
British administrative apparatus. As such, when the capital of British India was transferred
from Calcutta (in Bengal) to Delhi in 1911, many Bengalis who were part of the British
administrative machinery, as also modern Bengali professionals such as doctors and
lawyers, also moved to Delhi.

\textsuperscript{35} Muhammad Feroz Dehlvi, "Mir Baqir Ali Dastango” in Dr. Salahuddin (ed.), \textit{Dilliwale Vol. II},
p. 372
second and third decade of the twentieth century, reveal how alien modern Delhi seemed to traditional Dilliwallahs. Mir Baqir Ali was from a renowned family of daastaangos—entertainers who specialized in the oral rendering of lengthy tales (daastaans). Though most daastans the daastaangos performed were classics which had been well known in the Arabic, Persian and Indic worlds for many centuries, daastaangoi, as a professional art, achieved its highest stature in the nineteenth century—the period of the last Mughals, and in some of the Mughal successor states such as Lucknow and Rampur.  

Mir Baqir Ali’s maternal grandfather was a daastaango at Bahadur Shah Zafar’s court. After 1857, when many Indian rulers, such as the Mughals, were deposed, daastaangoi, continued to be patronized by Indian riyaasats (kingdoms) that still existed under British paramountcy. Thus Mir Nazir Ali (Baqir Ali’s maternal uncle and teacher in the art of daastaangoi) served in the Hyderabad state, and Mir Baqir Ali served in the riyaasats of Patiala, Rampur and Bhopal. When employment in riyaasats became difficult, Mir Baqir Ali came back and settled in Delhi, and began to depend on the patronage of the wealthy notables in Delhi who would invite him to perform in their homes. But when even this patronage became hard to come by, Baqir Ali took to penning down and publishing short daastaans privately. He began to go street to street selling these slim books. Thus, in three generations, an art form had moved from court circles to the streets, where it was facing, not a fresh lease of life through democratization, but oblivion. When asked, by

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38 When I say that the art of daasatangoi had moved from the “court to the streets” I am not trying to convey that daastaans were recited only in court settings. Even in Bahadur Shah’s
an old acquaintance who was visiting Delhi after many years in 1911, why he had given up *daastangoi* for selling of books, Mir Baqir Ali remarked: “What do you think of Delhi today? In an age of electric lighting who cares about the old lamp? [Referring here to the invention of the bioscope that had put *dastangoi* in the shade]...and where do you think I should tell my *dastans*? In the cemeteries? Amongst the living, no body cares for *daastans*. And how can they? They are ignorant of the language, contemptuous of older ways. The philosophy of life itself has changed.”

Thus rapid change had attended the opening up Delhi in the late nineteenth century. And as the city became part of wider networks, Dilliwallahs were pressured to imagine themselves into broader communities of religion and nation. Community based (Hindu and Muslim) reform and revival movements that came up in Delhi at the end of the century were a sure indication of this change. Aimed at creating better or ‘purer’ Hindus and Muslims, such movements tore asunder the mixed local culture of Delhi.

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39 Ashraf Subuhi's article on Mir Baqir Ali Dastango was first published in his book *Dilli Ki Chand Ajeeb Hastiyan* in 1943.
Movements for reform and revival had become a feature of Indian life in most towns and cities by the late nineteenth century. These movements were partly the result of new technologies (such as railways, print and telegraph) that made possible the imagining of wider horizontal communities, partly a response to British criticisms of Indian society, and in part simply a manifestation of the self-enquiry and criticism that British colonial presence had generated in India. In Delhi, the Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharma movements became very prominent among the Hindus. The Arya Samajis worked at creating a ‘purer’ Hindu community modeled after an imagined ‘glorious’ Vedic past. By the end of the nineteenth century, Delhi, a historically Muslim city, had become an important center of organized Hinduism in India. But similar processes appear to be at work in other communities as well.

Among Muslims, Deobandi reformers sought to wean Muslims from ‘corrupting’, un-Islamic, Hinduized practices, and to create a community more faithful to the original tenets of the religion. The Deobandi aalim Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanavi lamented, “for many years, I have watched the ruination of the religion of the women of Hindustan and was heartsick because of it…It went beyond the women to their children and in many respects even had its effects on their husbands…The cause of this ruination is nothing other than women’s ignorance of the religious sciences. This lack corrupts their beliefs, their deeds, their dealing with other people, their character, and the whole manner of their social life.”

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That the efforts of reformers such as Mualana Thanavi and other Deobandis found a mark in Delhi is evident from Sayyid Ahmad Dehlvi’s 1905 book *Rasum-i-Dehli* (lit. ‘Rituals of Delhi’). Sayyid Ahmad Dehlvi’s work talks about the life-cycle rituals practiced within Delhi’s Muslim families. It shows how mixed, and closely modeled on Hindu customs, the life-cycle rituals *traditionally* followed by Muslims in Delhi were. But in his own times there were people who were claiming that that was not the case, and that Muslims did not follow such mixed rituals. It was this consistent denial of a lived past in the late nineteenth century that compelled Sayyid Ahmed Dehlvi to compose the *Rasum*. *Rasum-i-Dehli* was seeking to record for posterity, something (mixed life-cycle rituals) intrinsic to *Dehlviyat*, even to all of north Indian Muslim culture, at the very moment when it was starting, or threatening, to disappear.\(^{42}\) Therefore, with efforts aimed at delimiting community boundaries on all sides, the eclecticism of Delhi’s culture was already under threat.

But religious reformers were not the only people seeking to ‘cleanse’ Delhi’s culture in the late nineteenth century. They were other kinds of reformers, notably people such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Nazir Ahmad, Maulana Hali, Muhammad Hussain Azad etc., who were also trying to re-model Muslim society. Their exhortations to Muslims were aimed at dissuading the latter from withdrawing inwards into the realm of religion, and to instead turn outwards to the west for inspiration. They felt that 1857 had signaled the decisive defeat of everything Islam had stood for on the subcontinent. To them now, the only way forward for the Muslim community was through a reform of social, religious,\(^{42}\) 

\(^{42}\) Sayyid Ahmad Dehlvi, *Rasum-i-Dehli* (Delhi, 1986, first published 1905), p.62
and cultural life on the English model. The names of these reformers became associated with quite radical educational and language reform in the Muslim community. Maulana Hali and Nazir Ahmed, and to a degree Sayyid Ahmed too, were also active in the field of women’s reform, and in fashioning a new kind of religiously grounded, but “modern”, Muslim woman. 43

Thus reformers of different hues were attempting to refashion Indian society and culture. But regardless of the specific reform model followed, what was common was the acceptance amongst natives themselves of the British cultural critique that Indian weakness was the result of moral as well as political collapse. This was a dramatic change from earlier periods.

It is noteworthy that this was not the first juncture when Delhi’s liberal Indo-Muslim culture had attracted criticism. Criticisms from within indigenous society, and from without (from the British starting from the 1820s and 1830s onwards), had existed well before 1857. The link between ‘moral degeneracy’ and Muslim political decline, and urgent calls, therefore, for reform, had been made even in the eighteenth century, most

43 For Sayyid Ahmed’s educational reforms see David Lelyveld, Aligarh’s First Generation (Princeton, 1978); Muhammad Hussain Azad and Hali, along with Sayyid Ahmed Khan were the leading figures in pushing for a reform of Urdu. Their efforts were aimed at addressing the “sensuousness, decay and artifice” of Urdu poetry and language, and geared towards making Urdu poetry nechari (natural) like English poetry, and at promoting a prose style that would be less florid and more direct in keeping with modern sensibilities. For efforts to reform the Urdu language see Muhammad Hussain Azad Ab-i Hayat: Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry, ed. and trans. by Frances Pritchett and S.R. Faruqi (Delhi, 2001); Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed (trans. and ed.), Hali’s Mussaddas: The Ebb and Flow of Islam (Delhi, 1998); for women’s reform see Nazir Ahmad The Bride’s Mirror= Mirat ul-Arus: A Tale of Life in Delhi a Hundred Years Ago, trans. and ed., G.E. Ward and Frances Pritchett (Delhi, 2001).
notably by the Delhi theologian Shah Waliullah. According to Shah Waliullah, the body politic of the imperial city Delhi (indeed of the Mughal Empire itself) had become diseased due to impious and licentious living. Order could be restored to the body politic by establishing and upholding orthodox sunni Islam and firmly dissuading and punishing the behavior of Hindu polytheists and shia Muslims. Thus, Waliullah welcomed the sunni king Ahmad Shah Abdali who had invaded Delhi, and urged “strict orders should be issued in all Islamic towns forbidding religious ceremonies publicly practiced by infidels (such as the performance of Holi and ritual bathing in the Ganges). On the tenth of Muharram, Shi’is should not be allowed to beyond the bounds of moderation, neither should they be rude nor repeat stupid things (that is recite tabarra, or condemn the first three successors of the Prophet Muhammad) in the streets or bazaars.”

Although Shah Waliullah was a renowned teacher and scholar of Islamic religious sciences, eighteenth and nineteenth century accounts about the socio-cultural world of Delhi offer little proof that such exhortations to ruling elites, or reform efforts among commoners, bore much fruit.

The same was the case with British criticism before 1857. Several decades before the Revolt, under the combined impact of Utilitarian, free trade and evangelical-Christian influences, and the growing confidence that came with the establishment of Pax-Britannica by 1818, British colonial opinion had begun to turn very critical of Indian society and culture. Moving away from the earlier Orientalist refrain of “ruling India according to its own customs”, East India Company officials now advocated a more

44 Cited from S.A.A. Rizvi, *Shah Waliulah and His Times* p, 227.
45 A good eighteenth century account that would bear this out would be *Muraqqa-i-Dilli*, and a nineteenth century account would be Sayyid Ahmaed Khan’s *Asar-us-Sanaadeed*.
intrusive, “improving” and “reforming” government for India. “Useless vestiges of the past” had to be done away with. The leisured Indo-Muslim elite (the shurfa), native languages such as Persian and Urdu, as well as cultural activities such as poetry, music, dance, bird-keeping etc.—all important elements of Indo-Muslim urban culture—now became symbols of dissolution and decadence. But such British criticism from the pre-1857 period cut little ice with the natives of north India, especially Delhi. Prior to the Revolt, unlike in Bengal, the cultural impact of British presence in north India, and especially in Delhi, remained very muted. The socio-cultural world of Delhi, as we have seen in previous chapters, moved to its own rhythm, and British presence or criticism made little difference to it.

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46 For a brief discussion of attitudinal and ideological shifts caused by utilitarian, free trade and evangelical influences in nineteenth century India see Eric Stokes, English Utilitarians and India (Oxford, 1959), pp. 34-42

47 There was a real economic context in which the ideological shift towards intrusive government was taking place in the third decade of the nineteenth century. Between 1827-28 and the early 1830s there had been a downturn in the economy that had hit the north-western part of India especially hard (For this economic change see Bayly, Rulers... pp. 263-303). This had led the East India Company government in India to introspect and subsequently to take back some of the concessions they had allowed to the landed nobility in Delhi. New cost cutting measures were deemed necessary to deal with the economic crisis. As such, grants of land (jagirs) and pensions, which the older nobility had received from the Mughals and then the Marathas, had, when the British first took over Delhi in 1803, at first been re-confirmed. But from the 1830s these began to be resumed whenever some pretext presented itself. The death of a jagirdar was made an opportunity for strict construction of the original grant, for the conversion of jagir to a pension, or the restriction of a pension to the nearest relatives of the original grantee. When the need for thrift combined with Utilitarian and Evangelical influence which justified such behavior on the grounds that the old Mughal nobility was a class of “degenerate parasites” not to be indulged, British policy underwent a change. Not only was the traditional Mughal nobility critiqued, their entire life-style (in which poetry, music and sundry other passions (shauq) were actively indulged) came to be stigmatized. For the new attitude of firmness toward the old feudal nobility see Peter Hardy’s, “Ghalib and the British” in Ralph Russel (ed.), Ghalib: The Poet and His Age (London, 1972)

Until 1857 therefore, the sense that dominated native thinking was that Dehlvi culture was a traditional one. Whether with respect to high courtly culture, where it was said that “in the days before the Mutiny”… “the etiquette of the days of Akbar the great was still in vogue” \(^{49}\), or with respect to popularly observed mixed Hindu-Muslim life-cycle rituals (which it was thought had started to develop with the coming of the earliest Muslims into India)\(^{50}\), the feeling was that Indo-Muslim culture had developed in a continuum from previous ages, even centuries. There had, of course, been periods of change and rupture, particularly in the eighteenth century, when new urban centers and new social groups had come to prominence. Dehlvi poets even then had bemoaned the death of their city\(^{51}\), but there had been no sense in these writings that the fundamentals of the Indo-Muslim urban culture that Delhi represented had seriously been questioned. Though Lucknow and other cities had risen to prominence challenging Delhi’s political and cultural pre-eminence after the mid eighteenth century, they had not attempted to redefine ideas of urbanity and civilization that Delhi represented. They were trying to beat Delhi at its own game, and to underline their own position of importance within the established Indo-Muslim urban cultural idiom\(^{52}\). Cultural capital was claimed for new cities not by running Dehlvi culture down but by showing that they were more Dehlvi than Delhi\(^{53}\). Even when the


\(^{50}\) *Rasum-i-Dehli*, p. 60

\(^{51}\) See above Chapter Two, p. 13, f.n. 28

\(^{52}\) Michael H Fisher makes this argument in his book *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British and the Mughals* (Riverdale, 1987)

\(^{53}\) Abdul Halim Sharar’s, *Hindustan men Mashraqi Tamaddun Ka Aakhir Namuna* (*The Last Example of Eastern Culture in India*) is a collection of essays that appeared in the Urdu journal *Dil Gudaz* over a period of four years, starting from 1913. These essays were on Lucknow’s history, especially on specific features of the city’s socio-cultural life such as the development of Urdu poetry, the development of Yunani medicine; Calligraphy and the Urdu press; the art of *dastangoi*; the arts of combat and self defense; Islamic learning etc.
British took over Delhi in 1803, Dehlviyat, though it was challenged in some ways, remained a self-assured culture, much celebrated by the Dilliwallahs.

In many ways, it was only in the late nineteenth century, when the British government’s criticisms of native culture coalesced with self-criticism amongst natives of north India, that north Indian and Dehlvi Indo-Muslim culture began to undergo rapid change. Moves to reform Urdu, to cure it of its supposed decadence and lack of realism; efforts to create purer religious communities by cleansing ritual practices; and the critique of, or at the very least unease with, traditional Indo-Musim urban life-styles and practices that were seen as integral to it—all came to the fore in the late nineteenth century. Ahmad Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) depicts the life of an upper class Muslim family of Delhi in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The idea, as Ahmad Ali says in the Preface, was to portray “a particular mode of though and living, now dead and gone already right before our eyes.” Ali analyses the decay and defeat of Delhi’s traditional Muslim culture, exposing its hypocrisies—the marginalization of women, the inadaptability of a feudal class clinging to out moded values—very compellingly. But Ali’s was not a didactic

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Taken together these essays constitute a text in the “biography of city” genre. Sharar wrote the essays to memorialize aspects of Lucknawi culture, which were beginning to wither away in his time. The essays are written with the sensibility of a patriot, but even so, when tracing the histories of different cultural elements of Lucknawi life he does not try so much to underline Lucknow’s distinctiveness as to show how the inspiration of a particular art came from Delhi and then was perfected at Lucknow. That Delhi was the fountainhead of Indo-Muslim urban cultures all over Hindustan was a given. “Muslim courts”, Sharar said, “were the ones that were considered most refined and cultured, and the first and foremost Muslim court was the Mughal court at Delhi” (p. 78—English translation). Sharar’s patriotism lay in showing that Lucknow did everything that Delhi did, and often much better. Sharar’s Urdu work is also available in an English translation as *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture* (Oxford, 1999).
novel, attempting to posit some sort of ideal for Muslim society. In fact, even though he is portraying a decaying society, he does so with sympathy. It is quite evident that Ahmad Ali is himself attached to the values that were dying out and was sorry for their decay. From our point of view it is telling that the chief character in the novel who stands for Delhi’s traditional culture as a whole is Mir Nihal—a middle aged man, with grown children, a wife, and two great passions—his pigeons and his mistress Babban Jan. When Babban Jan dies, Mir Nihal gives up flying pigeons, gives up his job, and takes refuge in alchemy and mysticism. What is also telling is the character who stands for the “change” that does Mir Nihal in—his youngest son Ashgar. Ashgar is “new” man, influenced by modern, English ideas, and fashions. And for this he is constantly berated by his father for wanting to learn the English language, wear English style shirts and pump shoes, and marry a woman of his own choice. In every thing Ashgar finally has his way—he marries the woman he wants, and leaves the family homestead to set up a nuclear home with his wife in a house fitted with western furnishings. So Ali clearly sets up the clash between

54 There were some novels that did this too. Muhammad Hadi Rusva’s Sharif Zada, was one such. In a biting critique of the novel S.R.Faruqi says—“Most people would tend to describe Mirzā ‘Ābid Ḥusain, the … central character of Mirzā Muḥammad Hādī Rusvā’s novel Sharif zādah (A Person of Good Family), as a typical new-style Indian gentleman. Of respectable family, impecunious but honest, he is partly self-educated and fully self-made. He manages to go the famous Engineering School at Roorkee (established by the British in 1844, well before any universities). When he graduates, he obtains a minor job in the engineering department—that is, he becomes a 'Government servant', a person of great honor and substance in those days. By dint of honesty, ability, generally good relations with the English, and a slice of good luck, 'Ābid Ḥusain succeeds in life, does many good-samaritan deeds, retires from the service at the proper age, and lives happily ever after in affluence with his pliable, virtuous wife. Scrupulous, decorous though not servile with his employers, handy with tools and instruments, devoted 'Government servant', humourless, with an active dislike of Urdu poetry, devout, untroubled by questions of identity or change of patronage, Mirzā ‘Ābid Ḥusain would seem to be the perfect prototype of the 'loyal', technologically current, politically correct, and 'morally sound' individual whom the British wanted to develop in India. But the sharif zādah has a certain too-good-to-be-true-ness about him.” S.R. Faruqi’s “Introduction” in Ab-i-Hayat, p. 1.
traditional Mughal culture and the modern, west inspired one. But in Ali’s novel neither side wins. While Mir Nihal wastes away—bit by little bit; Ashgar doesn’t find happiness either, and continues a restless and self-centered quest for it.\textsuperscript{55}

So, there was much that was rapidly changing in Delhi from the late nineteenth century onwards. A modern Delhi was beginning to emerge with its railways, massive migrations of new populations, electricity, new entertainments, new modes of transport, and the modern politics of nationalism. In and through all of these contextual changes, a pre-modern culture, which had developed in a spacially cohesive walled city, was beginning to come under strain. But Dehlviyat felt imperiled for other reasons as well. Some boundaries, faultlines, and disparities in power and status, internal to Dehlviyat, had until 1857, seemed almost natural. They had been part of the commonsense about Delhi. These disparities, though they had sometimes been questioned even before the Revolt, had not been seriously challenged. Until 1857, Delhi was still a proud Mughal city, and the Mughal Emperor and his court were still around as glue that held the traditional Indo-Muslim culture of the city together. But after the Revolt, once the Mughal Emperor was gone, and the British had turned hostile to the traditional Mughal nobility and culture, the disparities and faultlines that were internal to Dehlviyat were widened, and often overturned.

Dehlviyat represented a cosmopolitan, Muslim, urban culture. People across classes and religious divides identified with it.\textsuperscript{56} But there were limits to the sharing Dehlviyat

\textsuperscript{55} Ahmad Ali, \textit{Twilight in Delhi} (London, 1940)
\textsuperscript{56} See Chapter Three above
permitted. A distinct hierarchy undergirded Dehlviyat. The social elites within this culture were nobly born Muslims and those with traditions of military-administrative service under the Mughals (who were often, though not exclusively, Muslim). Even the cosmopolitanism of Delhi was of a distinctively Muslim variety. Though it was not deeply based in Islam as religion, it did draw heavily upon the Muslim cultural universe. When these two related bases of Dehlviyat: its Muslimness; and the position of Indo-Muslim elites within it were questioned, extreme anxieties about the death of the culture began to be voiced.

**The Limits of Dehlviyat**

The ideal city of the Indo-Persian world has been sketched in Indo-Persian literature. And the city as it emerges in this literature has scholars of Islam, Muslim divines, mosques, madrasas and sufi khaanaqahs. Yet the ideal Indo-Persian city is not primarily a sacred, Islamic one. Great cities in the Indo-Persian tradition, while often depicted as places of sacral merit, are even more depicted as places that enticed and trapped. Their charming goods, beautiful people and entertainments seduced people to err. The “city of beauties” was often celebrated in a formulaic fashion in Indo-Persian literature from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. But the fully realized ‘city of beauties’, as opposed to the generic, formulaic one, begins to be talked about from the eighteenth century. Dargah Quli Khan’s description of Delhi in the eighteenth century, with its many sufi saints,
musicians, dancing girls, beautiful boys and women, and its simultaneous pursuit of indulgence and piety, is a picture of the ideal ‘city of beauty’ come alive.\textsuperscript{57}

Dehlviyat, as it developed in the eighteenth century, was a liberal, eclectic culture. Wearied by the Emperor Aurangzeb’s twenty-two year long military campaign in the Deccan, and his religio-cultural puritanism,\textsuperscript{58} his successors and their nobles took the empire in the other direction. The imperial camp moved back to Delhi, the emperors gave up war, and they and their nobles stayed put in the city. If the giving up of war and sedenterization were signs of imperial weakness they were also the result of a conscious effort to undo the harm caused by Aurangzeb’s relentless wars and his religious zeal, and to make the Mughal polity more liberal and tolerant. Shia and Hindu influences in Dehlvi culture became more pronounced, and a love of music, poetry and the \textit{sufi tariqa} began to hold sway over the people.\textsuperscript{59} At the level of the masses a kind of syncretism had existed for a long time. Hindus and Muslims practiced very similar life cycle rituals and shared common idioms of piety. Now, in the eighteenth century, one finds high culture becoming more inclusive, and simultaneously acquiring a larger social base, moving out from court confines to assemblies of nobles and notables. In many respects the Delhi that Dargah Quli Khan describes in the \textit{Muraqqa} is not a narrowly elite Delhi. What he has

\textsuperscript{57} Dargah Quli Khan’s \textit{Muraqqa-i-Dilli}

\textsuperscript{58} There is much evidence to show that Aurangzeb’s orthodox measures such as the re-imposition of the \textit{jizya} (poll tax) on Hindus, and the inordinate importance the Emperor began to give to \textit{ulema} (scholars of Islam) and \textit{Qazis} (Islamic judges), were opposed and resented by many of his nobles, and sections of his Hindu \textit{riyaya} (population). At Delhi, Jahanara Begum (the Emperor’s sister), and several nobles vehemently opposed the tax, and the Hindus of the city protested publicly. See N. Manucci, \textit{Storia do Mogor}, 1653-1708, tr. William Irvine, (London, 1907-08), III, pp. 288-291; Khafi Khan, \textit{Muntkhab-ul-Lubab}, (Calcutta, 1874), II, p. 255

\textsuperscript{59} For the development of an extremely liberal culture at Delhi in the eighteenth century see Chapter two above, pp. 20-30
depicted is a broader city culture, one that may best be described as one of ‘frenetic gaiety’.

This permissiveness of Delhi’s culture did not go uncontested and guardians of orthodoxy resented the turn the ruling elite had taken. Shah Wali Ullah, the charismatic alim and teacher, whose father had been one of the co-compilers of Fatwa-i-alamgiri in Aurangzeb’s time, was at the forefront of the orthodox reaction against the liberalism of Delhi’s culture.

However, orthodox reactions notwithstanding, in the early nineteenth century, by all indications it seems there was a further democratization of Dehlvi culture, a continued, or even greater emphasis on mysticism, and incorporation of non-Muslim elements. The emperors celebrated Hindu festivals. Hindustani music, the most catholic of arts to develop in India, thrived in the eighteenth century as well as the nineteenth century, as did the lingua franca Urdu. So the permissiveness of Dehlviyat, if anything, increased even more in the first half of nineteenth century. Orthodox Islam had a place of honor in the city. Delhi still boasted famous scholars and charismatic teachers of Islamic studies, but orthodox Islam did not define the city’s culture. The Sufi Tariqa dominated at Delhi.

60 The Fatwa-i-Alamgiri was a compilation of legal opinions (fatwa) based on Sunni Islam’s sharia law. It was seen as the orthodox code on which law and doctrine in Aurangzeb’s time were based. Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) has the reputation for being the most puritanical in matters of religion among all Mughal emperors who ruled Hindustan.
61 For Shah Wali Ullah see S.A.A. Rizvi, Shah Wali-ullah and his Times
62 The Bazm-i-Aakhir, which sketches the minutae of every day of the last two Mughal emperors, details how a host of Hindu festivals (salonon, dasehra, diwali holi) were celebrated at the Mughal court. Some of these were celebrated even under previous Mughal emperors, but some, such as Salonon ka Tyohaar (raksha bandhan) came to be celebrated only from the late eighteenth century. See Bazm, pp. 81-84.
In fact, an ultra-conservative *wahaabi* strain did develop in Delhi form the late 1820s. But it found more support outside Delhi than within it. Thus Shah Ismail Shahid, who was from the Shah Waliullah family—a family of very famous *alims* and teachers—at some point became ultra conservatively *wahabi*, and joined the movement for *jihaad* (holy war) that was preached by Sayyid Ahmed Barelvi. Though the purists tried to preach their creed at Delhi, their movement faced considerable resistance in the city. Many nineteenth century Dilliwallahs, led by famous *ulema* (religious scholars) such as Abul Kalam Azad’s grandfather, Maulana Munavruddin, stoutly defended the practices of honoring saints, and visiting *mazaaars* (tombs of saints) that had been practiced by their *buzurgs* (venerable elders), against the new fangled ‘purist’ *wahabi* ideas of Islam influenced by Arabia.63

Yet, despite its cosmopolitan *shehriyat*, and its preference for a piety that was not orthodox Islamic, Delhi was a Muslim center. Starting from the eighteenth century, until

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63 Abul Kalam Azad mentions that his grandfather Maulana Munavruddin strongly opposed the ultra purist views on Islam that Shah Ismail “Shahid” and Abdul Hai began to propound around the 1830s. Shah Ismail was from the famous Wali-ullah family, which was a family of orthodox ulema, but Shah Ismail’s views had become influenced by Wahabi puritanism. In 1832 a public debate was held in the Jama Masjid, and was attended by hundreds of people. On one side were Shah Ismail and Abdul Hai and on the other Maulana Munavruddin and the other ulema of Delhi. Shah Ismail and Abdul Hai would accept no proof unless it came from the Quran or the Hadith, and the other Ulema offered precedents followed by the venerable ulema of Delhi who, as it happened were Shah Ismail’s grandfather and father. When all arguments failed on the question of the validity of visiting tombs (*mazaaars*) and offering prayers, maulana Munavruddin’s party asked Shah Ismail if he had not himself visited the tombs of saints with his grandfather and father? Would he hold them in error? Would he declare that these men were also engaging in un-Islamic practices? To this when Shah Ismail and Abdul Hai still insisted that the only valid proofs were proofs from the Quran or Hadith, the at this insult to Shah Sahib (Shah Abdul Aziz), cries rose in the gathering—“these people have turned away from their own elders and teachers too!”. See Abul Kalam Azad, *Khwud Navisht* pp. 51-2. Ghalib, in his letters, also talks about this debate between the traditionalists in religion and the radical reformers at Delhi. See Islam and Russel (ed.), *Ghalib: Life and Letters*...pp. 31-34
the time the Mughals resided in the city, i.e. until 1857, challenges to this basic element of Dehlvi personality - the city’s Muslimness- were rebuffed strongly, and the traditional social hierarchy made to prevail. A few examples of conflict situations from eighteenth and nineteenth century Delhi will bear the point out. What is striking about these examples is that in nearly every case the Mughal Emperors, and many of their leading nobles, seem disposed towards deciding cases in favor of non-Muslims, but pressure from Muslim legal officers (qazi), scholars of Islam (ulema), or sometimes even from ordinary Dilliwallahs, makes them backtrack. When pushed against the wall, if there was a face off between Muslims and non-Muslims, the ruling elite had little choice but to uphold the normatively Islamic character of their state and city.

The first of the examples that bears this out is of an incident from March 1725. A Hindu clerk in the Mughal government at Delhi had converted to Islam. His wife and daughter, however, hadn’t. The clerk appealed to the chief law officer in Delhi saying that since his daughter was a minor, his conversion automatically made her a Muslim. The daughter, in her testimony to the qazi claimed that three months before her father’s conversion to Islam, signs of puberty had appeared, implying thereby that she was no longer a minor. Muslims argued that she should embrace Islam, while the Hindus said that since she was not a minor she was free to choose her own religion. The Emperor Muhammad Shah referred the matter to the chief law officer of his Empire. This officer’s view was that menstruation was not necessarily a sign of puberty. Other legal scholars disagreed with him. The Emperor himself was inclined to see the girl as Hindu, and ordered that the she should be handed over to the custody of a Hindu cloth seller. But though this order was
given, it greatly increased the agitation amongst Delhi’s Muslims. The next Friday, an excited crowd of Muslims prevented the *khutba* from being read at the Jama Masjid, and forcibly circumcised two or three Hindus. The Emperor parlayed with his chief legal scholars and law officers, and imprisoned the girl to pacify the mob. A few days later the girl was murdered and buried according to Islamic rites to mollify the Delhi Muslims.64

The other eighteenth century incident is the famous one of the shoe sellers’ riot. The riot took place in 1729. A Hindu jeweler named Shubhkaran was passing through the shoe sellers’ bazaar on his palanquin. Shubhkaran, apart from being a jeweler, was also a member of the Mughal administrative hierarchy, and was in fact returning from the Red Fort when he passed by the bazaar of the shoe sellers, who were orthodox Punjabi Muslims. It was the month of March, a time of year when both Hindus and Muslims ritually let off fireworks. While passing through the shoe sellers’ market a squib landed near Shubhkaran’s dress and burnt it slightly. This resulted in a fracas between Shubhkaran’s servants and the owners of the shoe shops in the bazaar. Though Shubhkaran’s men were armed, they were outnumbered by the rasp wielding shoemakers who chased them away. That same night Shubhkaran sent more armed men to the shoe sellers’ market to avenge the day’s defeat. In the disturbance that ensued, a young Muslim boy was beaten to death, and one Hajji Hafiz, who had rushed to the scene to restore peace, was also killed. The following morning the shoemakers and other Muslims in Delhi decided that the Hajji’s body would not be buried until his death had been avenged. A crowd of Muslims, crying “*Din, Din*” (Faith! Faith!) carried the Hajji’s body and laid it on Shubhkaran’s door. The latter had already fled to take refuge in the house

64 Muntakhab ul-Luabab, II, pp. 868-70
of the Muslim noble Sher Afghan Khan Panipati—under whom Shubhkaran worked. On discovering that Shubhkaran had fled, the Muslim crowd rushed to the imperial palace to seek justice. On the way they passed by the Emperor’s litter. The Emperor on hearing the complaint ordered the arrest of the jeweler, but Shubhkaran’s benefactor, Sher Afghan Khan, refused to hand him over.

Thereafter, on Friday, 12th March 1729, the shoe sellers formed a procession and marched to the Jama Masjid (Jami Mosque), where a large number of faithful were gathered for prayers. The crowd interrupted the prayers, and beat up the qazi and the khaatib for siding with the ‘infidel criminal’. The wazeer (prime minister) rushed to the mosque with his troops to pacify the crowd. Sher Afghan Khan (Shubhkaran’s benefactor) too was passing by the mosque with his troops. Seeing these representatives of imperial authority, intent more on controlling them rather than on meting out punishment to the ‘errant’ jeweler, the crowd went berserk and started to attack them with their iron heeled shoes. Though the wazeer’s troops killed a number of rioters, the rioters ultimately carried the day. Sher afghan Khan and the wazeer had to beat hasty retreats. At night the mob demolished Shubhkaran’s house and buried Hajji Hafiz’s body. A mosque was erected on the grave and the “war of the shoemakers” passed into Delhi’s folklore. It was immortalized in Persian and Urdu poetry of Delhi as the event when shoemakers knocked sense into over mighty nobles too sensuous and debauched to care for the upholding of the true faith.65

65 The shoe sellers’ riot finds a mention in nearly all eighteenth century histories. The accounts in different Persian chronicles vary in points of detail. I have depended largely on William Irvine’s Later Mughals, Vol. II (Calcutta, 1922), pp. 257-62. Irvine’s history of the later Mughals is extremely rich in factual details culled from the wealth of Persian
Thus, the eighteenth century examples show that the ruling classes by themselves were often less inclined towards seeing incidents in a narrow Hindu-Muslim light. The obligations of doing justice, of honoring individual equations they may have shared with friends or subordinates, and/or factional jealousies and conflicts, all had roles in influencing the actions and decisions of the ruling classes. But public opinion also mattered. Violence, or the threat of public violence, could compel rulers to do the “right thing” by the *riyaayaa* (public). And in Delhi’s case, where conflict situations between Muslims and non-Muslims were concerned, the general expectation seems to have been that the Muslim side be favored.

In the nineteenth century too we have similar instances of conflict. The most significant from our point of view, one that reveals a real faultline in Dehlvi culture, comes from 1807. It involved the wealthy Jain banker Harsukh Rai who was also a *co-wazeer* of the Mughal Emperor, Akbar Shah II. In 1807 Harsukh Rai decided to take out a *rath yatra* (a chariot procession carrying the image of a Jain saint) through the streets of Delhi. To begin with Harsukh Rai was given the permission to do so (it is not clear if the permission came from the Emperor or the British Resident), but the orthodox *ulema* of Delhi took umbrage at this development. The suggestion for a triumphalist, visible

chronicles he had pored over. It is an excellent work in the positivistic, empirical tradition even though it lacks in analytical rigor, and in fact, as Irvine clarifies in his Preface, does not even make a show of attempting much analysis. Irvine’s own idea in writing the *Later Mughals* was to make details from Persian sources accessible to non-Persian reading, English reading, audiences. On that count the *Later Mughals* succeeds fully. The *Later Mughals*, as a source for eighteenth century history is particularly useful because even though it offers a synthesis of the different Persian accounts in its main text, it also carefully details the differences between these accounts in the footnotes.

celebration of Jainism in a city that had historically been dominated by Muslims, was considered a challenge and insult to established hierarchy. There was a huge furor by Delhi Muslims. As a result, the Resident asked the treasurer to give up the request, and the treasurer relented. Yet, even though Harsukh Rai ended up not taking out the *rath-yatra*, a crowd of Muslims attacked and burnt his house. Thus, a suggestion, rather than an actual act, was punished by the socially dominant community in the city.\textsuperscript{67} The British, who at this time were managing the administration of Delhi, at first responded by seeing this as an act of aggression by Muslim community leaders. They went ahead and arrested Maulana Rafiuddin—the *alim* (scholar of Islam) believed to be the leader of the revolting Muslim party in Delhi.\textsuperscript{68} But when this move further aggravated the unrest in the city, the British attempted to manage the situation by asking Maulana Rafiuddin to leave the city, paying for him and his family’s travel expenses, and having the British resident visit and pay respects to his esteemed elder brother and *alim* of Delhi—Shah Abdul Aziz. One of the ways in which the British had tried to make their rule acceptable in Delhi in their early years in the city was by emphasizing to Muslim community leaders that they would uphold and respect Delhi’s character as a Muslim city—something that had supposedly suffered under Hindu Maratha domination of Delhi in the 1880s and

\textsuperscript{67} The details of this episode come from a number of sources. Charles Metcalfe summarizes the events in a letter that may be found in Kaye, *Life and Correspondence of Charles, Lord Metcalfe*, Vol. I., pp. 155-56; a meticulous record of the whole episode is also available in *Foreign Political Proceedings* (FPP), National Archives of India, 21 May 1807.

\textsuperscript{68} According to British sources, Rafiuddin had written to the Mughal emperor soliciting his support for the Muslim cause in the Harsukh Rai episode. Apparently, in the note to the Emperor, Rafiuddin suggested that Harsukh Rai, or his brother, should be made to apologize publicly to the Muslims, short of which the Muslims of Delhi would feel dishonored. FPP, NAI, no. 12 of 21 May 1807, cf. Warren Fusfeld, “Communal Conflict in Delhi: 1803-1930” in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, 1982, p. 184.
1890s. And here we see, despite some initial vacillation, the British did just that, and steered clear of tampering with existing power equations in the city.⁶⁹

In some ways the confrontation between Harsukh Rai and Delhi’s Muslims was symptomatic of a challenge to traditional power dynamics in Delhi. Harsukh Rai, as noted earlier, was a Jain banker. Hindu and Jain trader bankers represented a group that had become increasingly influential in eighteenth century north India, including Delhi. Part of the reason for the rise in fortunes of this trading-banking group was the political environment of the eighteenth century.

The fragmentation of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century created a climate of heightened military activity all over Hindustan aimed at re-drawing the political map of the subcontinent. The military-fiscalism this situation gave rise to, made the monetary resources and instruments (such as the hundi or the promissory note) of the trader bankers absolutely crucial to the functioning of all eighteenth century polities that came up in India. In the nineteenth century, under the British, the lalas were doing even better. British land revenue policies, and their laissez faire proved very favorable to the lalas.⁷⁰ Harsukh Rai is an excellent example of a trader-banker that administrations all over India were dependent upon.

⁶⁹ Fusfeld, op. cit., p. 185
⁷⁰ For a broad understanding of how the trader banker class flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in India see C.A. Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars. For more specific examples of how British revenue policies and laissez faire helped the trader banker class in the areas around Delhi in the decades leading up to 1857 see Gautam Bhadra, “Four Rebels of Eighteen Fifty Seven”
Harsukh Rai’s family came from Hissar, in present day Haryana. By some accounts Harsukh Rai’s ancestors came and settled in Delhi in the seventeenth century, under the Emperor Shahjahan. But other accounts insist that Har Rai’s father was the first from his family to arrive in Delhi in the late eighteenth century. If the latter was the case then Har Rai’s family may well have been one of many Agarwal and Jain families who moved from small towns in present day Haryana (such as Mahim and Hissar) to Delhi between 1750-1800, probably in search of protection. The Agarwals and Jains seem to have thrived in Delhi. The Jains, in particular, were a small sect who had an impact on town and commercial life totally out of proportion to their numbers. Although never more than 3-5%, even in towns they were most numerous in, Jain businessmen, according to one estimate, commanded half of the total commercial wealth that circulated between Rajasthan and Bengal. Between 1790 and 1820, the Jains in Delhi spent over 25 lakhs of Rupees on religious buildings and public facilities. Harsukh Rai himself built several temples including the highly ornate Naya Mandir in 1807. It was supposed to be the first temple in Mughal Delhi to have a shikhar (lit. ‘mountain peak’. It refers to the rising tower in North Indian temples).  

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71 Ayodhyaprasad Goyalia *Jain Jaagran ke Agradut* (Bhartiya Gyanpeeth, 1975), pp. 466-472
72 Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen...* p. 142
73 C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, p. 141
74 James Todd, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajput States of India*, ed. W. Crooke (London, 1920), II, 603-4
75 For details of building activities refer Maulvi Zafar Hussain's *Monuments of Delhi: Lasting Splendor of the Great Mughals and Others*, (ed.), J.A. Page, Volumes 1-4, (Delhi, 1919)
Harsukh Rai’s banking wealth made him indispensable to the powers-that-be at Delhi. If he was Akbar Shah’s wazir he also had close dealings with the British administrative establishment in the city. In 1806, Harsukh Rai, who was also the Treasurer of the Delhi Residency, made the British a big loan at 12 percent interest to cover charges incurred on military expenditure and on paying the Mughal emperor’s pension. But, as the incident above shows, his wealth, so crucial to the functioning of both the imperial and the British establishments at Delhi, did not win him wider social respectability in the city. In old Mughal/Muslim cities, respectability was the preserve of the *sharif* (well born Muslims and/or those with traditions of military-service under rulers). Those who did not make the cut as *sharif* did not qualify for social respectability in Indo-Muslim culture. This is not to say that people like Harsukh Rai—part of a rising, non-Mughal commercial elite, gave up their struggle for greater visibility and respectability at Delhi. The presence of two authorities at Delhi—Mughal and British—with somewhat different ideas of fairness—in fact greatly expanded the scope of conflict between an older Mughal administrative and military elite (largely, though not exclusively Muslim) and a new mercantile banking elite (largely Hindu and Jain) that owed its ascent to the British. However, despite a

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77 The Delhi Residency was the office that represented British power in Delhi in the early nineteenth century. The highest British official in the city was called the Resident. For the loans Harsukh Rai made to the British, indeed for the loans that the British sought from several other trader-bankers in Delhi to keep their administration going see Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, p. 213.

78 For a detailed discussion of the notion of *“sharif”*—who were considered thus, what was their life-style, and how they coped with British rule, see David Lelyveld’s *Aligarh’s First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Delhi, 1996), pp. 35-92

79 For Hindu/Jain and Muslim conflict in Delhi, arising out of the situation peculiar to Delhi where two authorities existed—the Mughal Emperor and the British—see Warren Fusfeld, “Communal Conflict in Delhi: 1803-1930” in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, 1982, pp. 181-200
questioning of older hierarchies, until 1857, i.e. until the time Delhi still had a Mughal ruler, traditional power equations, though they were questioned, still remained strong.

And it is not only in conflict situations that we can see how social privilege was protected and maintained in Delhi. The impulse to hold down an emerging lala elite into a position of ritualized inferiority within the social order is visible elsewhere as well. Eighteenth and nineteenth century works on Delhi, written in the genre of “biography of city” literature, offer short write-ups on the notables of the city. A perusal of such city biographies allows us to gain perspective on who were considered worthies within Dehlvi culture, and in fact, within Indo-Muslim culture, more broadly. The notable absences and silences about the city’s lalas in texts that celebrate Dehlviyat reveal how they were denied a place within the city’s traditional culture.

When talking about city notables, biography of the city texts almost always begin by talking about the sufi saints, scholars of Islam and doctors of Greco-Arabic or Yunani medicine. Almost all these people are well-born Muslims, and/or those with traditions of military-administrative service under the Mughals—who were mostly, though not always Muslims. City biographies also write about the practitioners of arts highly valued within Delhi’s Indo-Muslim urban culture. Among these the chief were poets, but also mentioned were calligraphers, qaarees (Quran reciters), marsiyaa khwaans (reciters of elegies to the martyred grandson of the Prophet Muhammad), drum players, domnees (singing and dancing girls) etc.\(^\text{80}\) It is significant that artists and fankars connected to the...
singing and dancing professions traditionally belonged to lower caste groups, and as such, were not considered high up in Indo-Muslim social hierarchy. But they did find a mention among notable individuals of the city, for a real shehr in the Indo-Persian world, a “city of beauty”, would be incomplete without such artists whose skills added the charms considered essential to city life. But a group that noticeably fails to find mention in city biographies are the lalas of Delhi.

The lalas of Delhi were not well born Muslims, they had no traditions of politico-military service, they were not socialized into the Persianate-Urdu literary culture, nor were they discerning patrons of the more popular shehri pastimes such as pigeon keeping, kite flying etc. The banking profession moreover, was not given a high status within the Indo-Muslim scheme of things, and the lalas were even more resented because British policies, that had ruined many traditional elites, had proved most profitable for the trading banking groups. It was thus that Delhi’s lalas, though they were famous all over India for their wealth, and though they were the makers of fine buildings (whether havelis, temples or rest houses), and were the force behind the much vaunted liveliness of Delhi’s bazaars, in city biographies on Delhi, they command no individual write-ups or special mention. Other sources speak about the wealth of Delhi’s lalas and about the edifices they created,

81 It is helpful to consider a full list of the “types” of notables that Sayyid Ahmed Khan talks about in Asar-us-Sanaadeed and the numbers of individuals of each type that he mentions: Mashaikh (mystics living in monasteries or mosques)—18; Rasul Shahi (mystics who renounced worldly connections and shaved hair from all parts of their body)—4; Mazjub—8; Ulama-i-Kiram (physicians trained in Greco-Arabic or Yunani medicine); Ulama-i-Din (religious scholars)—29; Qurra wa Huffaz (recites and memorizers of Quran)—5; Poets—17; Calligraphers—11 (including 1 Hindu); Artists—4; Musicians—9 (including 2 Hindus). All notables except the 1 Hindu calligrapher and the two Hindu musicians were Muslims. If one were to look at other Indo-Persian biographies of cities such as Muraqqa-i-Dilli (on Delhi) and Abdul Halim Sharar’s, The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture—one finds the same types of people mentioned.
but rarely the Dilliwallahs themselves. Thus, Felice Beato, the celebrated Italian British photographer, took pictures of Chunna Mal’s haveli—focusing on it as the landmark of the main street in Delhi—Chandani Chowk. But Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s large tome, the Asar-us-sanadeed, though it describes many significant monuments and places within Delhi city, makes no mention of it. Likewise, Mirza Sangeen Baig’s Sair-ul-Manazil completely blanks out all mention of Hindu and Jain temples and rest-houses within Delhi, as does a map claiming to represent “the prominent monuments of Delhi” from the immediate pre-Revolt period.

Not only were the lalas written out of texts celebrating Dehlviyat, demeaning stereotypes about them also abounded. Some of them are visible in the Persian text—Farasat namah. The author of the text was most probably an Afghan who had stayed at the courts of many rulers, and was visiting Delhi in 1844. The author of Farasat Namah makes many interesting and also many disparaging observations about several groups of people he met at Delhi—such as the Kashmiris, the Mughal shahzadas and the Lalas of the city.

82 Felice Beato’s famous “View in Chandani Chowk, Delhi” may be viewed here—http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/18060/lot/143/
83 Mirza Sangeen Baig, Sair-ul-Manazil (New Delhi, 1982), being first written in the early nineteenth century; For re-drawn, enlarged version of an 1850 Map of Shahjahanabad/Delhi taken form the India Office Records see Ekart Ehlers and Thomas Krafft, Shahjahanabad/Old Delhi: Tradition and Colonial Change (Delhi, 1993).
84 The Farasat Namah is available as a Persian Manuscript in the National Museum, Delhi. I am grateful to Mehtab Alam for sharing with me her unpublished M.Phil dissertation on the “Farasat Nama” (an annotated index of the Persian text). All references to the Farasat Nama come from Mehtab Alam’s dissertation, and I have depended on her for free flowing translations from Persian to Hindustani. Translations from Hindustani to English are mine.
Particularly unflattering, were his comments about the Delhi *lalas*: they are sweet to you when they have something to sell, but the moment your back is turned, they are all cut and dry; all they eat is “*Daal mash and chapatti*” (simple lentils and bread)— meaning no matter how much money they have, they live in miserly fashion; their only attachment is to money. Otherwise they are completely selfish; when faced with difficult situations and crises, they gain their objective not through direct, frontal confrontation, but with intelligence, or rather a bit of cunning. The author of the *Faraasatnamah* does not just describe the *lalas* of Delhi in adjectives. He also tells stories about them that illustrate his reading of them. Thus, for instance, he mentions the following.

A Delhi *bania* had become quite old. He decided to leave all his money to his sons, and to lead a quiet life himself ‘remembering God’. But the sons, being *bania* sons, forgot all about their father once they had their hands on his money. The old man was very distressed. A good friend of his came to his aid, and the two ‘old foxes’ pulled a trick that set the sons right. The old man put some pebbles and stones in a rich looking money bag and then spoke in private to each of his sons. He showed each son the money bag and said—‘I have distributed my wealth equally among you all. But I have some gold ornaments in this bag that I want to leave only to my most deserving son. I am telling this only to you.’ Once the old *lala* had ‘put this information in each son’s ears’ they became very attentive to his needs, and tried to outdo each other in looking after him. Of course, when the father died, the greedy sons were in for a shock!\(^{85}\)

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\(^{85}\) Mehtab Alam, “*Farasatnama*”, unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Department of Persian, Delhi University, 2006, pp. 28-29
Another story goes this way:

Once, a lalaji was passing by a forest. Four robbers fell upon him. It was clear to lalaji that the robbers would not only take away his money but would also leave him dead in this viraana (wasteland) where his family would not even be able to trace him. So lalaji begged and pleaded with the robbers to spare him. But the robbers were unmoved. The lala became crest fallen. Soon however, he had an idea: feigning resignation to his fate, he said to the robbers—even though I am going to die I want to tell you of a way to make good money. He pointed to a tree in the forest, and said that if they could cut the branches of that high tree and carry the leaves and the branches to the city market, they would be paid very good money. The leaves of that rare tree were highly prized, he said, for their medicinal properties. The robbers were tempted, and one by one they took turns guarding the lala while the others busied themselves hacking at the branches and the leaves of the tree. When they had got together a huge pile of leaves and branches, they set out for the city. Almost as soon as they reached the market at Delhi, lalaji lost no time in slipping away from the group. The robbers, worn down by the weight they were carrying, were already too tired, and now in the city--scared as well, to go after him. And no sooner had they sought the first buyer for their ‘goods’ than they realized how worthless they were, and that they had been completely outwitted and made fools of by the lala’s cunning (chaalaaki).86

These perceptions about lalas: their supposed grasping love of money, their plainness (as opposed to simplicity) in living and comportment, and some kind of “inherent”, deep seated cunning that belied their outward plainness and timidity, were not confined to one

86 “Farasatnama” op. cit., p. 46
eccentric or particularly frustrated individual. They are echoed in several writings and even proverbs of the period.

Pyare Lal Ashob, a Hindu kayastha gentleman, who is spoken of in Dilliwallah writings as a quintessential Dilliwallah, in his 1868 work, Rasum-i-Hind, reproduces several of the same notions about the banias (lalas). That he chose to air his views about lalas or banias in a work such as Rasum-i-Hind is in itself interesting. Rasum-i-Hind was a work commissioned by the Punjab education department about the life-cycle customs and rituals followed in ‘Hind’ or Hindustan/India. This could have been a straightforward anthropological account of the type that Sayyid Ahmed Dehlvi’s Rasum-i-Dehli, about the life-cycle rituals followed in Muslim families of Delhi, was. But Pyare Lal Ashob’s work was much broader in scope—it spoke of Hindu and Muslim customs, and Hindu customs and ceremonies were mentioned with reference to different caste groups among the Hindus. Also, customs are not merely described, they are interwoven into stories in which people from caste groups such as brahmin, ahir, jat and bania appear. Most caste groups in the book are talked about in terms of their essentialized characteristics. Such reflections on the supposed characteristics of specific groups are completely gratuitous considering this is a work about rituals and customs. In this work, as in the Farasatnama, the banias or lalas are not the only ones disparaged. But they are without a doubt the

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87 See, for instance, Allama Rashid-al-Khiri’s 1935 work Dilli kee Aakhri Bahaar p, 124-25
88 The edition used here was printed in Lahore, 1961. Details about the commissioning of Rasum-i-Hind by the Punjab Education Department are mentioned in the Deebacha (preface) of the 1961 edition. Rai Bahadur Pyare Lal ‘Ashob’ Dehlvi and Captain W.J. Holroyd, Rasum-i-Hind (Lahore, 1961, 1868).
89 Rasum-i-Hind, pp. 26-168.
group that receives the worst press.\textsuperscript{90} Also worth noting is the fact that the one story (\textit{qissa}) that deals with the travails of an aristocratic Muslim family, speaks of that socio-religious class only in terms of the greatest admiration and sympathy.\textsuperscript{91}

In the \textit{Rasum-Hind} we get the story of three generations of a \textit{lala} family. The grandfather in this particular family is a Delhi lala who is poor. His son, however, manages to get a small position in the British army supplies department at Punjab at a salary of 7 rupees a month. From these modest beginnings, through unbridled ambition, obsequiousness, and a relentless, slow and steady kind of corruption (that involved the under weighing of food rations dispensed to every single sepoy, on every single occasion), the son is able to shave off supplies worth 3000 rupees. When a bigger opportunity presents itself, this Lala, in collusion with his superior in the Department, fudges the supply ledger and manages to make a lakh of rupees from the war. Pyare Lal does mention that all through the war the \textit{bania} is terrified at the prospect of coming to harm, and it is only the rich money laundering opportunities that keep him in Punjab. At the end of the war the \textit{bania} leaves the supply department job and taking the ill earned stash of money goes to Delhi to be with his family, and to become a moneylender, lending out funds at interest. As money-lending brings in further riches he builds a grand \textit{haveli} (mansion) and his father starts to spend on good works and charity—building temples, feeding Brahmins etc. He also, at some point, manages to cheat his son’s brother-in-law (a minor) of his property when the latter’s father dies unexpectedly. When the Revolt breaks out in 1857 the rich \textit{lalaji} is in Bareilly getting his grandson married in that city. Over the remonstrations of

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid. pp. 86-168.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid. pp. 279-351.
his grandson’s in-laws to wait for the “disturbances to pass”, the lalaji, horrified at the prospect of the harm that might come to his haveli and his stored riches, decides to leave for Delhi. In Delhi, after many twists and turns, the lala gets reported to the rebels as a spy of the British. As a result, the rebels put him to death for being a traitor. Thus an ill spent life comes to a sad end.⁹²

Such views about the lalas—the sordid means by which they came into wealth, a basic dishonesty in their disposition, the “reality” of the charity they practiced, and their overwhelming greed—would not have been known only in the Delhi region. But in Delhi, which on the one hand housed many members of the fading Indo-Muslim nobility, and on the other, had a rapidly rising trader banker class whose finances and loans had become critical to the functioning of many a noble’s establishment, such views would have been held and aired with greater bitterness. The lalas’ success was too obvious not be acknowledged, but they could be denied respectability through belittling stereotyping.

On the contrary, if one were to look at the merchants’ self-perceptions—their ideas about ideal conduct for themselves-- then thrift, sobriety, and the keeping of a low profile, all come across as worthy qualities. These were qualities that every merchant who wished to enhance his credit in the market and in society was expected to cultivate. In fact, the merchant society held stereotypes of its own about the “decadent” nawabi types, and consciously sought to cultivate a life-style at variance from the nawabi one.⁹³ And here

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⁹² Rasum, op. cit, pp. 166-68.
⁹³ For perceptions of “model” or “credit-worthy” behavior in merchant society, and also for a critique of “nawabi culture” in this society see C.A. Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, Chapters 10 and 11, pp. 369-427.
too, what must have seemed like decadence and conspicuous and wasteful consumption from the outside, may quite often have been the appropriate “noble” behavior on the part of the service-gentry elites. Notables were expected to maintain themselves in a fashion that allowed several direct and indirect dependents to thrive with them. They were expected to provide employment and service opportunities to artisan and service classes. It is not surprising therefore that people who could no longer afford expansive lifestyles continued to do so even at the cost of calling material ruin upon themselves. They stayed with old ways not just for reasons of vanity, or because of inveterate habits of consumption (though these were important for some individual cases), but possibly also because they were actuated by some sentiment of noblesse oblige. Before the overweening influence of Victorian morality began to impact North Indian society in the late nineteenth century, sharif (well-born, elite) Muslim lifestyle was held in high esteem all over North India. And generous, large living, that supported many dependents—whether from the family or servants—was considered the very essence of sharafat.94

Thus, rival stereotypes; Hindu/Jain versus Muslim conflicts; as well as the absences and silences of the biography of city literature, all point to a conflict between a declining Indo-Persianate, military-administrative, Mughal elite on the one hand, and a rising, mercantile, British backed, Hindu-Jain lala elite on the other. Until 1857, the traditional elites, though pushed to the wall, had managed to assert their superiority through the

94 For a detailed discussion of the attributes of sharafat (nobility) and an argument for how the Muslims most possessed these, see Muhammad Hasan Qateel's, Haft Tamasha, (ed.), Dr. Muhammad Umar, (Delhi, 1968), pp. 26-28. Qateel, it must be added, was a Hindu from the Khatri caste who had converted to Islam. The exact year when the book was written is unknown, but from other details we do know it is possible to tell that it was written in the nineteenth century, and before 1817, when Qateel passed away.
influence of the Mughal emperor. But after 1857, the *lalas* really came into their own. Conflicts over the control of public spaces within Delhi began afresh.

In 1873, the Jains at Delhi made a fresh effort to petition the British government to allow them to take out their procession, believing that Muslims would now be unable to resist. Likewise, petitions were forwarded by prominent Hindus, and were entertained by British officials, about matters of community centered public displays that had been decided very differently in the pre-1857 phase. In April 1886, 7000 Muslims of Delhi signed a petition and presented it to the British Viceroy and Governor General complaining about British officials at Delhi. The grouse was that these officials, on the prompting of Delhi Hindus, had allowed for certain restrictions on cow slaughter, had permitted Ram Lila processions to pass through Muslim majority areas in Delhi, and had allowed the Ram Lila to be staged at a location very close to the city. All of these were seen as symbolic challenges to the social superiority the Muslims had traditionally enjoyed at Delhi.\(^5\)

It is noteworthy that some of the issues mentioned in the 1886 petition, had been raised even before 1857, and back then they had been “resolved” in a very different way. Thus a petition by Hindu residents at Delhi, about the slaughter of cows by Muslims on the festival of Id, had been presented to British officials in August 1854, but the British at that point did nothing to alter the practice. Likewise, the question of the route that the *Ramlila* procession should take was settled by Bahadur Shah Zafar in such a way that it did not aggravate the Muslims, and placated the Hindus too. Though the procession was

\(^5\) Home Public (B) Proceedings, nos. 113-17 of April 1886 petition enclosed in file (National Archive of India)
not allowed to pass through Chandani Chowk (the main thoroughfare), the Badshah requested that the procession pass in front of the eastern face of the palace so that he may have the pleasure of viewing it.\textsuperscript{96} In the post-1857 phase however, the same issues about Ram Lila processions and cow slaughter were being decided very differently.

It is little wonder then that Muslims at Delhi should have signed a petition in large numbers and protested in words that clearly spelt out their disapproval of a change in the power dynamics within Delhi. The petition said--:

“(At) the commencement of its rule in India the British Government found the Mohamedans and Hindoos strong and weak respectively. Your petitioners do not pretend to maintain that these relations were founded on any equitable principle or ought to be continued, but they refer to the relative positions…of two religions…in those times the Mohamedans were more dominant and unrestrained and took the lead as compared with the Hindoos who were servient, retrained and in the background, so to say, in the performance of their respective religious ceremonies and services.

That since there are tensions between them the cause for this must certainly be sought with the Hindoos who must have sought to attain more freedom, dominance and prominence of their religious ceremonies and from a fair conclusion may be deduced the question as to which party has remained passive and to its own cost eventually to be downtrodden with indignities into humiliation and which party has been aggressive.”\textsuperscript{97}


\textsuperscript{97} Home Public (B) Proceedings, nos. 113-17 of April 1886 petition enclosed in file (National Archive of India)
Thus, it is clear that by the late nineteenth century, traditional power equations in Delhi as well as the city’s reputation as a Muslim center, were coming under severe strain. Hindus and Jains were no longer willing to acquiesce in the symbolic inferiority that had been imposed upon them in the traditional Indo-Muslim order, which despite a few challenges, had persisted in Delhi until 1857. Aggressive efforts on the part of new elites to overturn existing hierarchies, begot a sense of great insecurity in the older elites. As the petition above shows, Delhi’s traditional elites did not deny that they were the more powerful community in the earlier set up. Nor did they see, as most groups being challenged for power don’t, that Hindu and Jain assertion was a reaction against an earlier system that had not been entirely generous towards them. When a sense of grievance met an opportunity for redressal provided by sympathetic British rulers, the older order began to unravel.

Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and into the early twentieth century, there were consistent attempts on the part of Hindus and Jains in Delhi to assert their power, and of the Muslims to cry foul, protest their “humiliation” and come up with an organized response of their own. A year or two before 1919, Bashiruddin Ahmed, who was writing a multi-volume tome on the monuments and neighborhoods of Delhi, found that he was being denied access to Jain temples in Delhi because he was a Muslim, prompting him to remark in disgust “this is what the Mussalmaans have come to in Delhi” (Dilli men Musalmaanon kaa yeh haal ho gayaa hai).98 Moreover, as discussed earlier, Hindus in Delhi, by the late nineteenth-early twentieth century, had also become

organized under the Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharma movements—both revivalist movements with a strong anti-Muslim tenor. By the early twentieth century, Delhi, a historically Muslim city, had become one of the foremost centers of organized Hinduism in India.

Given this situation, from the late nineteenth century onwards, barring the brief period of Hindu-Muslim unity during the pan-Islamic Khilafat and Non Co-operation Movement in 1919, the policy of the Muslim leadership in Delhi became broadly one of staying away from anti-colonial politics, of stressing loyalty to British rule, and of seeking “protection” against Hindu “aggression”. In this new relationship with British power what was evident was an acceptance of British paramountcy on the one hand, but a very aggressive rejection of and defense against a rising Hindu power, on the other. In acting thus, Muslim leadership in Delhi acted very much like Muslim leadership all over India. The Hindustani speaking heartland of North India, of which Delhi was a part, was dotted with many old Muslim urban centers. The decline in the power of Muslim elites in the Hindustani heartland was not absolute. In the North-Western Provinces, comprising the territories ceded to the British by the Nawab of Awadh in 1801 and the Marathas in 1803 (by which Delhi came under British control), Muslims occupied a huge percentage of seats available to Indians in the British administrative services. In 1850, Muslims held three quarters of all judicial posts available to Indians.99 Likewise, even in the revenue services, Muslims served as deputy collectors and tehsildars. The majority of inspectors of police in northern India were also Muslims.100 So there was no real “decline” of the

100 George Campbell, *Modern India*, (London, 1852), pp. 295 and 443
Muslim elites in North India, but the *perception* of decline was acute, as was a growing sense of insecurity bred by assertive new elites who had found their “spurs”, so to speak, outside of the Mughal politico-cultural order that had nourished them. It is under this backdrop that fears about the death of *Dehlviyat* must be understood.
Conclusion

*Dehlvi* patriotism or *Dehlviyat* was the product of a particular historical conjuncture. The disintegration of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century, the localization of the Mughal Emperor and of his capital Delhi that followed in its wake, and the emergence of rival centers of Indo-Muslim urban culture were prerequisites for the emergence of a *Dehlvi* civic identity. The shrinking of scales brought about by the Empire’s breakup, allowed for the flowering of local cultures such as *Dehlviyat*.

By the late nineteenth century the constellation of factors that had made possible the emergence of *Dehlviyat* were coming apart. The post-1857 changes in the communication systems—with the introduction of railways, steamships, telegraph, and the postal system—allowed for British Raj to emerge as a unified order. But the same communication revolution also made possible the emergence of new kinds of horizontal unities—the nationalisms of different hues—both anti-colonial and communitarian. It was in this climate, when the eighteenth century change of scales from empire to locality was being reversed, and the spotlight was shifting from the locality to the broader unities of the nation—that *Dehlviyat* began to unravel. And as *Dehlviyat* began to unravel those who identified with this local patriotism began to write and talk about it, to record it for posterity, and to memorialize it.

The nostalgic-memorializing literature, produced at a time when its writers believed that *Dehlviyat* was coming apart, contains within it a portrait of Delhi from the period of the
last Mughals to the early twentieth century. The portrait is a partisan one, often devoid of internal contradictions, but it is nonetheless useful for it throws light on socio-cultural aspects of Dehlvi life that have otherwise found little space in mainstream histories of the city. Moreover, this literature, with its unselfconscious subjectivity, allows the historian insight into the dominant perceptions about Delhi. And its silences offer a window into the narratives that the “dominant perceptions” have suppressed or elided. As such, nostalgic-memorializing literature on Delhi is at once a subjective celebration of Dehlviyat and proof of the boundaries or limits within it.

Through a philological survey of this literature I have identified the broad contours of Dehlviyat—the axes around which Dehlviyat was celebrated and articulated—memorialization of the past, the Mughal emperor and family, and some popular culture practices such as love for Urdu poetry and pigeon keeping. I have also attempted an assessment of this culture—the adjectives one might use to describe it. And my reading of Dehlviyat is that it was a culture that was both cosmopolitan and Muslim.

I have used the term ‘cosmopolitan’ to convey a sense of ‘broadness’ in terms of both Dehlviyat’s constitution and affiliation. Elements integral to the culture—such as language, fairs and festivals, music and dance, life cycle rituals etc. developed through an admixture of Indic and Persio-Arabic influences. Moreover, people across class and religious boundaries identified with them. Hindus from caste groups such as Kayasthas, Khatris and Kashmiri pandits, who had had historically close associations with the Mughal administrative machinery, took great pride in Indo-Muslim urban culture and
considered it their own.¹ “The Mathur Kayastha community”, as Shiela Dhar avers, “were great believers in the good things of life. They were reputed to have provided the Mughal rulers at Delhi with executives and revenue officials for hundreds of years and had in turn imbibed the values of the courtly tradition themselves. They appreciated Urdu and Persian poetry, classical music, good food, and refinement of manner.”² This was of course true for the Kayastha as a whole. Everywhere in India, Kayasthas had a reputation for being very “Muslim”/”refined” in their culture. But the Kayasthas of Delhi, considered themselves the “highest of a high species”: they were Kayasthas, and they were Kayasthas of Delhi—the foremost center, in the opinion of many, of Indo-Muslim urban culture in South Asia.³ We have seen how closely a Kayastha such as Pyare Lal Ashob identified with Delhi’s Indo-Muslim culture, and how much he shared the prejudices of those “within” the culture, for those (such as the lalas) who were “outside” of it.⁴ In fact, it was not completely unusual for Hindus from Kayastha, Khatri and Kashmiri Pandit caste groups to become so attached to Indo-Muslim culture, that some converted, and adopted Islam as their own religion. Muhammad Hasan Qateel, the author of Haft Tamasha, the passionate defender of sharif values, and believer that sharafat

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¹ For a broad survey of the Kayastha community see Karen Leonard, Social History of an Indian Caste: the Kayasthas of Hyderabad (Berkeley, 1978); for Kashmiri Pandits see Henny Sender, The Kashmiri Pandits: A Study of Cultural Choice in North India (new York, 1990).
² Sheila Dhar, Tales of Innocents, Musicians and Bureaucrats (Delhi, 1995), p. 16. Sheila Dhar’s memoirs also give us a brief peep into the Kashmiri Pandit culture through the glimpses we get of her husband—P.N. Dhar--a Kashmiri Pandit, with great love for Persian poetry (See especially the chapter “Persian Couplets and One Green Chilli”). For another take on Mathur Kayastha culture of Delhi see Madhur Jaffrey, Climbing the Mango Trees: A memoir of a Childhood in India (London, 2005), pp. 1-10. Sheila Dhar and Madhur Jaffrey were, in fact, first cousins.
³ The phrase “highest of a high species” comes from the famous Delhi publisher Ravi Dayal. See Ravi Dayal, “A kayastha’s view of Delhi” in Mala Dayal (ed.), Celebrating Delhi.
⁴ See Chapter Four above for the demeaning manner in which Pyarelal Ashob portrays the baniyas/lalas of Delhi in his Rasum-i-Hind, and his respectful and sympathetic portrayal of a sharif Muslim family that had “fallen on hard times”.

(nobility) was a “Mussalman” trait much more than a Hindu one, was a Khatri gentleman, and renowned Persian poet, who had converted to Islam.\(^5\) Thus the broad, inclusive, nature of the Indo-Muslim culture of Dehlviyat, and its hegemonic appeal, cannot be doubted.

Yet, my study argues that the cosmopolitanism of Dehlviyat must not be confused with present day non-denominational secularism. Dehlvi cosmopolitanism was of a rooted variety. It was admittedly broad, but was rooted in the Islamic cultural universe. Looking at the social elites in Delhi, the city’s sedimented history, the kinds of art forms privileged here, and the manner in which eighteenth and nineteenth century Dilliwallahs and outsiders wrote about Delhi, it is possible to see that Delhi was looked upon as a Muslim cultural center. Delhi, of course, was not seen as Muslim in the same sense as a place such as Panipat would have been. Panipat was a Muslim center largely because it was a pilgrimage center, the town of the sufi saints, and home to Islamic theologians and old Muslim families. A city such as Delhi was Muslim in a different way from a place such as Panipat. Delhi, like Panipat, was a sacred site for Muslims: it was after all hazrat-i-dilli—the land of famous sufi saints of the past and present, and it remained a center of Islamic theological studies till well into the mid nineteenth century. But Delhi was also much more. It was also a large, cosmopolitan, imperial city. In Delhi, along with Islamic religious establishments such as mosques and dargahs, and religious specialists such as saints and ulemas, could also be found—people from round the world, masters of many of trades and crafts, all kinds of diversions and entertainments (many of them patently un-Islamic and morally suspect), the fabulously wealthy, and also the wares of the world.

\(^5\) For Qateel’s family background see Muhammad Umar’s Preface to Haft Tamasha, pp. 1-22.
To be a Dilliwallah was to be a real shehri—to be from a place that was both cosmopolitan and Muslim.  

It is important to acknowledge both the cosmopolitanism and the Muslimness of cultures such as Dehlviyat. The culture that is the focus of this work was the Dehlvi variant of the Indo-Muslim urban culture whose other centers would include places such as Lucknow, Rampur, Agra, Lahore, Hyderabad etc. The cosmopolitanism of such centers, was, in some senses seen to derive—(as I have shown for the case of Delhi)—from their Muslimness. Until the mid to late nineteenth century, Muslim urban cultures of places such as Delhi and Lucknow were seen as the epitome of urbanity and refinement in South Asia. But this association between Islam, urbanity, and cosmopolitanism is not always recognized in India. Within Indian historiography there has been a prominent strain that views Islam in India as a religion of conquest. R.C. Majumdar, the editor (from 1951-69) of the multi volume History and Culture of the Indian People sees the entire medieval period (i.e. the period from c. 1200-1800) as a “Muslim period” and characterizes it as a phase of “foreign rule” when Hindus were oppressed and humiliated. The British rule that followed, though also foreign and oppressive, is seen as an improvement over Muslim

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6 For a sense of how Delhi and Panipat, though they were both considered Muslim cities, were considered very different kinds of Muslim cities see Mir Sher Ali Afsos’s Araish-i-Mehfil. The Araish is a book that celebrates the “land of Hind” by highlighting the special products and distinctive traits of the different regions and cities of Hind. In this broad survey most places get barely a paragraph or a page. But Delhi, i.e. Shahjahanabad, takes no less than 7 pages to describe. Afsos talks about Delhi’s long imperial history, its many excellent monuments, its merchandise rich bazaars, and its Urdu language. Panipat by contrast, gets only a third of a page. The only thing Panipat is mentioned for is the sufi Bu Ali Qalandar, whose tomb, we are told, “is a place of pilgrimage for the whole universe”. For sections on Delhi/Shahjahanabad see pp. 48-55; for Panipat see p. 57.
rule. This historiographical perspective has not always enjoyed respectability in mainstream, cosmopolitan, academic circles, but it has persisted nonetheless as part of popular commonsense in India. In contemporary times in particular, when Islam, owing to world events, has more than ever come to be seen as an “insular”, “dogmatic” faith, it is helpful to recall and remember other times when cultures spawned by Islam in South Asia had generated very different perceptions.

But perhaps there is another reason why the Muslimness of urban cosmopolitanism in India is not highlighted. Unlike historiography that sees Islam as an outside influence and a religion of conquest on the subcontinent, more nationalist historiography emphasizes how Islam was indigenized in the sub-continent and both transformed with and

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7 This view finds frequent expression throughout the eight volumes of History and Culture which were published by the Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan with assistance from the Government of India. R.C. Majumdar (ed.), History and Culture of the Indian People 8 vols. (Bombay, 1951-68).

8 To say that this view of history that considers Islam as a religion of conquest in India has not enjoyed mainstream respectability is not to say that effort to mainstream it, through government education bodies such centralized school text books, have not been made. In 1971, under the janta Party coalition government, the HRD ministry (which oversees education) under the guidance of a Hindu right wing minister attempted to re-write history books to push this agenda. But the more concerted effort to Hinduize history was made under the NDA government, with Murali Manohar Joshi as HRD minister between 1998-2004. For a quick overview of the text book controversy see Delhi Historians Group, “Communalization of Education: The History Text-books Controversy”, (Delhi, 2002) here: http://www.friendsofsouthasia.org/textbook/NCERT_Delhi_Historians_Group.pdf

9 The “popular” historian who has done most to disabuse people of the “lies of secular history” is the author P.N.Oak. A representative example of his writing is his book on Delhi Dilli Ka Lal Qila Lal Qot Hai (Delhi’s Lal Qila/ Red Fort is Lal Qot [a palace complex built by the 11th century Hindu ruler Prithviraj Chauhan]). P.N. Oak states upfront in his preface that “many educated people have been led astray by Anglo-Muslim education into believing that nearly all of India’s historical cities such as Delhi, Agra, Jaunpur, Kannauj, Lucknow...etc. were established by foreign Muslim conquerors. According to them...before the thousand years of killing and plundering by Muslims, nothing of significance existed in India. In fact, the reality is that foreign Muslim conquerors have only destroyed cities and monuments---they haven’t created or constructed even one.” P. Oak, Dilli ka Lal Qila Lal Qot Hai (New Delhi, 2006), p. 1. Another representative title would be Agra red Fort is a Hindu Building (Delhi, 2000).
transformed the Indian setting. In “nationalist” writings, there is often the tendency to see the amalgam produced by the intermingling of Muslim and Indic cultures (denoted by the term Indo-Muslim culture) as almost seamlessly syncretic or *ganga-jamni*---the flowing together of two great sub-continental rivers Ganga and Jamuna. Urban cultures of certain centers—particularly the court centers of Muslim sovereigns—are often discussed in the context of syncretic culture but their Muslimness is almost always underplayed. A few examples will bear this point out.

C. F Andrews, in his book *Zakaullah of Delhi*, has underlined the shared culture of Delhi until the 1920s. Andrews speaks of the warm friendships that people like Zakaullah (a devout Muslim), Pyare Lal Ashob (a Hindu), and Master Ram Chander (A Hindu convert to Christianity), nurtured all through their lives. They were gentlemen steeped in the traditional culture of Delhi: they were lovers of Urdu, scrupulously mindful of proper comportment, respectful of each others’ faith, and punctilious about their *wazaadaarees*. C.F. Andrews was writing in the 1920s, in the shadow of great Hindu-Muslim conflict in Delhi. He was writing about Zakaullah and the broader socio-cultural world of late nineteenth century Delhi to show how contrary conflict was to the ethos of traditional *Dehlvi* culture, and that people like Zakaullah and Nazir Ahmad were the best exponents of inter-faith harmony.

C.F. Andrews’ work on Zakaullah may be seen as an early nationalist account of Delhi’s Indo-Muslim culture. But the template followed in this work may be found in later nationalist histories as well. Mushirul Hasan and Margrit Pernau wrote an introduction to
C.F. Andrews’ *Zakaullah* in a new edition of the volume in 2003, echoing very much the sentiments Andrews had himself expressed.\(^{10}\) The Urdu Academy of Delhi’s re-prints of late nineteenth and early twentieth century works on the socio-cultural life of Delhi push the same line: they are always prefaced with observations about how the said texts bring to light Delhi’s “makhsus tehzeebi riwaayat” (unique cultural tradition) which was the very embodiment of “ganga-jamni” or “mushtarka tehzeeb” (mixed culture).\(^{11}\)

Such scholarship is laudable in that it seeks to highlight a history of commonality and sharing in fraught times. But it can also be misleading. Nationalist histories and texts have rightly highlighted the shared aspects of Indo-Muslim culture. But the sharing within Indo-Muslim urban cultures, such as the one Dehlviyat represented, needs to be qualified. Indo-Muslim urban cultures had room for non-Muslims so long as they were comfortable with the broadly Muslim cultural bias inherent in them. Love for Persian and Urdu, honoring of sufis, appreciation for certain kinds of non-vegetarian foods, adoption of a distinctive Indo-Muslim sartorial style, and a preference for *shehri* entertainments, particularly Hindustani music and dance—were some of the qualifications for membership among the respectables within this culture. Hindus, from caste groups such as Kayasthas, Kashmiri Pandits and Khatris, who had historically close associations with Mughal administrative apparatus, were also participants in Indo-Muslim culture. But other kinds of non-Muslims, such as the Jain and Hindu trader-bankers, who did not meet these qualifications, were, as I have shown, accorded an

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11 See for example Khaliq Anjum’s foreword to *Rasum-i-Dehli* (1986) and Sayyid Zamir Hasan’s foreword to Sayyid Wazir Hasan’s *Dilli Ka Aakhir Deedar* (1992)
inferior social status within the Indo-Muslim world. Delhi’s therefore, was a shared culture—but the sharing never took place in equal measure. Delhi was a Muslim center.

The reluctance to view places as either Hindu or Muslim is very much a twentieth century phenomena. To contemporaries, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, even until the Partition, Delhi, for instance, was a Muslim city. Many a traumatized Muslim of Old Delhi, forced to flee Delhi for Pakistan, was aghast at the change that had come over Delhi in 1947. How could Mussalmans be hounded, the way they were being, in, of all places, Delhi?! “Dilli”, after all, as one of them said, “was a Muslim city” (Mussalmanon ka shehr tha)!

Gandhi too, who was straining to bring a modicum of sanity to a Delhi up in flames in the Partition violence in 1947-48, also shared in the view that Delhi was a Muslim city. He would appeal to Hindus and Sikhs to acknowledge that Delhi could not be imagined without the Jama Masjid, without its Muslim monuments, and its Muslim residents. “Delhi”, he emphasized, “has a long history behind it”, and “to even try to erase it would be madness”. Indeed, one of the measures Gandhi suggested as a way of bringing warring communities together was to have Hindus and Sikhs promise to re-build the tomb of Delhi’s patron saint Bakhtiyar Kaki. The tomb had been vandalized in the Partition disturbances, and the promise to re-build it was Gandhi’s way of signaling to the Muslims of Delhi that he understood that

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13 Excerpts from Gandhi’s speeches cited from Gyan Pandey, op. cit., p. 186.
Delhi could not hope to be “normal” until the injury done to the city’s sufí saint was remedied.

Post-Partition India was a nation struggling to keep itself together. In the surcharged atmosphere after the Partition violence, it became important to under play community identities and emphasize a history of sharing and secularism. But perhaps it is important to shrug off such reluctance and to acknowledge the dominant personality of places as contemporaries viewed them. How people viewed places impacted the politics they adopted. The perceived Muslimness of places such as Delhi, and the strong identification of Muslim elites with this culture, must be recognized because it allows us to better understand the politics of nationalism that emerged in India from the late nineteenth century onwards.

The politics of Muslim separatism in India, spearheaded by the All India Muslim League, was based on the idea that Muslims cannot be a minority—by which was meant being a ‘minor’ component of India-- that would be dominated by the Hindus of the country. Jinnah’s final parting of the ways with Congress was over this issue. Jinnah and the League were not willing to countenance reservations for Indian Muslims (on representative bodies) that would be commensurate with their numbers in the population. The League, a relatively small party which claimed (these claims had not been backed by actual electoral results on the ground until 1945) to represent the Muslims of India (who were numerically a minority), absolutely insisted on the principle of parity, and on being treated as the equals of the Congress which was a much bigger party, with a real mass
following gathered during numerous mass anti-colonial movements it had spearheaded.\textsuperscript{15}

What was the demand for parity founded upon?

My answer to this is not rigorously worked out. But I think it is possible to see this insistence on being the “ruling minority”, as something with a longer pedigree. To say so is not say that the Partition was inevitable. It was an event that came to pass in 1947 after many historical twists and turns. Yet some of the mentalities on display in the leadership of the League—can be traced to much earlier periods. Muslim elites from urban centers in the Hindustani heartland—north India—had always wielded power far in excess of their numbers in the population. This right to rule was not based in democratic politics but in a socio-political order that had been generous to Muslim elites. In fact, when democratic politics did start to emerge from the late nineteenth century, it seemed very threatening to old aristocratic Muslim elites. Being second to anyone was difficult because it entailed a loss of power and privilege, but it also rankled because of the feeling that \textit{sharif} Muslims were a ruling race, and it was unseemly that inferior people, unfit to rule, should try to upstage them. Two examples from the late nineteenth century will show that mid twentieth century Muslim League stances may well have had older antecedents as well.

Sayyid Ahmed Khan, in his \textit{Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind}, written in 1858, had made a passionate plea for representation of Indians on governing bodies in India: “It is highly

\textsuperscript{15} Ayesha Jalal, \textit{The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan} (New York, 1983). Jalal argues that Jinnah had not really wanted a partition. He wanted a strong center that would accept a parity of parliament seats between Muslim League and Congress. But since that was not acceptable to the Congress, the Partition happened.
conducive to the welfare and prosperity of the Government, indeed it is essential to its stability that the people should have a voice in its councils.” Yet, when the Indian National Congress was formed, and made the same demands of the British government, Sayyid Ahmad Khan did a volte-face. The early Congress was a body of English educated men from the professions who hailed from the colonial cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras.\(^\text{16}\) This was not a body that old, aristocratic elites identified with.

Addressing a meeting of traditional notables (\textit{rais}) Sayyid Ahmed said—

“Government has made a Council for making laws…For this Council she selects from Provinces those officials who are best acquainted with the administration…and also some \textit{Rais} [men of position and influence. Mostly these would be landed magnates. In the North western provinces most of the landed magnates would have been Muslims]…some people may ask why should they be chosen on account of social position instead of ability?...It is very necessary that for the Viceroy’s Council the members should be of high social position. I ask you—would our aristocracy like a man of low caste or insignificant origin, though he be a B.A. or an M.A. and have the requisite ability, should be in a position of authority above them?... Never! Nobody would like it!”

Talking of the dangers of introducing the principle of “equal competition” for Government positions he further argues, “What is the result of competitive examination in England? You know that men of all social positions, sons of dukes, and earls, and \textit{darzis} [tailors] and people of low rank, are equally allowed to pass the exam. Men of both high and low rank come to India for civil service…But those who come from England, come from a country so far removed from our eyes that we do not know whether they are sons of Lords or dukes or \textit{darzies}…But as regards

\(^\text{16}\) In time the Congress expanded its social base to include the middle classes and intermittently, and somewhat imperfectly, subaltern groups such as peasants as well. But the old aristocratic elites (in the North they were quite often Muslims, though not always so), never warmed up to the Congress.
Indians, the case is very different. Men of good family would never like to trust their lives and property to people of low rank with whose humble origins they are well acquainted.”

The point in reproducing these speeches is not to show Sayyid Ahmed Khan as a Muslim fanatic. Far from it, he was *sharif* man, a gentleman, with many Hindu friends. He was the author of the *Asar-us-sanaadeed*, where he talks about many Hindu temples and about the Hindu faith respectfully and knowledgably. But when democratic politics began to emerge, traditional elites became extremely insecure. Facing the prospect of being sidelined, or having to defer to the “low” types, traditional notables dug their heels in. And once that happened, sharif dignity could often fray at the edges. Let us consider one other example.

Mualvi Zakaullah has so often been talked about in nationalist accounts (See C.F. Andrews, and Mushirul hasan) as a symbol of *sharat* and inter-communal co-existence that it will be illuminating to see what he himself says about Hindu-Muslim relations. Zakaullah wrote a massive 10 volume *Tarikh-i-Hindustan* (History of India), whose last volume he capped with an essay called “Was Muslim rule good or bad for Hindus and Hindustan?” The essay is a long one, and its burden is to prove that Muslims *brought many good practices with them to Hindustan, from which Hindustan was able to derive many benefits*. Using the example of the revenue system

he says, that Muslim rulers, especially the Mughals, instituted a very efficient system for which they deserve praise. He admits that some people will say that Hindus dominated

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17 See Sir Sayyid Ahmed on the present state of Indian politics, consisting of speeches and letters reprinted from the Pioneer (Allahabad, 1888), p. 1-24; for another speech (given in Meerut), along very similar lines, see pp. 29-53.
the Mughals’ revenue system, but clarifies that,” so many Hindus were needed in the revenue department because to collect a portion of produce from the ruled, it was important to know the culture of the ruled and their language, and these two things only the Hindus could have known. Hindus were good enough to help in this department, but they were not competent enough to manage it on their own.”18

It is less important whether Zakaullah was presenting facts or opinions, but the tone and tenor of this writing is striking. What Zakaullah presents is a very triumphalist account of Muslim rule in India, which flies in the face of the historical reputation he enjoys as an embodiment of a liberal, shared culture. There was a sense of superiority among Hindustani Muslim elites, which definitely derived from long access to politico-administrative power in north India. But it was also predicated, as the above examples show, on a long enjoyed cultural hegemony, which made the prospect of minority status, and of Hindu politico-cultural “majority” so galling for them.

It is not my argument that a threat to cultural superiority created Muslim nationalism in India. More material causes such as the prospect of losing government jobs to other groups were important; Muslim nationalism was also all along stoked by colonial policies and encouragement; and it was radicalized and pushed into the corner by Hindu

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18 Muhammad Zakaullah, Tareekh-i-Hindustan Vol. 8-9-10 (Lahore, 1998), pp. 4966-4967. The book was originally published in 1897-98. What I have presented by way of the revenue system example is a mild sample of the manner in which Zakaullah has tried to establish Muslim superiority. He also has many other things to say, for example about basic Hindu personality vis-à-vis that of the Muslims. He says that Hindus are mild mannered, but explains that this is really a sign of their “ghulamanan safaat” (slave mentality), and though the Muslims are haughty it is because they are “manly and strong.” (See p. 4968) It is evident from the caustic, debating tone zakaullah had adopted that he would have been writing this not as a sober, analytical piece, but as a response piece to the some of the more venomous pieces produced by Hindu publicists.
nationalists, and by the broad Hindu tone and tenor even of mass anti-colonial nationalism in India. But once nationalisms of various hues had emerged, existing fault-lines from the domain of society and culture were referenced, they bolstered exclusive nationalisms, and the latter in turn further widened the older faultiness. Thus Hindus, who had labored under a ritualized sense of inferiority even until 1857, would, after that event, aggressively seek (from British political masters) parity in power and position with the Muslims. They would also selectively appropriate aspects of the colonial discourse to disparage Muslim culture and history, and to laud and extol ancient ‘Hindu’ society and culture. Muslims, on the other hand, even while seeking political protection from the British as a threatened minority against the Hindus, would simultaneously, and with great aristocratic scorn, run down Hindus and Hindu politico-cultural assertions and symbols as crude, upstart-ish and lacking in sophistication. An understanding of cultures such as Dehlviyat allows us a window into the worldview of elites from Muslim urban centers in North India. It was for centers such to furnish much of the leadership of the Muslim League—the party that spearheaded the movement for the creation of Pakistan.19

Thus, the Muslimness of Dehlviyat is important to acknowledge and understand. But, so is its cosmopolitanism. There is general consensus in India to see the movement for Pakistan as a symbol of “communalism” that cut into the ‘secular’ anti-colonial national struggle spearheaded by the Congress. The Party that articulated the political demand for Partition—the All India Muslim League (AIML), has concomitantly, come to be seen as a party of religious exclusionists. Non-Indian historians such as Ayesha Jalal and

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19 For an analysis of the League’s leadership see Peter Hardy, The Muslims of British India (Cambridge, 1972).
Christophe Jaffrelot, on the other hand, have argued that the AIML was a party of secularists. These secularists pushed the movement for Pakistan because they feared a marginalization of their power and culture in a democratic India that would be overwhelmingly Hindu. So, the AIML’s demand for a separate homeland in the name of Islam—was driven not so much by religious zeal, as by the Muslim elites’ desire to retain political power. And once the political battle for a separate homeland for India’s Muslims was won, the culture that the leadership of the Muslim League envisaged for Pakistan was not a narrowly Islamist one but was cosmopolitan, Muslim and urban. My study agrees with the ideas of Jalal and Jaffrelot, but it also seeks to historically comprehend the secularism of AIML’s religious nationalists. Why leaders who had fought for a separation from India in the name of Islam, should balk at the prospect of making Pakistan Islamist can be understood, only if we understand the culture of Muslim urban centers from which this leadership was derived. Theirs was a culture that drew not upon Islam as religion but upon the Muslim cultural universe. It was a culture that was, in its own way, liberal and cosmopolitan.

Thus, socio-cultural histories, such as this one about Dehlviyat, enrich our understanding of the trajectories of different nationalisms on the Indian sub-continent.

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